

The Hot Box

Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
René Marie <i>I Wanna Be Evil</i>	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
Swing Fever <i>Grand Masters Of Jazz</i>	★★★	★★½	★★★	★★★½
The Claudia Quintet <i>September</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Randy Brecker <i>Brecker Brothers Band Reunion</i>	★★★½	★★½	★★★	★★★

Critics' Comments

René Marie, *I Wanna Be Evil: With Love To Eartha Kitt*

Swinging, soulful vocalist René Marie has great control and range but has had difficulty defining her territory. Oddly, this tribute album to Eartha Kitt has sparked some originality. Her clever, funky arrangement (in three) of "Let's Do It," a sexy "Santa Baby" and her daringly transgressive original "Weekend" add punch. The earnest Marie is more seduced by Kitt's theatrical "earthiness" than by her winking kitsch. —Paul de Barros

The Eartha Kitt songbook gives this excellent singer a superb array of material (from Dave Frishberg to Cole Porter) in which to show her winking, sinewy stuff. The East Side cleverness and sophistication tilt toward cabaret, but Wycliffe Gordon bridges the gap with humor and a few strange sounds. —John McDonough

Successful transfusion of Eartha Kitt's red-blooded, raw sex and exotica, purred and snarled as a steely story of determination and triumph. Marie throws a few of her own curves into the mix, but plays it rather close to the source. —John Corbett

Swing Fever, *Grand Masters Of Jazz*

Obviously prepared with love and admiration for the swing-pins. Memorable flashes from Clark Terry and Jackie Ryan, and DeFranco's got such a huge presence, but much of the disc and two freebie DVDs falls short of being extraordinary. —John Corbett

Love the idea of the locals hosting the heroes, especially when the locals kick it with so much verve. The pros demonstrate what makes them global figures—and that kind of expertise nudges everything even further. —Jim Macnie

Clark Terry, Terry Gibbs and Buddy DeFranco—caught here more than 10 years ago—play with sparkling panache, and San Francisco bandleader Bryan Gould's ensemble honors them with a solid bed of swing. But the CD, stitched from live and studio sessions (with falsely feathered applause to make it sound like it was all one show) promises more than it delivers—the principals never appear together and the expansive (and wonderful) vocalist Jackie Ryan feels like the real star. —Paul de Barros

The Claudia Quintet, *September*

The interplay of the Claudias has been magical for a few years now, but the eye-opener here is the intrepid nature of Hollenbeck's compositional sense. It's simultaneously more refined and more far-reaching on these pieces, and it's the main reason the disc is so enchanting as a whole. —Jim Macnie

Even when this superb accordion- and vibes-laced quintet is chattering in Morse code or obsessing, Steve Reich-style, over asymmetric chunks of melody, a shimmering spiritual warmth swells up around leader John Hollenbeck's inspired, orchestral drumming. "29th: 1936 'Me Warn You,'" built from imbedded historical speech, conjures contemporary social reality in a way that much music more readily labeled as "jazz" feels altogether too remote from. —Paul de Barros

If you've never heard FDR's mocking 1936 aria to eternal GOP hypocrisy set to music, you'll enjoy this quirky quartet as it teases and riffs on his rhythms. Politics aside, the music is impressionistic, intellectually vexing and emotionally rather evasive. Its elusiveness is part of its charm and its frustration. —John McDonough

Randy Brecker, *The Brecker Brothers Band Reunion*

Hard to peg the Brecker brand as nostalgia, but a reunion doesn't lie. Randy and his fusionaires are all on top of a rather half-breed game here, in jazz quarters at least. But the playing has punch, power and wattage. The surprise is Ada Rovatti, who warrants her prominence as stand-in for her late brother-in-law. Companion DVD very well produced. —John McDonough

Glint of light on metallic font—this self-tribute adopts the '70s aesthetic the Brecker Brothers helped codify, down to the design. Glitter of disco + pneumatic thwack of salsa + adrenaline wail of mainstream rock + post-bop infrastructure = music that birthed 100 TV themes. For the record: "Merry Go Town" has some of the dopest lyrics this side of Men At Work. —John Corbett

Sharp playing on paper, but the studio stuff has a hokey side, and the live stuff truly seems locked in another era. That said, the band scalds through its rather predictable fusion flourishes. —Jim Macnie



COREY CHRISTIANSEN

LONE PRAIRIE (Origin)



Much like the soundscapes jazz guitarists Bill Frisell and Pat Metheny have recorded, *Lone Prairie* has its pastoral charms. But in revealing the breadth of his musical education, or at least a significant measure of it, Corey Christiansen draws from a variety of influences—folk, country, rock, blues, funk, jazz—with as much ingenuity as finesse.

