



Ted Reichman

Drew Gress

John Hollenbeck

Matt Moran

Chris Speed

"This is a true ensemble from top to bottom, a sonic equivalent to a hand-woven tapestry...Impressive." -DownBeat

This brilliant New York band led by drummer and composer John Hollenbeck - a leader of a new generation of musicians who have brought together many disparate threads of contemporary music to create a new sound - recasts jazz in shimmering new shapes inflected by classical minimalism, new music, progressive rock and post-rock. The Claudia Quintet embraces the textural freedom of electronic sounds and improvisation, the structural ambition of contemporary classical music, and most importantly, the joy of bodacious grooves and unapologetically gorgeous melodies. For this ensemble, Hollenbeck has assembled a group of the foremost innovators in this new sound to create a powerhouse band. The quintet's one-of-a-kind "jazz and beyond" sound, with massive emotional depth, comes organically from the uncanny interplay of its virtuosos: Drew Gress (John Surman, Uri Caine, Ravi Coltrane), Matt Moran (Slavic Soul Party, Mat Maneri, Theo Bleckmann), Ted Reichman (Anthony Braxton, Marc Ribot, Paul Simon), and Chris Speed (Human Feel, Bloodcount, AlasNoAxis), accompanied by guest pianist Matt Mitchell, best known for his work with Tim Berne. Their beautifully seductive work features propulsive grooves, catchy melodies and improvisation that is nothing short of telepathic.

[Claudia Quintet Myspace](#)

JOHNOLLENBECK.COM

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET IS:

Chris Speed - clarinet/tenor saxophone

Matt Moran - vibraphone

Ted Reichman - accordion

Drew Gress - acoustic bass

John Hollenbeck - drums

SPECIAL GUEST - Matt Mitchell - piano

[THE CLAUDIA QUINTET ROYAL TOAST EPK](#)

Los Angeles Times

Pop & Hiss

THE L.A. TIMES MUSIC BLOG

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Album review: Claudia Quintet's 'Royal Toast'

May 17, 2010 | 2:06 pm



A year removed from an unexpected (yet wholly deserved) Grammy nomination in the large ensemble category, jazz drummer and composer John Hollenbeck returns to what ostensibly makes up his day job.

Under Hollenbeck's complex yet always inviting compositional lead, the Claudia Quintet's fifth album continues the group's moving-target aesthetic. Touching on enough influences to resemble an expertly curated corner record shop — a thicket of Steve Reich-informed vibraphone here, a dash of knotty chamber jazz there — the Claudia Quintet is one of the more adventurous jazz ensembles working today. Often built around the unique harmonic interplay of saxophonist-clarinetist Chris Speed and accordionist Ted Reichman (who quickly dispatches just about any stereotype listeners could have about his instrument), the group is also joined by guest pianist Gary Versace, who adds new shading with the elegantly atmospheric "Crane Merit" and "Keramag," which finds the quintet dancing circles around Hollenbeck's restless rhythm.

Frequently mining a trebly, contemplative territory, the album can initially feel somewhat monochromatic, but unexpected pleasures lie below the surface. "Paterna Terra" rises out of wild, electro-junkyard percussion from Hollenbeck that approaches drum-and-bass, only to have an expressive saxophone solo from Speed spur the band into a joyful race toward the finish.

Rich with ambition and empathetic interplay that never allows one player to rise above any other for long, the Claudia Quintet doesn't entirely sound like anybody else. Which is exactly what makes them worth seeking out.

— Chris Barton

Claudia Quintet

"Royal Toast"

Cuneiform

Three Stars (Out of four stars)

The New York Times

Critics' Choice
New CDs

Published: May 16, 2010

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

"Royal Toast"

(Cuneiform)

The Claudia Quintet, established a little over a dozen years ago by the drummer and composer John Hollenbeck, turns out music of clockwork intricacy and crisp premeditation. But it's not a fussy enterprise, or given to pondering its own accomplishment. "Royal Toast" exudes the same coolly assertive air as each of the band's previous four albums, striking a similar accord between the factions of progressive jazz, classical Minimalism and low-glare experimental rock.

