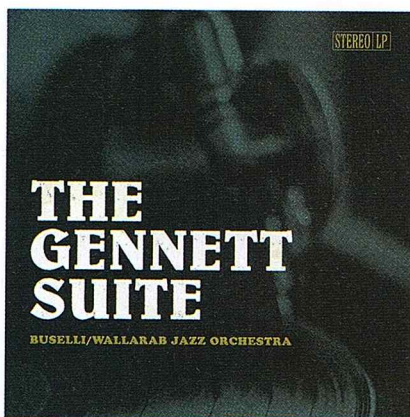


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●●

Orrin Evans: *The Red Door*. Smoke Sessions.

Pianist/composer/producer Orrin Evans' seventh Smoke Sessions release was recorded in three different sessions, with two different bass and drum teams, and the albums prove his ability to deliver the goods in a variety of musical situations. Nine of the twelve musical selections present Evans with bassist Robert Hurst and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith, with trumpeter Nicholas Payton and saxophonist/flautist Gary Thomas joining them on five of those selections. There's some collective improvisation on the title track and on Geri Allen's "Feed the Fire." Also, vocalist Sy Smith displays her beautiful voice on a moving arrangement of "Amazing Grace." Bassist Buster Williams and drummer Gene Jackson join Evans on two radically different performances, a straight-ahead and swinging version of "The Good Life" (which showcases the warm-toned tenor sax of Larry McKenna, an Evans mentor), and a reconstructed "All the Things You Are," where the melody isn't stated until the last minute. The latter composition highlights the fiery trumpet of Wallace Roney. Sadly, this was Roney's last recording, as he passed away later that month from COVID-19. *The Red Door* provides an interesting mix of music, but I'm hoping the next release pairs Evans with Payton, Thomas, Hurst, and Smith. **Greg Turner**

Further Listening: Joe Farnsworth: *In What Direction Are You Headed*



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●●

Buselli/Wallarab Jazz Orchestra: *The Gennett Suite*. Patois.

This ambitious piece is named for Gennett Records, whose crucial role in jazz history began 100 years ago. It was written by Brent Wallarab, co-leader of the outstanding band heard here. How did a label based in eastern Indiana become the epicenter of jazz recording in the mid-20s? By recording musicians based in Chicago, when that city was home to such great New Orleans-born players as Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, and King Oliver, as well as Midwesterners like Bix Biederbecke and Hoagy Carmichael. The Suite is divided into movements that feature pieces recorded for Gennett, though in some cases the original themes are referenced only indirectly, and all are enhanced by arranging concepts that owe more to Gil Evans than Mr. Jelly Lord. This is not to say that Wallarab has merely used the themes as springboards. To the contrary, he plainly loves the early masters honored here, which is why the project has such depth. Listeners who share this love will spot all kinds of intelligent and witty references to the originals, and Wallarab leaves plenty of space for excellent soloists too numerous to mention to stretch out. With the highest production values at every stage, this one is a must for devotees of contemporary big band jazz. **Duck Baker**

Further Listening: Jelly Roll Morton: *Complete Recorded Work, 1926–1930*