

Anthony Braxton | Where to Study Jazz 2008

DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

October 2007

The HOT BOX		John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
CDs	CRMC5 »				
Terence Blanchard <i>A Tale Of God's Will</i>		★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★
The Claudia Quintet <i>For</i>		★★★	★★★	★★★½	★★★★
Charlie Hunter <i>Mistico</i>		★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★
Nguyễn Lê Duos <i>Homescape</i>		★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★

Critics' Comments

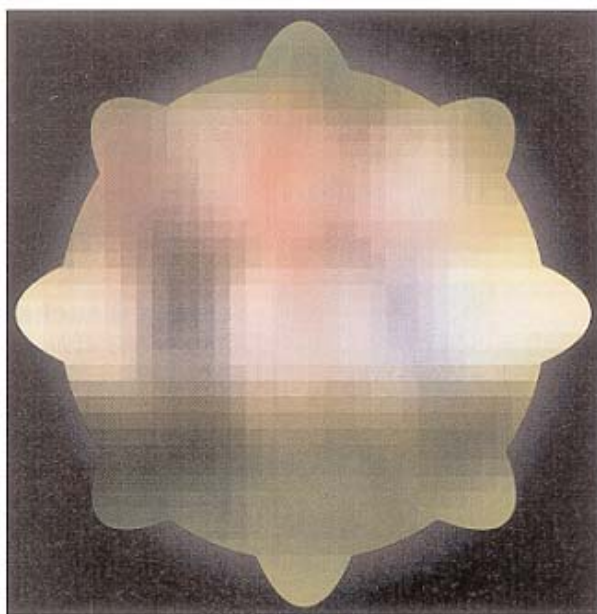
The Claudia Quintet

For
CUNEIFORM 247
★★★★

All the tunes on the new CD by The Claudia Quintet are “for” someone; it is also No. 4 in the group’s discography, so the title is a pun. Such personal playfulness keeps with a chamber band that has tickled the ears of adventurous listeners for a decade with its deft blend of improvised jazz solos, run-on, minimalist figures that gradually shift shape and color, and unusual instrumentation.

The group features clarinet and often high, reedy accordion playing off shimmering vibes, whose percussive qualities also dance with a rhythmic spine of drums and bass. No matter how dark the music gets—and this album has a more muscular urgency than previous ones (and some powerful solos)—light, beauty and a sense of well-being always seem ready to emerge. Conversely, as chipper and optimistic as the music becomes, you never feel some easy, new-age solution is being offered.

The dense, urgent and sometimes a little scary “Be Happy” is a good example (no



Bobby McFerrin nostrums here). It starts with a haunting, repeated descending scale on vibes by Matt Moran and continues with successive solos by bassist Drew Gress, tenor saxophonist Chris Speed and accordionist Ted Reichman over stacked meters (drummer John Hollenbeck knows his African music) created by rippling vibes and insistent drums. The ambient but also scary and other-worldly “For You” uses some electronic looping and features single-word separated by long spaces lyrics (written and spoken by Moran).

For starts with a heavily syncopated drum-’n’-bass club beat and continues with an homage to Hollenbeck’s wedding, “August 5th, 2006,” which gambols through a variety of moods. Chris Speed’s pastoral, Debussy-like clarinet solo is a highlight. The dirge-like “This Too Shall Pass” acknowledges grief while suggesting some comfort, as well, with a wonderfully warm and bluesy vibes solo by Moran. Hollenbeck stretches out on “Rug Boy,” with a burbling Moran and braying Speed not far behind the frenetic mood. I’m not sure I get the joke in the “mash-up” of the Carpenters’ “Rainy Days And Mondays” and “The Peanut Vendor,” but the somber, then lively (Latin) feels are lovely, with another fine Speed clarinet solo. The album closes with three odes, most notably a dark, funereal one for Mary Cheney that closes with snare roll sputters and ritard into darkness.