By now that balance of styles reflects an established protocol, one slightly less unusual than when the group first started. Jazz and new music and post-rock, or whatever you want to call it, have been steadily encroaching on one another's turf for a while, sharing many of the same resources, even some of the same musicians. (Mr. Hollenbeck, for one, has longstanding ties to the interdisciplinary artist Meredith Monk.) The overlap has a lot to do with textural dynamics, which is what the Claudia Quintet has always been about.

Well, that and groove, on a cellular level. Along with Mr. Hollenbeck, an inventive and economical drummer, the band involves Chris Speed on tenor saxophone and clarinet, Ted Reichman on accordion, Drew Gress on bass and Matt Moran on vibraphone. "Royal Toast" also puts Gary Versace to work on piano and a second accordion: another pair of rhythm instruments in the lineup, and more grist for the harmonic mill.

Mr. Hollenbeck composes with an ear for passing tensions, some breezier than others. His band mates, all thoughtful improvisers, fill in the gaps, sometimes literally. "Royal Toast" includes brief interstitial tracks by each regular Claudia Quintet member, overdubbed with a version of himself from a separate take: so "Ted vs. Ted" has Mr. Reichman doubling an accordion prelude. It leads naturally into "Armitage Shanks," on which he solos over a row of telegraphlike rhythmic stoppages.

In several tunes, that one included, a solo gradually melts into a background figure, without any clear threshold. Structure and liberty are both so integrated into the band playbook that they don't assume any kind of opposition. That's more commonplace than it used to be too, though this group still makes it feel special. **NATE CHINEN**



The Claudia Quintet Royal Toast Review

Album. Released 17 May 2010.

BBC Review

A jazz group questioning the divide between genres and points in time.

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET—ROYAL TOAST



PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY VERSACE
STYLING BY GARY VERSACE
HAIR BY GARY VERSACE
MAKEUP BY GARY VERSACE
+ GARY VERSACE

Kevin Le Gendre 2010-09-07

The buzz around this New York ensemble has grown to a roar over the last few years, which is a delicious irony given that The Claudia Quintet is often at its most affecting when playing *sotto voce*, as if content to whisper rather than bellow into the listener's ear. The instrumentation partly explains this. Ted Reichman's accordion, Chris Speed's clarinet, Matt Moran's vibraphone, Drew Gress' double bass, John Hollenbeck's drums and (guest) Gary Versace's piano often blend into an ensemble sound that has the vaporous drift and haze that one might associate with hushed ambient electronica or at least very produced or studio sculpted music.

There are many moments on this, the group's follow-up to their much-loved 2007 set, *For*, in which sounds hover and glide and then incrementally shift weight and trajectory to create the kind of textures and tightly mapped grids that are reminiscent of artists such as Manitoba/Caribou. But the improvisatory dynamic of the music is too strong for it to be too confined to a serial-based aesthetic, and although the repeating marimba figures of Steve Reich are a clearly discernible element of the Claudia sound, the band regularly breaks out of a scored framework to create the slide, swerve and omni directionality that largely defines jazz. The solos are often no more than 20-odd bars on some songs, which to a certain extent makes them stand out more, as if they were a planned chip or crack in the leaning, rococo architecture of the music. On Keramag Gress' bass tells a brilliantly gentle short story which serves to heighten the impact of Hollenbeck's funky drumming, while elsewhere there are some very novel juxtapositions of staggered African rhythms and ostinatos of hard to define noise.

However, Claudia's timbres, eerie and winsome in equal measure, prove its greatest strong point. The combination of clarinet, accordion and vibraphone fashions an electric whistle and whirl that squares the circle between 90s indie science frictioners Stereolab and 60s proto-proggers Soft Machine, making it clear that Claudia is a jazz group questioning the divide between genres and points in time.

