

# Ravita Jazz Alice Blue



Liner Notes By Raul da Gama

In the 1939-40 academic year at Harvard University, **Igor Stravinsky** delivered a series of six lectures in French entitled *Poétique musicale sous forme de six leçons*.

Stravinsky analysed the role of the critic, the requirements of the interpreter and the state of Russian music. He believed that a composer's freedom to create rose from a platform of structures which incorporated the rules of music – a process that ultimately frees the spirit. Stravinsky understood his own vocation as that of a craftsman, rather than a revolutionary or an artist.

What have Stravinsky's lectures to do with music in general, and this music by Philip Ravita and his group? Everything, if you ask me. For contained in Stravinsky's lectures – now essays in print – is the study of the craft of music-making. Upon listening to Ravita's music, one finds that the same values and rules appear to apply to both composers. As it happens, Dr. Ravita plays symphonic as well as jazz music. The two composers are drawing from the same well.

In these works by **Ravita Jazz** in *Alice Blue*, Stravinsky's influence seems apparent. Ravita's music is relevant and enduring. The album includes five Ravita originals, two compositions by pianist Greg Small and three standards.

Ravita's renown across a wide spectrum of music is impressive. He has performed with famed jazz instrumentalists **Jimmy Heath**, **Claudio Roditi** and **Bobby Shew** and celebrated jazz vocalists **Kim Nazarian**, **Akua Allrich** and **Gabrielle Goodman**. He has graced every type of venue in the Mid-Atlantic region: concert halls, theatres, museums, jazz

clubs and festivals. He also hosts a weekly radio program, "Jazz on Record," on WMTB 89.9 FM.

With a doctorate in music education from Boston University, Ravita serves on faculty of several colleges and Universities. He was co-leader on the critically acclaimed disc *Jagged Spaces* with the **Grasso-Ravita Jazz Ensemble** released in 2021 and leader on the disc *Oriana* with his group **Ravita Jazz** in 2023.

The album title *Alice Blue* references the azure-colored paint used by visual artists. This album features beautifully crafted arrangements of beguiling variety and sensuousness. In every phrase of *Alice Blue*, Ravita's love and skill for the poetics of music shines brightly.

Ravita's judiciously chosen material reveals a penchant not simply for clever and challenging rhythms, but a true gift for melodic and harmonic invention. Listen to the way he blends the kaleidoscope chord progressions and to the harmonic variations and rhythmic momentum in "Broken Light" on **Track 1**, and how vocalist **Deirdre Jennings** and musicians sculpt the long inventions of "From the Start" on **Track 2**. Every semiquaver has been fastidiously considered.

Following those tracks, Ravita and company bedazzle the listener with the album's cinematic qualities. On the title track (**Track 3**), **Paul Carr's** soprano saxophone soars as it follows the composer's mysterious narrative out into the azure. Ravita enters his gentle bossa nova on the acoustic bass. About this piece, Ravita says "I use some be-bop rhythms found in *Yard Bird Suite*, one of my favorite compositions by John Coltrane." In contrast, on the C-melody

“Almost Blue” (**Track 4**), he plays the electric bass and employs a modified blues harmonic structure as well as a traditional blues melodic structure. Hence the title.

On **Track 5**, Deirdre Jennings delivers a fine, gospel soaked take on “I Can’t Stand the Rain.” Congas and rain stick played by **Mark Leppo** lend pleasing atmospherics to the piece. Melodic, harmonic and rhythmic changes brighten the mood on **Track 6**. The elegant medley is comprised of two songs from widely different eras yielding “Fool in the Rain / Sunny Side of the Street.”

**Greg Small’s** contemplative piece, “Hereafter,” graces **Track 7**. Built on shifting tonal centers, it features Paul Carr’s warm, rich soprano sax, **Nuc Vega’s** pulsating and interactive cymbal play and Ravita’s warm acoustic bass.

**Track 8** features the ballad “Blackout,” written by Ravita during a power failure. He says, “As the lights, computer, and other electronics dropped out, the world became quiet and peaceful. Thoughtless speech on various devices was replaced by meaningful conversations among neighbors who came out to talk with each other.”

“Golden Sky” on **Track 9** was inspired by Ravita’s daily runs at daybreak in the Upper Fells Point neighborhood of Baltimore, a favorite stomping ground since childhood. It’s not the first time his morning sojourn has led to a new composition. The Neo-Bebop tune is a perfect canvas for Paul Carr’s masterful saxophone,

which is central to the tune. His solo features sterling sax runs employing melodic and rhythmic structures reminiscent of Wayne Shorter.

The album’s dénouement comes on **Track 10** with Greg Small’s climactic “Signal and Noise,” which alternates from swing to Afro-Cuban feel. It reflects our constant struggle to distinguish between what is important in life and what distracts us. Small was thrilled with the band’s take on his tune.

Throughout *Alice Blue* the poetics of musical tradition are impressively maintained. The balance of melody, harmony and rhythm present in compositions and improvisation make this an album worth adding to your collection.



## TRACKS

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| <p><b>1 Broken Light</b> 4:03<br/>(Phil Ravita, 2023, BMI)</p> <p><b>*2 From the Start</b> 4:10<br/>(Laufey &amp; Spencer Stewart, 2023, ASCAP)</p> <p><b>*3 Alice Blue</b> 5:34<br/>(Phil Ravita, 2014, BMI)</p> <p><b>4 Almost Blue</b> 5:09<br/>(Phil Ravita, 2024, BMI)</p> <p><b>5 I Can’t Stand the Rain</b> 5:04<br/>(Ann Peebles, Don Bryant, and Bernard “Bernie” Miller, 1973 Burlington Music Co., Ltd. &amp; Irving Music, Inc.)</p> | <p><b>*6 Fool in the Rain/<br/>Sunny Side of the Street</b> 2:39<br/>(John Paul Jones, Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, 1979, Swan Song/<br/>Jimmy Hugh with lyrics by Dorothy Fields, 1930, Famous Music Corp.)</p> <p><b>*7 Hereafter</b> 5:17<br/>(Greg Small, 2024, BMI)</p> <p><b>8 Blackout</b> 4:29<br/>(Phil Ravita, 2022, BMI)</p> <p><b>9 Golden Sky</b> 2:59<br/>(Phil Ravita, 2024, BMI)</p> <p><b>10 Signal &amp; Noise</b> 4:22<br/>(Greg Small, 2024, BMI)</p> |
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\*Suggested Tracks

## MUSICIANS

**Paul Carr**  
tenor - Tracks 1,4,5,6,8,10  
soprano - Tracks 2,3,7,9

**Mark Leppo**  
percussion - 2,3,5,6

**Phil Ravita**  
electric bass - Tracks 1, 4,5,6  
acoustic bass - Tracks 2,3,7,8,9,10

**Deirdre Jennings**  
vocals - Tracks 2,5,6

**Greg Small**  
piano - All Tracks

**Nucleo Vega**  
drums - All Tracks