

## STEPHEN BUONO PUBLICITY



### Acclaimed Drummer-Composer John Hollenbeck Pens Rich, Complex Songs For Short Attention Spans on the 8<sup>th</sup> album by The Claudia Quintet

#### ***Super Petite*, to be released June 24th via Cuneiform Records, packs virtuoso playing and a wealth of ideas into ten short songs**

*Short* doesn't necessarily mean *simple*. Drummer-composer **John Hollenbeck** acrobatically explores the dichotomy between brevity and complexity on ***Super Petite***, the eighth release by the critically-acclaimed, proudly eccentric **Claudia Quintet**. The oxymoronic title of the new album, due out June 24th via Cuneiform Records, captures the essence of its ten new compositions, which pack all of the wit and virtuosity that listeners have come to expect from the Claudia Quintet into the time frame of radio-friendly pop songs.

As always, Hollenbeck's uncategorizable music – which bridges the worlds of modern jazz and new music in surprising and inventive ways - is realized by Claudia's longstanding line-up: clarinetist/tenor saxophonist **Chris Speed**, vibraphonist **Matt Moran**, bassist **Drew Gress**, and accordionist **Red Wierenga**. Over the course of 19 years and 8 albums, the band has forged an astounding chemistry and become expert at juggling mind-boggling dexterity with inviting emotion and spirit.

Like the band's name, the title *Super Petite* originated as an affectionate nickname for one of the band's fans. "I thought that was a funny juxtaposition," Hollenbeck recalls, "but it also became a good frame for the album because the tunes are short but can also be grand in a way - just not in length."

The concept was both a personal challenge for Hollenbeck as a composer always dealing with a wealth of ideas, but also a reaction to a tendency in modern music toward the epic. "I'm feeling things in the opposite direction," the composer explains. "When tunes are longer, there tend to be moments when not a whole lot is happening. If you have a really short tune, the whole thing has to be compelling."

Nowhere is that principle better exemplified than in "Pure Poem," which clocks in at under two minutes but is the most difficult piece the quintet has ever recorded. It was inspired by "Pure Poem 1007-1103" by Japanese poet Shigeru Matsui, which consists solely of sequences of Roman numerals and was used by controversial poet Kenneth Goldsmith to illustrate his theory of "Uncreative Writing."

Hollenbeck draws inspiration from a number of diverse sources throughout *Super Petite*, including two unrecognizable interpretations of classic jazz – which, in its earliest years, demanded short songs due to the limitations of the day's recording media. The mesmerizing "Nightbreak," which opens the album, is built upon a slowed-down translation of Charlie Parker's famous break in "Night of Tunisia," while "Philly" transforms an infamous Philly Joe Jones lick into an exercise in bebop deconstruction.

Two variations on the same theme, "JFK Beagle" and "Newark Beagle" were sparked by the contraband-sniffing dogs that patrol the international baggage claim area of airports. They are the living embodiment of *Super Petite* – utterly adorable but all business. "My problem is I want to pet the beagles but they're so focused on that one thing," Hollenbeck laments. "That piece began as a portrait, a combination of being really cute but staying focused. I don't know exactly what that would sound like musically, but that's the challenge. In the end it doesn't really matter to me if it happens or not, because it still leads me into a certain world." In this case, the idea of international travel inspired Hollenbeck to use his passport number as a series of pitches that formed the basis for the pieces.

Similarly, “If You Seek a Fox” began life as a dig at the composer’s least favorite 24-hour cable news network, then morphed into an aural description of the eponymous animal. “A-List” began with an even more fantastical scenario, imagining the Claudia Quintet walking the red carpet. (“Think *Entourage* meets the Geek Squad,” as Hollenbeck wryly puts it in his liner notes.) If the tune’s urgent pulse is unlikely to attract the paparazzi, it’s nonetheless a compelling mood piece that Hollenbeck insists “feels almost like a Led Zeppelin tune in our heads.”

“Peterborough” was written in the titular New Hampshire town, where Hollenbeck spent six idyllic weeks in the fall of 2014 as a resident artist at the famed MacDowell Colony. It was there that Aaron Copland composed his Pulitzer-winning “Appalachian Spring,” which inspired the hint of Coplandesque American optimism in Hollenbeck’s combination of clarinet and vibes. The residency also provided the opportunity to explore the work of master Senegalese drummer/composer Doudou N’Diaye Rose, whose “Rose Rhythm” forms the basis for Hollenbeck’s “Rose-Colored Rhythm.”

Hollenbeck describes the MacDowell Colony as “a beautiful space where you can do whatever you want all day and no one bothers you. You can work hard all day on something, but you can also get out and ride a bike or run if you want. Then in the evening you see all these other people from different disciplines who have been doing the same thing as you, talk about what they’re doing, go to bed and do it all again the next day.”

The album concludes with “Mangolds,” a mood piece built from a slow, elongated melody line named for Hollenbeck’s favorite vegetarian restaurant in Graz, Austria, where he worked with the renowned Jazz Bigband Graz on his 2006 release *Joys and Desires*.

#### **About John Hollenbeck -**

A graduate of the Eastman School of Music, Hollenbeck recently concluded a 10-year professorship at the Jazz Institute Berlin to join the faculty of McGill University’s Schulich School of Music. In addition to the Claudia Quintet, Hollenbeck also leads his twice Grammy-nominated Large Ensemble and was nominated again for his arrangement of Jimmy Webb’s “The Moon’s a Harsh Mistress” from *Songs I Like a Lot*, the first of two albums that puckishly reimagine pop songs by the likes of Cyndi Lauper, Daft Punk, Queen and Burt Bacharach with big band arrangements. His other awards and honors include the 2012 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, the 2010 ASCAP Jazz Vanguard Award and a 2007 Guggenheim Fellowship; winning the Jazz Composers Alliance Composition Contest in 1995 and 2002; and Meet the Composer’s Grants in 1995 and 2001.