The Boston Globe

ALBUM REVIEW

The Claudia Quintet with Gary Versace, 'Royal Toast'

May 17, 2010

In the sometimes murky world of experimental jazz, New York's Claudia Quintet stands out with a playful spirit and utterly distinctive sound that gets hips swaying and heads nodding in even the most austere music-nerd performance spaces. A not-found-elsewhere front line of accordion (Ted Reichman), clarinet (Chris Speed), and vibraphone (Matt Moran) makes for bright tones filled with folky allusions and plaintive undercurrents. The compositions of drummer-bandleader John Hollenbeck privilege rhythm, so that even the sparest passages crackle with momentum. On "Royal Toast," its fifth album, the quintet adds Gary Versace on piano, and he blends in seamlessly, sometimes as ensemble player with a perfect grasp of Hollenbeck's jolty, elastic sensibility, and elsewhere with a cool pianism that brings the sound back to more familiar jazz terrain. Brief interludes showcase each player in a solo with himself, a little studio trick Hollenbeck threw in. They act as palate cleansers between the barn-burners with post-rock tendencies ("Keramag," "Royal Toast") and the elegiac pieces ("Ideal Standard," "For Frederick Franck"), where one picks up the scent of great lyrical composers like Duke Ellington. (Out tomorrow) *SIDDHARTHA MITTER*

ESSENTIAL "Ideal Standard" ■

allmusic

Royal Toast



Artist
Claudia Quintet/Gary Versace

Album
Royal Toast

Rating
★★★★★

Release Date
2010

Recording Date
Dec 14, 2009-Dec 15, 2009

Label
Cuneliform Records

Time
69:14

Genre
Jazz

AMG Album ID
R 1783773

Review

by Michael G. Nastos

Throughout the decade of the 2000s, the Claudia Quintet recorded, toured, and became one of the top five progressive jazz units in the U.S. and the world. For 2010 they continue with *Royal Toast*, implying elegance and a golden brown, perfectly prepared, even buttery music. Percussionist/composer/bandleader John Hollenbeck has retained saxophonist and clarinetist Chris Speed, the piquant subtle vibraphonist Matt Moran, accordion specialist Ted Reichman, and the great bassist Drew Gress, adding special guest Gary Versace, not on organ but acoustic piano. The resulting music is surprising low-key, less complex and intricate, but still bold, groundbreaking, and spread across numerous colorful sonic palettes. Many of these performances have solo preludes from individual bandmembers, with Hollenbeck's drums preceding the more involved funk of "Keramag," the pithy bass of Gress leading into the driven and heavy fast march "Sphinx," and Speed's counterpoint overdubbed saxes as an intro for the sideways title track, recalling recent efforts of David Binney. The stand-alone "Crane Merit" lives up to its title in the lugubrious but dignified persona of the near extinct bird, while "Paterna Terra" is free to soulful and the tandem "Ideal/American Standard" is mysterious to insistent. Versace's role is that of shading or propping up these melodies, and one should listen closely to his contributions here. It's another extraordinary musical experience from the Claudia Quintet, who deserve all the high marks they receive as an innovative, thought-provoking, singularly unique contemporary ensemble.

dusted



Dusted Reviews

The Claudia Quintet - Royal Toast

Dusted Reviews

Artist: The Claudia Quintet

Album: Royal Toast

Label: [Cuneiform](#)

Review date: May. 18, 2010



A good chamber music composer lets you hear all of the combinations a group can offer. A great chamber music composer makes the group sound larger than it is. John Hollenbeck is in the latter category, and this newest Claudia Quintet offering confirms his mastery of form and orchestration on an expertly programmed disc.

The decade-old quintet has long been praised for eschewing category. Hollenbeck, Matt Moran, Drew Gress, Chris Speed and Ted Reichman are all veterans of musical situations that involve boundary busting; Hollenbeck brings their talents together, along with guest pianist Gary Versace, in a compositional vision that encompasses everything from groove-based minimalism to tonally ambiguous ballads. His trademark rhythmic interplay and tempo juxtaposition is ever-present, as is his penchant for beautifully chosen instrumental color. That said, a new level of concentration is achieved here, making these fairly brief tracks seem longer than they are. Watch the miniature masterpiece “Paterna Terra” travel its path from atomistic free jazz toward increasingly dense layers of counterpoint and rhythmic complexity to see how much Hollenbeck can pack into five and a half minutes. By the climax, the quintet seems to have grown to twice its size. Yet, each gesture also connotes a world as Speed’s tenor dialogues with modified percussion — possibly bowed vibes — before the groove slides into place.