That's no small feat—not when you consider the ease with which Christiansen navigates the fretboard, whether favoring escalating pentatonic runs, slippery jazz chromaticism or sophisticated harmony. He's no slouch, too, when it comes to colorfully deploying effects or reveling in twang. In fact, nothing on *Lone Prairie* proves more engaging than Christiansen's version of "Sittin' on Top of the World," reimagined as a thoroughly hip and witty take on honky-tonk.

Strong, simple folk melodies clearly appeal to the Utah-bred guitarist, and he's careful not to compromise their fundamental allure with excessive embellishment. What's more, he composed three complementary tunes for this session and finds enough space for Marty Robbins ("El Paso") to rub shoulders with Ennio Morricone ("Il Grande Massacro").

Lingering lyricism isn't the album's chief focus, though. A top-flight improviser, Christiansen often cuts loose, primarily in vibrant blues-rock or fusion settings that prominently feature bassist Jeremy Allen, drummer Matt Jorgensen and keyboardists Steve Allee and Zach Lapidus. The result is a series of performances that aren't merely evocative; they're dynamic, too. **MIKE JOYCE**

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

SEPTEMBER (Cuneiform)



John Hollenbeck has fashioned his share of attention-grabbing tunes, but few as compelling as "September 29th, 1936: Me Warn You," a highlight of the Claudia Quintet's shiveringly good new album. A mash-up of reflective music and sonically sliced and diced excerpts from a Franklin D. Roosevelt speech, it basks in the president's sarcasm in blowing off the opposition for pretending to back his New Deal programs and claiming, "We will do them better." With ad nauseam repetitions

of phrases like that, the piece can drive you to distraction, but through its coiled minimalism and the lucid counter-voices of Matt Moran's vibes and Chris Speed's saxophone, the music wins us over by powerfully claiming the human voice as an instrument of its own.

September, strung loosely on the memories and sensations that various days in the month conjure for Hollenbeck, is elsewhere awash in gentler emotion. New accordionist Red Wierenga adds to the tapestry-like richness of the music on such tunes as "September 12th: Coping Song," which affectingly recalls the aftermath of 9/11, and "September 17th: Loop Piece," on which Hollenbeck the drummer is at his most lyrical.

The Claudia Quintet could once sound a bit soft and mannered. But there is nary such a moment here, not with the pronounced, throbbing bass of Drew Gress (or, on four cuts, Chris Tordini) riding over the cool currents and asserting its soulful authority. Hollenbeck's subtle absorption of ethnic sounds including Indian and Brazilian further adds to the stylistic depth of the album, which for all its artful texture is one of his most forceful and immediate efforts. **LOYD SACHS**

PAQUITO D'RIVERA AND TRIO CORRENTE

SONG FOR MAURA (Sunnyside)



As closely associated as he still is with Cuba, from which he defected in 1981, Paquito D'Rivera has often chosen to express his affection for the music of Brazil. *Song for Maura* (named after his late mother) is the latest example, a collaboration with that country's Trio Corrente: Fabio Torres (piano), Paulo Paulelli (bass) and Edu Ribeiro (drums). Recorded in São Paulo and co-produced by Jacques Figueras and Brenda Feliciano, it's a more successful probe into the music than 2002's weak *Brazilian Dreams*, which was watered down with tame arrangements and the inclusion of the New York Voices' pallid harmonies.

Song for Maura is a gutsier, earthier and ultimately more inspired record. D'Rivera's clarinet and, to a lesser extent, alto saxophone are bold and swinging on the vigorous uptempo tracks, eloquently expressive on the ballads. It would be easy for him to get away with complacency on a set such as this, but he's not interested: *Song for Maura* houses some of D'Rivera's

most satisfyingly edgy playing in years. Chalk that up, in good part, to his collaborators, who've clearly given D'Rivera much to work with. In Torres, especially, who also arranged 10 of the 13 tracks, D'Rivera has partnered with a pianist of uncommon skill and drive.