More than many hybrid jazz forms on offer these days, *For*’s rhythmic propulsion, bursts of blues feeling and first-rate soloing should make it attractive to swing purists who may think it’s not “for” them. —Paul de Barros

For: I’m So Fickin’ Cool; August 5th, 2006; Be Happy; This Too Shall Pass; Rug Boy; For You; Rainy Days/Peanut Vendor Mash-up; Three Odes; Admiration (For Peter Garland); Nostalgia (For Jan Garbarek); Pity (For Mary Cheney). (81:48)

Personnel: John Hollenbeck, drums, percussion, electronic tape preparation (B); Drew Gress, acoustic bass; Matt Moran, vibraphone, vocals (G); Ted Reichman, accordion; Chris Speed, clarinet, tenor saxophone.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com

Claudia Quintet, For

★★★★★ (Cuneiform/Rune 247)

John Fordham
Friday August 10, 2007
[The Guardian](#)

The Claudia Quintet, led (if such a conversational ensemble can be said to be led) by New York drum virtuoso John Hollenbeck, was one of the hit newcomers of the 2007 Cheltenham Jazz Festival. Hollenbeck's rough equivalent in the UK might be Seb Rochford, in terms of a seamlessly multi-idiomatic rhythmic flexibility allied to a composer's conception. Claudia plays plenty of tough postbop (saxist Chris Speed sees to that), but there are strong folk elements in both the melodies and in the big role for an accordion. The latter trait retains a taut logic through Hollenbeck's precision and the consistently strong composing. The opening track, shifting through free-jazz, polyphonic clamour and a klezmerish bounce, set against a hip-hop beat, is typical. Matt Moran's vibes are sometimes gently blended with clarinet and accordion, while lyrical pealing-bells cascades contrast with edgy free-swing. It's all far from just another exercise in eclecticism, and ushers in one of the most characterful small jazz groups of recent times.

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Hartford Courant.

courant.com

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

For

Cuneiform Records

John Hollenbeck shows a minimalist's love of repetition, austere beauty and the use of motifs as sonic grids on his latest genre-bending venture with The Claudia Quintet.

Tapping into jazz, contemporary classical and world-music influences, the drummer/composer is, despite his minimalist leaning, also a colorist and a lover of textures generated by an offbeat blend of reeds, accordion and vibes, lightly wired with electronic effects.

Hollenbeck holds his dynamic, interactive chamber group together, even when Chris Speed's clarinet and Ted Reichman's accordion spiral along in dizzying conversation over Matt Moran's thick, wet, wavering vibraphone tones.

Using a mix of ease and rigor, Hollenbeck covers an emotional chasm ranging from anarchic free jazz to the serenely spiritual.

"Rug Boy" is free jazz, accented with eerie, keening. "This Too Shall Pass" is a requiem, sanctified by a resonating lamentation on vibes. "For You" is a space odyssey soaring on a stream of cosmic effects and spare, surreal use of the spoken word.

"Three Odes," the finale, is a color-soaked, poetic trilogy, one of whose sections is cryptically titled "pity (for Mary Cheney)," daughter of Vice President Dick Cheney.

Hollenbeck, a minimalist who can also be quite loquacious in artistic expression, says nothing more, leaving it to the listener to ponder what his enigmatic "ode" may or may not imply about the curious Cheney clan's credos.

The Claudia Quintet plays Friday at 8:30 and 10 p.m. at New Haven's Firehouse 12. Information: 203-785-0468 and www.firehouse12.com.

OWEN MCNALLY

Published October 11, 2007

Album



The Claudia Quintet For

[Cuneiform]

Artist: The Claudia Quintet

Released: 21 May 2007

Catalogue number: RUNE247

Review

by Martin Longley

24 August 2007

This New York combo were little known in the UK before this year's Cheltenham Jazz Festival, where they were soon hailed as one of its clear favourites. Composer and bandleader John Hollenbeck tells of how the quintet was named after a mysterious woman who attended an early gig, rabidly enthusing and making promises for repeated showings. They never saw her again...

Drummerman Hollenbeck also likes the idea of turning his back on the too-often masculine world of jazz, his womanly naming ceremony pointing to what he perceives as a strongly feminine spread of instruments: clarinet, vibraphone, accordion. No groaning guitars or bullish horns here, but John did refuse to relinquish his heavy metal-sized kit...

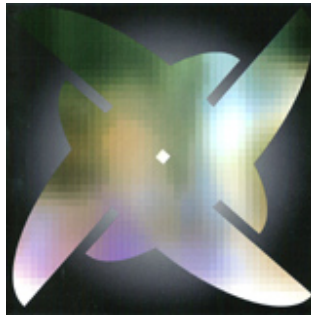
This is the Quintet's fourth album since forming back in 1997.

The character of its compositions is mostly self-consciously chamber-orientated. Hollenbeck prefers well-ordered intricacy, pulsing away over long distances, with his chief discernible influence being minimalist Steve Reich, and to a lesser extent, Philip Glass. Bassist Drew Gress and reedsman Chris Speed are familiar figures on the New York moderne jazz scene, but vibesman Matt Moran and accordionist Ted Reichman are less known, at least in the UK.