Throughout the disc, my concentration veered continually between micro and macrocosm. The recording is as good as the music, so that the reediness of Reichman’s accordion and Speed’s clarinet contrast and merge in Technicolor, Moran’s vibes often providing a glassy sheen. As if to highlight these relationships, almost as a subtext, there is a series of improvised and multi-tracked duets at strategic points throughout the album where each player dialogues with himself. Each then transitions seamlessly into the following composition. The serpentine “Ted Verses Ted” leads without pause into Reichman’s solo entry on the rhythmically morphing “Armitage Shanks.” The vignettes lend the whole a certain unity in juxtaposition which mirrors the moment-to-moment changes in timbre and tempo.

Gary Versace’s pianism is a perfect addition to the group aesthetic. He’s certainly no stranger to Hollenbeck’s music, having toured with Claudia and participated in Hollenbeck’s large group projects. His playing is intellectually rigorous and exciting by turn, and he is comfortable in the very different roles of ensemble player and soloist. His contributions are just one more reason for *Royal Toast*’s overwhelming success. For those unfamiliar with this exemplary quintet and its composer, there’s no better place to begin.

By Marc Medwin

Point of Departure

an online music journal

Claudia Quintet + Gary Versace

Royal Toast

Cuneiform 307



As one confronts the rising tide of CD releases, it's tempting to cry – like Thurber, rather than King Canute – “what do you want to be prolific *for*, Cynthia?” With John Hollenbeck, there's no reason for the question, even rhetorically, for everything he puts his name to claims a worthwhile place, and clearly answers some specific creative need. His large ensemble record *Eternal Interlude* was my most-played release of 2009, a deeply consoling and satisfying set of compositions that didn't lack for muscle and edge in addition.

The small group work – and it's Claudia, rather than Cynthia – is equally compelling. I make this the fourth record by the named group, starting with a fine eponymous release in 2002 but really making the jazz world sit up and take notice with *Semi-Formal*. The new one is already coming up fast in the favorites' lane, with enough of the misterioso brooding of *Eternal Interlude* to establish a continuity but more of the insistent

percussive drive Hollenbeck brings to combo situations. The prevailing mood, though, is sombre, and almost elegiac. The closing “For Frederick Frank” completes a sequence that in “Ideal Standard” and “American Standard” seems to articulate something important, but not yet finally worked out, about Hollenbeck's attitude to jazz language and rhythm.

It's actually the guest musician, Gary Versace, who introduces this important section, on piano this time rather than organ, completing the round of short cadenzas by the individual players, most of them dialogues-with-self. Saxophonist Chris Speed is overdubbed on his introit to the title track, while “Ted Versus Ted”, “Drew With Drew” and “Matt on Matt” similarly spotlight accordionist Ted Reichman, bassist Drew Gress and vibist Matt Moran. These aren't simply filler material. They make an important point about the internal dynamic of the group, in which the players seem invited or granted permission to confront their own stylistic boundaries, playing in and out of character at once. It's an effective way of establishing a group identity, as well as making the record a sophisticated studio artefact rather than merely a blowing document.

Hollenbeck makes the point most clearly – as inevitably he would, given the nature of his instrument – in the introduction to “Keramag”, a funky idea that evolves out of a sprung rhythm so extended it almost feels free. Gress similarly provides an enigmatic prelude to “Sphinx”, which emerges in march time, oddly similar to some of the things Anthony Braxton was writing in the 70s. (Even the Egyptological reference points vaguely in that direction.)

