

The Blog

Archives | RSS

« 6/19 — Free Legal Advice from... [David Leonardis Closing Sale](#) »

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2010

[Music / Post No Bills](#)

Two Great Pop Shows on Sunday

Posted by [Peter Margasak](#) on Fri, Jun 18, 2010 at 2:11 PM



Susanna & the Magical Orchestra

Because I was on vacation I missed the chance to write up two excellent Sunday shows in the *Reader's* print edition, but now that I'm back I want to highlight them in this space. Back in December 2008 extraordinary Norwegian vocalist [Susanna Wallumrød](#) performed [solo at the Empty Bottle](#), delivering her refined, dolorous music with sparse piano accompaniment and guitar courtesy of Helge Sten (aka [Deathprod](#)); [Cairo Gang](#) guitarist and key Bonnie "Prince" Billy collaborator Emmett Kelly also sat in for a few tunes. On Sunday she makes [her local debut \(at Schubas\)](#) as [Susanna & the Magical Orchestra](#), her project with fellow Norwegian Morten Qvenild—best known as keyboardist and leader of [In the Country](#).

In both contexts Wallumrød sings with dazzling clarity and exquisite patience, shaping melodies with care and sensitivity and tightly controlling her emotional engagement with the material, but Qvenild's involvement makes for more varied and inventive instrumental

backdrops. The project's third and latest album, last year's [3](#) (Rune Grammofon), includes original tunes by both members in addition to covers of songs by Rush and Roy Harper, all of them lush, gentle, and delicately beautiful. The record is placid and elegant on its surface, with Qvenild contributing anything from atmospheric drapery to sophisticated melodic counterpoint and guest musicians, including Sten and Mariam Wallentin of [Wildbirds & Peacedrums](#), adding extra depth. But Wallumrød's voice is always the focal point, providing an emotional gravitas that belies the music's fragility. I've seen her perform a couple of times now, and as much as I enjoy the recordings, only in a live setting does her solemn presence register at full power.

Below you can check out "Palpatine's Dream," a tune from [3](#):

Chicagoan [Liam Hayes](#), for two decades one of the most mercurial and elusive figures on the local scene, makes a different kind of rarefied pop music with his long-running project [Plush](#). On Sunday night at the [Hideout](#) he finishes a three-week residency—an unusual arrangement to be sure for this normally reclusive musician. The shows have been in support of the group's latest album, [Bright Penny](#) (Broken Horse), a typically immaculate, beautifully sculpted collection of pop songs injected with blue-eyed soul. As with [Plush's](#) previous album, [Fed](#), the lush arrangements feature contributions from an impressive roster of A-list guest musicians, including Chicago soul vets like drummer Morris Jennings and bassist Bernard Reed, younger heavies like guitarists Jeff Parker and Chris Bruce, and top-flight horn players like Bill McFarland, Hank Ford, and Willie Woods.



Liam Hayes

Yet as vibrant as the arrangements are, they serve mostly to cradle Hayes's crystalline vocals (he's long had one of the finest falsettos around) and catchy melodies. He's never been remotely interested in contemporary trends, and though rock, soul, and pop from 60s are his obvious inspirations, the record doesn't sound like a retro exercise either. [Bright Penny](#) was in regular rotation on my recent vacation, and by now it's ingrained in my brain—the strength of his songs and the classic timelessness of the music make me feel as though it's a record I grew up with. Sunday's show will feature a nine-piece band: Hayes, Jennings on drums, Reed on bass, Nashville mainstay Jimmy Matt Rowland on piano, Steve Gerlach on guitar, and a three-piece horn section put together by trombonist Willie Woods (formerly of the Pharoahs).

Below you can hear one of my favorite tracks, the deeply grooving "Look Up, Look Down":



Today's playlist:

- David Grubbs, [Hybrid Song Box.4](#) (Blue Chopsticks)
- Charles Evans, [The King of All Instruments](#) (Hot Cup)
- Yosuke Yamashita Trio, [Tenshi No Koukotsu](#) (Ultra Vybe)
- John Martyn, [Solid Air](#) (Island)
- Various artists, [Shir Hodu: Jewish Song From Bombay of the 30s](#) (Renair)

Tags: [Susanna Wallumrod](#), [Morten Qvenild](#), [Susanna and the Magical Orchestra](#), [In the Country](#), [Deathprod](#), [Rune Grammofon](#), [Schubas](#), [Liam Hayes](#), [Plush](#), [Hideout](#), [Bright Penny](#), [Wildbirds & Peacedrums](#), [Audio](#), [Video](#)

[Email](#) [Share](#) [Save](#) [Add to List](#)

COMMENTS (0) Sorry. Please [log in](#) to edit favorites.

[Add a comment](#)

Your comments

[Preview Comment](#)

Latest in The Blog

- [You Shoot: The Gathering/ed Storm](#)
by [Whet Moser](#)
- [City Council Hearing Turns Into Rally For Handgun Ban](#)
A hearing was held in the City Council Friday "to discuss violence and fire arm registration regulation." Instead a PR campaign for the city's gun ban broke out.
by [Mick Dumke](#)
- [Fashion Events](#)
This weekend, a benefit for Dress for Success, summer looks by Israeli designers, and more
by [Heather Kenny](#)

[More »](#)

Author Archives

- [Fred Anderson Gravely III](#)
Chicago jazz icon Fred Anderson is in a coma after a serious heart attack.
by [Peter Margasak](#)
- [The List: May 27–June 2, 2010](#)
Critics' Choices and other notable shows: Erykah Badu, Thee Silver Mt. Zion Orchestra, Andre Williams, the Brian Jonestown Massacre, the Pharez Whitted Sextet, and more
by [Brian Costello](#), [Peter Margasak](#), [Monica Kendrick](#), [Miles Raymer](#) and [Bill Meyer](#)
- [Chicago Palestine Film Festival](#)
Through Thursday, April 29, at the Gene Siskel Film Center
by [Andrea Gronvall](#), [Fred Camper](#) and [Peter Margasak](#)

[More »](#)

[most viewed](#) [most commented](#) [most emailed](#)

- [City Council Hearing Turns Into Rally For Handgun Ban](#)
- [Weis Struggles to explain how the gun ban is working](#)
- [You Shoot: The Gathering/ed Storm](#)
- [Dinner & a Show: Friday 6/18](#)
- [Fred Anderson Gravely III](#)

More Music in ...

[Crickets](#)

Top Commenters

- [FGFM](#)
- [The original IAC](#)
- [Lamprey](#)
- [mother of FGFM](#)
- [Pelham](#)

Recent Comments

[Re: The Berlin Wall Wasn't the Only One](#)

@ Alan and Karen,
Thanks much for the thoughtful responses! One of the delights...

Posted by [Pelham](#) on June 19, 2010

[Re: Weis Struggles to explain how the gun ban is working](#)

With the release of the Illinois UCR, a clearer picture of crime in the state...

Posted by [Thirdpower](#) on June 19, 2010

[Re: Weis Struggles to explain how the gun ban is working](#)

Geez, all this concern over concealed carry, see Florida & Texas government databases on the...

Posted by [Jarhead1982](#) on June 19, 2010

[More »](#)