The album's production sound is exceptional, particularly in the deeply woody bass realms. In fact, the Gress contribution is significant throughout, whether providing complex pulses or occasionally soloing out into springy abstraction. The clarinet, vibes and accordion trio frequently work as one, setting up darting ripples of repeat over Hollenbeck's virtuoso patterns and snapback changes. There aren't so many solos in the strict sense, but more of a continuous flow of simultaneous interlacing.

On the third track, "Be Happy", Speed solos on tenor saxophone, imposing a tougher, jazzier bite, whilst the others create a spangled tunnel, down which he hurtles. Gress bows morosely on "This Too Shall Pass", surrounded by ghostly accordion shivers. It's fruitful when the band pulls back like this, leaving some space in the music...

Hollenbeck kicks out his drumming frustrations on "Rug Boy", the Claudias freaking out in a continued vein of looseness. They certainly are at their best when relaxing the high precision, as they handle the Stan Kenton arrangement of "The Peanut Vendor" with an innovative funk-skew rebirth. The first half of this little medley involves The Carpenters, a duo who seem to be seriously valued in some experimentalist quarters...



RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
— 1 October 2007

The Claudia Quintet

For

(Cuneiform)

US release date: 21 May 2007

UK release date: Available as import

by **Will Layman**

The Claudia Quintet is a jazz group with a seriously hybrid ancestry—the group combines the shimmering clarity of the George Shearing Quintet with the ADHD adventurousness of John Zorn, the structured dorkiness of a string quartet with the shrieking madness of Albert Ayler. The Claudia Quintet, led by drummer John Hollenbeck, is one of the most exciting groups in contemporary jazz, but it can also be one of the most tedious. Let the creative tension sit in graceful equipoise.

For is the latest of three discs on Cuneiform in the last four years—a significant body of work from the same five guys: leader, composer, and drummer John Hollenbeck, Chris Speed on clarinet and tenor sax, Matt Moran on vibes, accordionist Ted Reichman, and Drew Gress on acoustic bass. The shimmer of the Shearing group comes through in the clean blend of vibes, accordion, and clarinet, but the creative bustle of Zorn emerges in the busy, almost mathematical compositions and structured improvising environments. Each of the discs comes at you with the force of a manifesto: this band knows exactly what it is about, and the compositions charge forward with inevitability.

Hollenbeck's compositions are both surprising and logical. Like much of the new downtown jazz, Claudia's music uses the liberties of "free jazz" in the context of extremely ordered writing. The order, however, is new. Songs rarely consist of easily remembered melodies in 12 or 32 bars; instead they are evolving patterns that take your ear on a journey. The solos are not just "blowing" over the tunes changes, but are improvised elements of the larger design.

On "August 5th, 2006", for example, Gress's bass solo takes place on top of (or, really, beneath) a winding pattern of lines played by the other musicians (with Hollenbeck on xylophone). In fact, the solo appears to be written rather than improvised, even though there is a jazzy tone to its articulation. Listening to song like this, you don't anticipate the return of the theme at all—you simply keep following the whole piece as it unfolds like the plot of a short story. There is no real repetition, but rather the playing out of a series of motifs across almost ten minutes of fascination.

This is not to say that there are not moments of more unreserved wailing. On "Be Happy", Speed gets to unleash a fairly knotty tenor solo that takes great advantage of his background playing fast music in the Eastern European style. His tone can get wooly or rough, but the articulation is precise—and it's all arrayed over an accompaniment that sounds as much like Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* as it does like jazz. When Gress follows this with a sliding-note statement that could be from a Mingus record, the background shifts to an eerie, otherworldly blend of clarinet and accordion.

That all this orchestration comes from the pen of a drummer should not be surprising. After all, drummers are musicians who regularly deal with more than one instrument under their own command (toms, cymbals, cowbells, and so on), and Hollenbeck controls his kit with grace and excitement. "Rug Boy" starts with a pure "out" drum solo, which is then fused with an accordion statement during which Reichman channels Cecil Taylor. As Speed and Gress join in a written part, Moran solos with abandon. Again: it's almost like a kind of chamber music that emerges from a free jazz sensibility.

There is a precious tedium to be found here as well. Most plainly, there is "For You 6:14", on which the band plays a series of ambient atmospheres beneath the recitation of a series of words: "fear", "breathe", "you", "you", "you". I guess it's "performance art", and I guess I should be giving it a break and trying harder to dig its profundity, but who's got the time when so many other tunes are full of fun and interest? The same might be said of "Three Odes", with its long, Reichian introduction of pulses and presence, all of which seems to be leading somewhere important...only to never quite arrive.

