

tent more than a pristine product, Gilbert delivers and then some. His vocals are as pure as branch water, but convey warmth and passion on a set of tunes that perfectly suits his breathy, romantic approach. He's also a deceptively deft guitarist, employing a crystalline, understated finger style or effortlessly walking a bass line — both of which he does on a charming “I’ll Buy You a Star.” He could also give fellow singer-songwriter Raul Midón a run for his money on “mouth trumpet,” which he facilitates on a ripe rendition of “Round Midnight.”

A gorgeous read of the dreamy Brazilian ballad “Dindi,” its lyric sung in English, truly showcases Gilbert’s lush, honeyed vocal. His emotion-laden performance eclipses any imperfections in his guitar or voice that may have been fixed in the studio on a more highly produced session. Same goes for a loose and lively read of the samba “Mas Que Nada,” which starts with a chuckle and ends with the singer vocally imitating percussion. Certainly his selection of material reveals a depth of sophistication, including gems such as Duke Ellington’s “Prelude to a Kiss” and Kris Kristofferson’s slow-dance classic “For the Good Times.” A moody read of “When Sunny Gets Blue” drives home Gilbert’s debt to Kenny Rankin, but he’s hardly imitative.

It’s no mystery why Gilbert was the opening act of choice for Shawn Colvin and George Carlin, among others. His is an honest and emotive art, and he brings fresh expression to some beloved tunes on his standards debut. —**Bob Weinberg**

Gabriel Vicéns

Days (INNER CIRCLE)

This sophomore effort as a leader by Puerto Rican guitarist/composer/arranger Gabriel Vicéns is loaded with an abundance of improvisational firepower. With saxophonists David Sánchez and Jonathan Suazo, trumpeter Alex Sipiagin, percussionist Paoli Mejías and others eager to demonstrate their talents, solo space comes at a premium. Perhaps that’s



why Vicéns inserted two arrangements in the middle of the nine-track set that allow him to display his talents as a soloist while providing a brief respite from the hard-edged horn forays and tumultuous rock and Latin-forged rhythms that otherwise dominate the record.

“Prelude to Amintiri,” inspired by a romance Vicéns once had with a woman in Romania, features the guitarist alone. Warm in tone and reflective in character, the piece exhibits more than a bit of classical influence in the guitarist’s technique. It also displays Vicéns’ keen sense of imagination, melodic invention and subtle use of chordal colors. In a duet with pianist Bienvenido Dinzey, Vicéns adds harmonic structure and slightly turns up the rhythmic heat on the following tune, “Amintiri.”

Elsewhere, the date’s generally assertive character is shaped by the virile trumpet, tenor and alto frontline. When Vicéns adds steely single note lines to the mix, the group’s orchestral prowess is magnified. “El Teatro,” the fetching set opener, provides a template for much of what follows. The core rhythm team concocts a burst of well-measured energy behind drummer Leonardo Osuna’s restless stick work before the horns and guitar enter with a taut, ascending hard-bop-style figure. Sipiagin, the Russia-born trumpeter phenom, solos first, tempering his fiery flurry of notes with a honeyed tone and milky fluidity. Dinzey is next, delivering luminous runs and percussive accents while tenor man Sánchez projects a modernist mood, favoring strident tones and impetuous spurts of note clusters. Vicéns has the final word, his searching, animated solo a fitting synopsis of the date’s ebullient outlook and its effective blend of disparate stylistic touchstones. —**Mark Holston**

Enrico Rava Quartet with Gianluca Petrella

Wild Dance (ECM)

Italian trumpeter Enrico Rava’s latest CD, featuring his quartet, augmented by trombonist Gianluca Petrella on seven cuts, comes on as a contemplative affair. It begins with three slow tunes, but moments of intense heat spark amid the lyrical effusions, and the set gains energy as it moves along. With the exception of one group improvisation, the 14 tunes are Rava’s, both new and



old, and tend toward the miniature. All display his melodic gift and clever marshaling of polyphonic passages and breakdowns into solo, duo and trio sections. The arrangements are both sparse and detailed, and the compositions limn a variety of moods.

High points of the set include the atmospheric ballad “Not Funny,” with the horns playing counterpoint lines over Gabriele Evangelista’s bass and Enrico Morello’s delicate percussion. “F. Express” features a sprightly head with a funky vibe and stellar playing from Petrella on trombone and slashing challenges to the soloists by guitarist Francesco Diodati.

On the sparkling “Cornette,” Rava’s solo generates considerable heat, goosed by distorted interjections from Diodati that recall the sound of Ornette Coleman’s Prime Time electric band. The quick, boppish “Happy Shades” features drummer Morello, first answering the rapid phrases of the guitar/trumpet head, then soloing. “Monkitos” jaunts head, with its knotty yet songful phrasing and rhythmic bobbing and weaving, evokes Thelonious Monk. “Frogs” is the only blowing vehicle on the CD, with Rava stretching out with some free gestures and Diodati delivering a wild solo. The leader ends the tune — and concludes the CD — with a soft, choked trumpet tone.

Rava is noted for mentoring young Italian jazzers and presents an excellent bunch of them here, especially drummer Morello and guitarist Diodati. Reflecting a career ranging from New Orleans-style jazz to extensive free-jazz experience with the likes of Don Cherry and Cecil Taylor, Rava touches all the bases on this fine release. Never strident, his tone on the trumpet possesses both lyricism and fire. —**Doug McMin**