Brooklyn Jazz Underground Ensemble (BJU Records) by Tom Greenland

The Brooklyn Jazz Underground (BJU), formed in 2006, is an association of independent bandleaders. 7 X 7, their second collective release, puts all of the chiefs/chefs in the kitchen at once, containing two compositions from each member: one a full-length work, the second a brief piece (called a “shorty”) inspired by one of the longer tunes. Thus the album displays a range of compositional approaches and musical personalities.

Although vocalist Tammy Scheffer sings lyrics on the clever “Ex-Communication,” more often she’s heard as a third horn, in combination with David Smith’s trumpet and Adam Kolker’s tenor or soprano saxophones or bass clarinet. The three-at-a-time frontline soloing is particularly effective on pieces like bassist Anne Mette Iversen’s “Along the Lines,” where voice, bass clarinet and trumpet combine in a variety of melodic textures. The double-drum team of Owen Howard and Rob Garcia provides propulsion, adding a dynamic cadenza to the end of the aforementioned tune or opting for Middle Eastern hand-drum patterns on “Our Last Hora.” The two-chord country gospel sound of “The Green Pastures of Brooklyn” was obviously inspired by “Cowboys and Indians,” a longer saga that morphs from a loping cowboy bassline in 5/4 time to a second section in 6/8 with a Middle Eastern-style melodic scale—a musical metaphor, perhaps, for the drastically different experiences of Native North Americans and their white colonizers.

The BJU gave the second of two local CD release parties at Shapeshifter Lab last month, headlining an evening that also featured Scheffer and Garcia’s groups. In spite of a house sound-mix dominated by keyboardist Billy Childs and Adam Koehler’s trumpet and synth, lagging a bit behind the drums, the septet delivered a dynamic set, which included almost all of the longer pieces and a couple of the shorties. “Ex-Communication” had an effective three-way solo by voice, tenor saxophone and trumpet. As on the album, “Along the Lines” and “Cowboys and Indians” were strong performances, the second a briefer piece (called a “shorty”) inspired by one of the longer tunes. Thus the album displays a range of compositional approaches and musical personalities.

For more information, visit bjurecords.com.