The slight difficulty of the record is that while parts of it hint at a continuous suite of ideas, there are also stand-alone tracks which don't fit that model but contain enough musical information to spin off an average jazz date each. Even the opening “Crane Merit” suggests multiple possibilities, while “Armitage Shank” (a plumbing reference that could be taken several different ways!) doesn't quite spring logically from Reichman's intro but rather subverts it. The title piece is pure, distilled Hollenbeck, witty, lateral, insistently driven but with a one-hand-on-the-wheel insouciance. Along with Matt Wilson, he's the most interesting jazz percussionist around at the moment and though, unlike Matt, he tends to keep the humour reined in, it's unmistakably there and all the subtler for being restrained. What's especially interesting about this recording is how easily Versace is assimilated. Even though he is a featured artist, and one could in places subtract him from the equation and identify a familiar “Claudia” practice going on, he doesn't sound in any way supernumerary or antithetical to the group's established idiom.

It's a record that is perhaps best absorbed slowly and by stages, but it is essential listening and consolidates the Quintet's high standing on the current scene. A cis-atlantic tour draws nigh. Can't wait.

–Brian Morton

Album Review



The Claudia Quintet Royal Toast

[Cuneiform; 2010]

7.1

It's fun to grapple with music that doesn't fit a prescribed notion of genre-- it forces you to listen a little harder and think a little more about actual sound. For instance, I could call the Claudia Quintet "post-jazz" or something similar, but without getting into the details of the music, you wouldn't know what that means. "Jazz" itself is a term that doesn't mean a whole lot anymore without modifying it-- the tent pitched by the word is huge. Here, when I say that the Claudia Quintet combine elements of jazz and modern chamber music, the jazz I'm referring to is mostly the post-bop stuff that's been swirling around in various permutations since the early 1960s, small ensemble music that doesn't necessarily lean on swung rhythms, is built on modal composition, and doesn't fear dipping into the avant-garde.

On *Royal Toast*, the Quintet, led by drummer John Hollenbeck and here augmented to a sextet by pianist Gary Versace, moves easily between improvisation and intricately arranged composition. For instance, "Sphinx" spends most of its first minute charging through a series of seemingly disconnected phrases that make more sense as they're repeated and combined, then pulls back for an almost funky midsection in which Chris Speed gets a chance to wail a bit on his clarinet. Bassist Drew Gress gets a little spotlight, too, almost as a reward for holding down the hyperactive low-end that gives everyone else their exploratory foundation on the rest of the song.

This is the group's fifth album, and they're clearly good at reading each other and knowing when to shift the rhythm to help a soloist escape a cul de sac. The band's unorthodox instrumentation-- bass, drums, reeds, accordion, and vibraphone-- gives it a distinct sonic signature. Ted Reichman's accordion is used in every conceivable way, playing leads, soloing, harmonizing with the clarinet, and in some of the album's slowest and most rewarding passages, hypnotically vamping in a static dance with Matt Moran's vibraphone. Though they can clang along with the best of them, they do quiet and meditative well. These more placid moments balance out the record's stormier passages and offer respite from fussy sections where the shifts in rhythm and time signature are a bit too much.

It's fitting they'd land on the Cuneiform label. The overall effect the band gives off is that of a more well-adjusted cousin to doom-obsessed labelmates Univers Zero, offering the sturm without so much of the drang. I wouldn't mind hearing Hollenbeck use the group to explore his softer side, because the pulsing comedowns on this record are some of its most arresting moments, even though the in-betweenness makes it unique and enjoyable on its own merits.

— Joe Tangari, August 19, 2010



OTTAWA CITIZEN

I propose a toast to John Hollenbeck (CD review)

By Peter Hum Fri, May 21 2010

... in recognition of his just released, starkly beautiful new CD with The Claudia Quintet, *Royal Toast*. Here's is the rollicking title track, performed last year by the band at the famed Jazz Baltica festival in Germany. ...

The disc, a Cuneiform label release, reflects the same musical priorities and esthetic that were so well-represented on the New York drummer and composer on last year's excellent *Eternal Interlude*, which was a large ensemble recording. *Royal Toast* is steeped in Hollenbeck's catchy fascination with prog rock's complexities married to the sonorities and refinement of chamber music, not to mention his abiding love for minimalism a la Steve Reich. Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet may also be unique in jazz -- for it is surely that kind of band too -- thanks to its always innovative grooving that values not just rhythms but more basic pulsations. Given all of the musical diversity that Hollenbeck embraces, and above all, his faith in and fascination with mixed meters and straight-eighths time feel, *Royal Toast* may well exemplify the "Jazz Nerds International" music that famously makes Jason Marsalis see red. But don't let his disapproval influence you.

