**Butcher Brown**

Virginia — Old Dominion itself, one of the original 13 — is about as teeming with historical and cultural significance as a state can possibly be. “But it also literally has a visceral connection,” says trumpeter and saxophonist **Marcus Tenney** — one fifth of the Richmond-based, boundary-erasing quintet **Butcher Brown**.

His mind wanders to Saturday afternoons in fall — cruising west on Highway 64, down the 81, soaking up the increasingly dazzling hues. “Especially when you don’t want to play a wedding gig, you start trying to find things that are cool about it,” he says wryly. “And then, over the course of however many years, it becomes a personal thing to drive those roads.”

Similarly, Butcher Brown’s bassist, **Andrew Randazzo**, attributes their kinetic, atmospheric essence to “the sights, the sounds, the landscape, the foliage.” “It’s almost subconscious,” he reflects. “All that stuff is going to seep into what comes out in the music.”

Of course, when considering the commingling of Black musical traditions, Butcher Brown — whose sound encompasses jazz, hip-hop, soul, funk, R&B, and that’s just the beginning — is one dot on a sprawling landscape. But across more than 15 years and something like a dozen albums, Tenney, Randazzo, guitarist **Morgan Burrs**, percussionist **Corey Fonville**, and keyboardist **DJ Harrison** have managed a lane all their own.

Butcher Brown describe their new album, ***Letters from the Atlantic*** — out **March 28** via **Concord Jazz** — as a travelogue up and down the East Coast: from the Chesapeake Bay to New York, down to Florida, and over to Europe. From the seventh-heaven opener “**Seagulls**” to a celestial cover of the late Wayne Shorter’s “**Infant Eyes**,” it could be their purest distillation of that crisp Virginia air. Their omnivorous muse, too.

At Richmond’s Spacebomb Studios, the band — with producer **Alex De Jong** channeling their energies — illuminated new facets of their aesthetic. “This album is definitely more house, more dance-y; we’ve also been on more of a jazz kick,” Burrs says. “Every record we’ve put out has been a reflection of where we’re at musically at the time.”

A formidable female presence elevates the proceedings: **Melanie Charles** on “Unwind,” **Leanor Wolf** on “**Right Here**,” **Mia Gladstone** on “**Change in Weather**,” **Yaya Bey** on “**I Remember**,” **Victoria Victoria** on “**Hold You**.” Rounding out the guest list is rumpeter and Black American Music exponent **Nicholas Payton** (“**Montrose Forest**”) and NOLA-steeped vocalist **Neal Francis** (“**Something New About You**”). “We’re fans of all of them,” Burrs says. “They bring a real harmony and chemistry to the new album.”

*Letters from the Atlantic*’s serene opener, “Seagulls,” transports the listener to a perfect day on Virginia Beach — out on the water, boombox aloft.

“When we were mixing this, I was standing on the beach, looking at the [Neptune statue](https://www.visitvirginiabeach.com/listing/king-neptune-statue/171/),” Tenney says. “I was listening to drill, which makes me think of new-school New York — musical cocaine. [Here]. it’s acoustic instruments: a lot more chilled out, a lot more vibe. It sounds like a movie.” (As he notes, the Big Apple and Neptune City’s hip-hop connection runs deep; in the ‘90s, Phife Dawg, Busta Rhymes, and the Notorious B.I.G. frequented the area.)

“**Unwind**” — imbued with Charles’ Haitian folkloric sensibilities, and drum & bass chops — is a perfect example of De Jong’s producorial imprint.

“Corey, DJ, and I laid down the initial track, and then I didn’t hear it again for a while,” Randazzo recalls, adding that Charles contributed her parts remotely. “But Alex really laced it up with all the delays and textural, sonic elements.” The result, in his estimation, is megalopolis-sized: “It sounds like New York City in its entirety,” Randazzo adds. Says Fonville, “Alex understood the assignment all the way through.

“**Backline**” is Butcher Brown’s self-referential response to “Frontline,” from their 2020 album *#KingButch*. “It’s a diss track to ourselves,” Burrs says with a laugh. Tenney explains: “If you look at certain hits and chords, it’s literally a flip of ‘Frontline.’ You could notate it literally like a mirror image.”

A fortuitous Instagram connection brought vocalist Leonor Wolf onto “**Right Here**.” “It’s just wild how that record came together,” Tenney says, calling the studio experience “a short, intense vibe.” Similarly, Gladstone enhances “Change in Weather.” “It has a lot of different elements,” Burrs explains. “The guitar has more of a bossa feel; Corey is kind of playing some traps—; Andy’s bassline is kind of reggae-ish.”

Ivan Lins and Vitor Martins wrote “**Dinorah, Dinorah**,” which memorably appeared on side two of George Benson’s 1980 classic *Give Me the Night*. “[The original] is sick too,” Fonville says. “We got more into that disco vibe that George and Quincy were going for.”

The percussionist goes on to call vocalist Bey “a great collaborator of ours — a homie. She came down to Spacebomb, and she just vibed with us heavy. Watching her process was a lot of fun.” “I Remember” leans into a neo-soul approach: “I feel like that one sounds like a cookout,” Fonville notes.

At Spacebomb, lead single “**Ibiza**” seemed to materialize on the spot — from a voice memo Fonville took, capturing a soundcheck jam from their 2023 European tour. From there, “It was like a supply chain of music,” Tenney remembers, remembering the band’s methodical contributions. “Alex was pulling out a lot of toys.”

Greensboro, North Carolina-based singer/songwriter Victoria Victoria proved ideal for “Hold You.” “It was interesting to see her approach a song like this that draws from boogaloo and bossa nova,” said Fonville. “She understood the vision and killed it. I’m really happy with the selection of guests we put on this record.”

Which certainly applies to “Montrose Forest,” featuring Payton; the eagle-eyed may recall that Randazzo, Fonville, and Harrison appeared on his 2014 album *Numbers*. “He’s one of the best trumpet players of the last 30 years,” Fonville opines. “It’s always a treat to be able to bring those types of legends into this space — and it’s like giving them their flowers, too.”

Spotlighting Francis’ gossamer pipes, penultimate track “Something New About You” leans into the soft-rock side of Butcher Brown’s equation. And it ends with a true classic from the Shorter canon: “Infant Eyes.”

“We were in Fort Worth, Texas, playing at this little club, and I was in a bad mood,” Randazzo relates. “I was like, ‘You know what? We need to just play some jazz. We should play ‘Infant Eyes.’” At first, the rest of the band balked; they bickered back and forth, until the other members saw their potential within. Starting in Texas, they played the elliptical, electrified ballad every night, all the way back to the Atlantic.

Once again, the chips fell where they did — which turned out to be exactly where they needed to be.

“Whatever happens with us in the band, it won’t be forced,” Burrs says. “That’s the attitude we carry with us. We’re going to make the art that we actually resonate with — and whatever happens outside of that, it’ll all be built off of.” Letter received.