These dull patches, however, are more than made up for by Hollenbeck's puckish play elsewhere. Most clever and most fun, surely, is "Rainy Days/Peanut Vendor", which is—I swear on my mother—a brilliant conjoining of the song by the Carpenters ("Rainy days and Sundays always get me down") and the classic Cuban rumba. You barely recognize either melody until you *utterly* recognize them and can't stop thinking about it. Speed runs a lovely clarinet solo over a short progression from "Rainy Days", and it all seems inevitable when the main motif of that melody is—of course!—set over a Cuban groove.

Which is as good a word for the music of the Claudia Quintet as any. Though this combination of instruments and this blend of styles are hardly obvious, the band now sounds so thoroughly integrated and seamless that you'd think it was a tenor-trumpet quintet or a 16-piece big band. You can almost imagine other clarinet/vibes/accordion groups springing up in its wake. Yet how many would have jazz soloists as imposing and inventive as Speed and Gress, or a composer as fiendish, playful, and patient as Hollenbeck?

Few. Or, actually, none. Though I encourage folks to give it a go. The Claudia Quintet, inimitable, deserves to inspire.

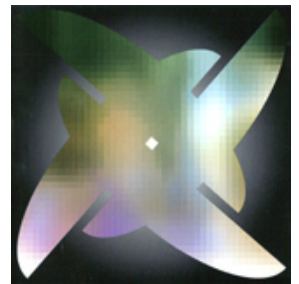


For

The Claudia Quintet | Cuneiform Records (2007)

By **Mark Corroto**

Drummer John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet has created a sound. Let's not call it jazz, or chamber music, or rock for that matter. It is *the Claudia sound*, period. The trouble, of course with being original, is that the pigeon-holders cannot pigeonhole you and the radio folks won't play you. But then, everyone with an ear for the edge can hip their friends to this Claudia sound.



Not that Hollenbeck and company make it easy for you. Their fourth album, *For*, draws from a unique cast of musicians playing a slightly skewed instrumental combination, with the players come from seemingly disparate backgrounds—bassist Drew Gress (Tim Berne, Uri Caine, Fred Hersch), vibraphonist Matt Moran (Slavic Soul Party, Mat Maneri, Luciana Souza), accordionist Ted Reichman (Anthony Braxton, Marc Ribot, Paul Simon), and clarinetist Chris Speed (Human Feel, Alas No Axis).

Then again, it is the combination of players that sparks Hollenbeck's writing here. The 'for' in *For* are dedications for folks like Dick Cheney's daughter Mary, a meditation founder, and various friends, family, musicians, and music teachers.

The repetitive chamber feel of "August 5th, 2006" flows with an ease, and simple clarinet, accordion, and twinkling vibraphone wash, that is like a gentler Philip Glass. Then zap, "Rug Boy" slams a bit of hardcore free jazz—but where could the nasty come from with this crazy instrumentation? Chris Speed foists a tenor saxophone exploration in and out of his partners' swirling cauldron. Elsewhere, deep space ambient music is probed on "For You," with all kinds of electronic tape preparations and some spoken word.

Just when you think Hollenbeck will zig, he zags. The band combines the Carpenters' (that's right the whacky 1970s pop unit) hit "Rainy Days" with Stan Kenton's arrangement of "The Peanut Vendor." Now, you're wondering, does Hollennbeck have big ears or is he the Raymond Scott of this new millennium?

The answer is yes and, hopefully, yes.

Style: [Modern Jazz/Free Improvisation](#) | Published: September 21, 2007

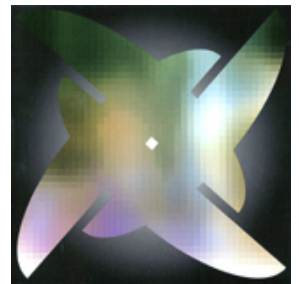


For

The Claudia Quintet | Cuneiform Records (2007)

By **Jerry D'Souza**

The Claudia Quintet has been evolving and shaping its music, creating a potent and forceful presence. They do it with graceful finesse; working the elements to let melody get its due and improvisation mark its presence. Think of the quintet as a minstrel of joy and the charm of their music becomes apparent. Theirs is a sound that flows like a river of shimmering beauty that glimmers, glows and most importantly, runs deep.



The music challenges norms. What starts out as a bouncy ode, may slip into chamber music and out again, without a grain of emotion sacrificed. Then again the intuitive interplay may find another sound to ferment. Context is never capsized by content. The evolution of these elements and their framing comes to life on “Be Happy.”