Hollenbeck's group includes his stalwart collaborators Drew Gress on bass, vibraphonist Matt Moran, accordionist Ted Reichman, and saxophonist/clarinetist Chris Speed. They're joined by guest pianist/accordionist Gary Versace, who makes a great band even more interesting. As I've written before, Versace -- whether he's playing with John Scofield or Ingrid Jensen or Maria Schneider or Loren Stillman or The Refuge Trio with Hollenbeck and Theo Bleckmann -- is a superb and special musician. In every context, his sense of inspiration and commitment to what he plays shine through.

The music on *Royal Toast* is wide-roaming. There are slow and often austere beauties such as the opening track *Crane Merit*, the closing, uplifting track *For Frederick Franck* and the rarefied ballad *Ideal Standard*. There are rabble-rousers too, including *Keramag*, *Royal Toast* (which features a star turn by Versace at the piano) and *Sphinx*, a riveting, four-minute burst of energy. In between are especially enigmatic compositions such as *Zurn* and *Paterna Terra*, which is featured in the clip below. ...

Finally, there are four vignettes -- *Drew with Drew*, *Matt on Matt*, *Chris and Chris* and *Ted vs. Ted*. These one-minute wonders are Hollenbeck creations -- he overdubbed snippets of each bandmate so that each was involved a kind of "duet" with himself -- not that Hollenbeck told the musicians of his intention before the engineer pressed "record." The results baldly juxtapose happenstance against the considerably more premeditated music of Hollenbeck's intricate compositions.

You could say that *Royal Toast* relishes reconciling opposites -- wood and metal, cerebral melodies and forthright grooves, stuttering rhythms and simple melodies. It's unpredictable, engrossing, richly detailed music. In a word, it's mind-expanding, and unless you fall in the Marsalis camp and would prefer to pass on some mind-expansion, it will reward your attention many times over.

CD/LP Review | Published: May 11, 2010

Royal Toast

The Claudia Quintet with Gary Versace | Cuneiform Records (2010)

By Troy Collins



The humorously titled *Royal Toast* is the fifth album from the Claudia Quintet, percussionist and composer John Hollenbeck's longstanding five-piece that is—in the eternal words of Duke Ellington—a band "beyond category." Eradicating the tenuous boundary lines between idioms, Hollenbeck and company draw on ethnic traditions, free jazz, contemporary composition and progressive rock in their multifaceted explorations.

A former pupil of legendary jazz composer Bob Brookmeyer and an avowed student of the minimalists, Hollenbeck's compositions are imbued with both the intricate structural layering of the former and the forthright emotional directness of the later. Mirroring the sequencing of the Quintet's previous albums, *For* (Cuneiform, 2007) and *Semi-Formal* (Cuneiform, 2005), this date alternates complex long-form works with brief interludes, this time in the form of unaccompanied improvised cadenzas from each member of the group. Joining the leader, multi-reedist Chris Speed, vibraphonist Matt Moran, accordionist Ted Reichman, bassist Drew Gress and guest pianist Gary Versace each play brief virtual duets with themselves, their multi-tracked solos serving as seamless bridges between compositions.

Versace joined the Quintet as a guest on its previous tour and is featured throughout the record. With Versace added to the mix, the group's sound is dominated by percussive string textures, an aesthetic Hollenbeck ably exploits on these new pieces. Far from mere blowing vehicles, Hollenbeck's intricate compositions allow his sidemen a modicum of solo space, with each member contributing equally to the mix, their subtle contributions blurring the line between the composed and improvised. Like a puzzle, Hollenbeck's modular arrangements feature interlocking counterpoint, cantilevered rhythms and modulating tempos; despite the high-brow approach, these pieces maintain an air of rhythmic immediacy and melodic accessibility.

