

REVIEW

The best jazz albums of 2025 so far

UPDATED

Our critic's pick of the latest releases: Chris Cheek and Bill Frisell team up for a late-night delight



From left: Chris Cheek, Rudy Royston, Tony Scherr and Bill Frisell have joined forces

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Here is where we will be reviewing our favourite jazz albums of the year. Everything from big bands to bebop, funk to fusion will be considered with the focus on living musicians, plus the odd vintage discovery. We'll be adding new reviews regularly, so bookmark the page to keep it handy.

The best album to listen to this week

Chris Cheek

Keepers of the Eastern Door

Analog Tone Factory

★★★★☆

Chris Cheek and Bill Frisell are such kindred spirits it's a wonder they haven't teamed up more often. Both are rooted in jazz and pop tradition but with a taste for the unknown. The Missouri saxophonist is adept at soothing the listener with warmth and lyricism before taking an unexpected turn. Frisell is similarly inclined, using the reverb on his electric guitar to infuse gentle, even beloved melodies with a sense of the uncanny.

Two adaptations of choral works take us into the ineffable. On Messiaen's *O Sacrum Convivium!* Cheek plays the soprano sax with primitive yearning. Purcell's *Lost Is My Quiet* is stated on tenor sax with desolate beauty over the drummer Rudy Royston's lonely tango tempo, before Tony Scherr's bass digs deep into its heart. *On a Clear Day* is a suave showtune, but a groove borrowed from *Ode to Billie Joe* dirties it up a little.

Cheek's originals are based on popular songs, although he leaves it to the listener to work out which. *Go On, Dear* was written to fit the lyrics of a standard. Its sorrowful air dissipates to reveal an uncertain calm. *Kino's Canoe* was created by reversing a famous tune, then using it to build new phrases. Cheek rides the rapids of a rocky groove with tossing and turning phrases as Frisell shimmers under the surface.

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On *Smoke Rings* Cheek drowsily puffs on the harmonies as Frisell fills the air with a cloudy haze. Royston drums drunkenly beside Scherr's almost too steadily walking bass. The band kick back with a backbeat on the Beatles' *From Me to You*, on which Frisell manages to rock cosily before Cheek teases delicious new melodies from the chords. Poised between chill out and spine-chilling, this album is a late-night delight.

The best of the rest