



A stalwart, thinking-person's sideman for years-cum-decades, the intrinsically musical pianist has blossomed under his own name in the last few years. He has wowed us, lulled us, and surprised some of us with his extra-mainstream breadth — as on his gutsy and experimental 1996 collaboration with percussionist Mino Cinelu, *Swamp Sally*.

In short, Barron has been busy writing his own history, on

his own terms, a mission to which *Things Unseen* attests. Actually recorded before *Swamp Sally*, this is Barron's most eclectic outing to date in terms of texture and musical instincts. On tunes like the closing slow-burner, "The Moment" — with its wild piano break on the out chorus — Barron locks in

with his quintet, with saxophonist John Stubblefield, trumpeter Eddie Henderson, bassist David Williams, and drummer Victor Lewis. Along the way, we also hear choice cameos from guitarist John Scofield, Cinelu, and Japanese violinist Naoko Terai, who joins Barron on a beautiful improvised duet, "Rose Noire".

Barron, a Philadelphia native, built a sturdy foundation through classical piano studies and found his way to jazz via his brother Bill. The pianist hit the ground running in New York and began a long legacy as one of the coveted pianists in town, playing alongside Dizzy Gillespie, Yusef Lateef, Milt Jackson, Freddie Hubbard . . . the list goes on. Barron worked on projects of his own devising too, notably the band Sphere, which he originally co-founded

as a tribute to Thelonious Monk. It was through a particularly empathetic liaison with the late Stan Getz that Barron segued into his own life as a leader. Getz's final recording, *People Time*, was a touching duet with Barron, recorded live shortly before Getz's death in 1992.

Since that time Barron has bolstered his recorded *oeuvre* with a succession of memorable projects garnering five Grammy nominations along the way: *Sambao*, *Other Places*, *Wanton Spirit*, *Swamp Sally*, and now *Things Unseen*. It's fair to say that Barron, at 54, is on an upward spiral, amassing a discography with care but also a calm, dogged intensity. It could be that he's making up for lost time, or just doing what he's always done with taste and adventure: seizing the moment.

*although it may seem that he has burst on the scene as a leader only in the '90s.*