The polyrhythmic title track, tempo shifting "Armitage Shanks" and funky "Keramag" are among the most infectious examples of Hollenbeck's contrapuntal writing—kaleidoscopic mosaics of harmony, melody and rhythm. Embracing genre, the passionate "Sphinx" brings Arabic and African influences to an exotic sonic travelogue that careens with unfettered glee, while "Ideal Standard" and "American Standard" both borrow liberally from jazz tradition. The former is a haunting rubato ballad, the later a driving anthem.

The remainder of the album tends towards an understated, chamber music vibe at the opposite end of the sonic spectrum occupied by such fare as the turbulent "Paterna Terra." The through-composed "Zurn" invokes minimalist concepts, its hypnotic drum and piano figure building tension until the tune's cinematic finale, which is reminiscent of the euphonious opener, "Crane Merit" and the closer, "For Frederick Franck," a lyrical ode to the Dutch painter, sculptor and author.

Balancing dynamics that range from bittersweet balladry to ebullient grooves, *Royal Toast* is another un-categorizable yet accessible offering from Hollenbeck and the peerless Claudia Quintet.

Track listing: Crane Merit; Keramag Prelude; Keramag; Paterna Terra; Ted versus Ted; Armitage Shanks; Drew with Drew; Sphinx; Matt on Matt; Zurn; Chris and Chris; Royal Toast; "Ideal" Intro; "Ideal Standard"; American Standard; For Frederick Franck.

Personnel: John Hollenbeck: drums, percussion; Ted Reichman: accordion; Chris Speed: clarinet, tenor saxophone; Matt Moran: vibraphone; Drew Gress: acoustic bass; Gary Versace: piano, accordion (16).

Style: Modern Jazz

CD/LP Review | Published: May 11, 2010

Royal Toast

The Claudia Quintet with Gary Versace | Cuneiform Records (2010)

By DAVID ADLER
Published: June 13, 2010

With one exception, drummer John Hollenbeck hasn't taken prominent front-cover credit on releases by The Claudia Quintet. This holds true for *Royal Toast*, the band's extraordinary fifth album. The decision makes sense, for Hollenbeck's labyrinthine compositions get much of their subtlety and force from the individual players that have defined the group's identity from the start.

On *Royal Toast*, Hollenbeck yields the floor to each of them in turn and so "Ted versus Ted" features accordionist Ted Reichman in a brief double-tracked duet with himself; "Drew with Drew" highlights bassist Drew Gress in the same fashion; "Matt on Matt" gives vibraphonist Matt Moran his turn and "Chris and Chris" features the sparring tenor saxophones of Chris Speed. Of course there's also "Keramag Prelude," a Hollenbeck drum solo and "'Ideal' Intro," an abstract, reverb-soaked meditation by pianist and guest Gary Versace, who expands the quintet to a sextet. Each improvised sketch flows naturally into the dense through-composed track that follows; cleansing the palate and helping listeners digest the music in all its extended brilliance.

Hollenbeck has worked a good deal in chamber and modern classical settings, and his writing for The Claudia Quintet involves a level of multipart detail expected from a new music ensemble like Alarm Will Sound. The key difference is the fitful improvised component, as well as the raw rhythm lurking under every shimmering harmonic texture or contrapuntal flourish, from the slower passages of "Zurn," "Armitage Shanks," and the opening "Crane Merit," to the breakneck assertions of "Keramag," "Paterna Terra" and the title track. For all its clashing asymmetry and constant, baffling change, the music radiates with steadiness and grace.



Track Listing: Crane Merit; Keramag Prelude; Keramag; Paterna Terra; Ted versus Ted; Armitage Shanks; Drew with Drew; Sphinx; Matt on Matt; Zurn; Chris and Chris; Royal Toast; "Ideal" Intro; "Ideal Standard"; American Standard; For Frederick Franck.

Personnel: John Hollenbeck: drums, percussion; Ted Reichman: accordion; Chris Speed: clarinet, tenor saxophone; Matt Moran: vibraphone; Drew Gress: acoustic bass; Gary Versace: piano, accordion (16).

Style: Modern Jazz