John Hollenbeck sets up a percussive dance on the drums that is answered by Matt Moran (vibraphone) and Chris Speed (tenor saxophone). The fluidity of the instruments changes course and shape. Speed twists and thrusts the melody, his groove flinty, quite the contrast to the sweet interspersions of Moran and the accordion of Ted Reichman. The cadence of the middle section comes from the interlocking bass of Drew Gress and the whirlpool of Moran’s vibraphone until it gets back into ensemble lines.

”Rug Boy” erupts on Hollenbeck’s drumming, a foretaste of the sense of urgency, fragmented lines, and free form that the group unleashes. But key surprise is their movement and it comes in the orchestration of the melody as the players weave the tapestry in unison.

”I’m So Fickin’ Cool” is another marvel of concept and execution. The giddy rhythm of bass and drums pulses afar from the crystalline tones of the accordion, the clarinet jumps in on darting lines, for a kaleidoscope that keeps the melody upfront and the inventions colorful.

This is a bright, expressive recording that should grab the listener with immediacy.

Style: [Modern Jazz/Free Improvisation](#) | Published: January 03, 2008

POSTED ON OCTOBER 17, 2007:

Claudia Quintet and the CSO's first "Out of the Box" event

Not Quite Classical: A memorable pair of jazz/classical fusion events, all in one week

By Lindsay Koob

It's safe to say that the new season is back in full swing. As of last week, all of the major Charleston Symphony series had begun, and almost every other major classical entity in town (like the College of Charleston's School of the Arts) is chugging along nicely.

Two of the performances I caught last week fall into what you could call the "jazz/classical fusion" category. Last Tuesday, an absolutely amazing ensemble of New York area musicians performed at the College of Charleston's Recital Hall. The Claudia Quintet were brought to town by a joint effort of the New Music Collective and the jazz department at CofC. They played pieces written by the group's fabulous drummer, John Hollenbeck — also an accomplished and utterly original composer. Between that and the absolutely brilliant players, this is some of the most powerful and engaging new music I've experienced lately.

Its rhythmic and harmonic groundwork is carefully planned and scored. There's no other way you could achieve the kind of metric variety and complexity found in this music — not to mention the arcane harmonic patterns. Yet the music still has a distinctly improvisational quality to it, thanks to the amazing musicians that perform it. And I'm talking real musicians, like major conservatory grads and virtuosos with glittering careers of their own. Chris Speed played a wicked clarinet and tenor sax; Ted Reichman proved to be a real virtuoso of the accordion; Matt Moran did stupefying things with his vibraphone, and guest organ bassist Gary Versace was a big part of the musical glue that held them all together.



This music impresses and appeals on multiple levels. Its jazzy exuberance and rhythmic vitality make you want to get up and dance. But its brainy complexity never stops teasing the mind, and its emotional intensity can really get to you. It sounds vaguely minimalistic at times but not in an "ambient" way. It takes you from limpid lyricism to the kind of jagged intensity that makes you want to run and hide. But just when you think things are getting too thorny or atonal, the composer throws a harmonic or rhythmic "hook" at you that keeps everything musically credible. These guys blew us all away. I'm still cursing myself for not bringing enough spare cash for one of their CDs.

The first of the Charleston Symphony's "Out of the Box" events came our way on Thursday evening at the Charleston Music Hall. Appearing with assorted CSO players and Resident Conductor Scott Terrell were the legendary local jazz drummer Quentin Baxter and his renowned quartet: Tommy Gill at the piano, Kevin Hamilton on acoustic bass, and Mark Sterbank on alto sax. It is this group, more than any other, that has given Charleston its niche in the global jazz scene. Quentin, as usual, was miraculous.

The ingeniously laid-out program included numbers by Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, and Bernie Miller, with musicians coming and going from the CSO. We even got an all-percussion ensemble in one number and an all-brass group (save for Baxter) in another. Classical musicians or not, they all seemed very much at home in the jazz idiom: nobody had trouble swinging.

I enjoyed the bigger ones the most: Darius Milhaud's *Creation du Monde* and especially *Brandenburg Gate: Revisited*, by American icon Dave Brubeck (who was Milhaud's student). The Brubeck piece was kind of a modern "concerto grosso," with themes and solos bouncing back and forth between the orchestra and jazz combo. In all, it was an evening to cherish and file away among favorite memories.

If the CSO intention is to attract and engage new audiences, I think they found the magic ticket here: this was the biggest (and youngest) crowd they've ever gotten in this series. Bravissimo, Quentin — I can hardly wait 'til the CSO brings you back.