Avoiding the tired Brazilian repertoire—not a single Jobim composition here—the quartet instead looks to lesser-known composers like Pixinguinha, whose frolicsome "1 X 0" builds upon airtight clarinet and piano harmonies, and Kximbinho, author of the seductively airy ballad "Sonoroso." Each of the musicians save Paulelli also contributes song material. *Song for Maura* is a first-rate summit, one that D'Rivera would be wise to explore further.

JEFF TAMARKIN

HARRIS EISENSTADT SEPTEMBER TRIO

THE DESTRUCTIVE ELEMENT (Clean Feed)



Drummer-composer Harris Eisenstadt has a beguiling way of meshing simplicity and sophistication, a characteristic that seems

most arresting in the context of his September Trio. It is the smallest of Eisenstadt's regular ensembles, and features a pair of dynamic stylists who are simpatico with Eisenstadt's casual complexity. Tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin often plays here in a cool, voluptuous manner that is amiable and attractive, and pianist Angelica Sanchez can tag her phrases with question marks and exclamation points without seeming the slightest bit overwrought. The leader acts as rhythmic sketch artist—there is no hunger to fill the void of the bassist, a role that occasionally falls to Sanchez—and is the least aggressive instrumentalist in the group.

There are a couple of songs directly influenced by Schoenberg; the dilapidated syncopation in the different motifs offered up by Sanchez and Eskelin in "From Schoenberg, Part Two" may be consonant with Schoenberg's notion of "developing variation." The relatively tumultuous closer, "Here Are the Samurai," is inspired by a scene of conflict and foreboding in the film *Yojimbo*, and the title of *The Destructive Element* refers to a passage in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* that talks about the industry and integrity required to truly immerse yourself in chasing a dream. (That the title song is the shortest among these nine originals is a slice of Eisenstadt's



Swing Fever with Clark Terry/ Buddy DeFranco/Terry Gibbs and Jackie Ryan

OPEN ART 07452

★★★★

The cover art of this CD-and-two-DVD package shows three great principals—Clark Terry, Buddy DeFranco and Terry Gibbs—hunched together as a unit as if playing in one terrific jam session. Would that it were. Unfortunately, no such combination materializes. These concert performances were recorded between 1998 and 2001, and each soloist appears separately in a collection whose

main purpose seems to be to showcase vocalist Jackie Ryan in major league company.

Though featured on only two pieces, DeFranco unfurls the fast, fluent and effortless perfection that for years made him the gold standard of the clarinet among musicians. His “Speak Low” has become something of a specialty feature, but its fizz still sparkles. Gibbs whirls through “Love For Sale” with a furiously poised control and shares “Liza” with tenor saxophonist Ray Loeckle. On a high-flying “Airmail Special,” Gibbs supports five smoldering clarinet choruses by Jim Rothermel. On “Topsy” and “Swingin’ The Blues,” Terry engages with the band like the master he is.

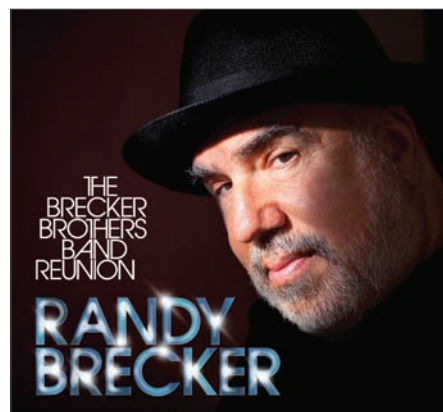
Backing them all, the nine-piece Swing Fever is worthy of its guests, with journeyman work from Loeckle and Howard Dudune. While Ryan is an appealing singer whose range and flexibility put a nice edge on the better songs, with six of the 14 pieces, she’s something of an unexpected guest on a CD that promises the “grand masters of jazz.”

—John McDonough

Grand Masters Of Jazz: Intro Gibbs; Airmail Special; Intro Buddy; Speak Low; Intro Jackie; Body And Soul; Intro Clark; Topsy; Love For Sale; That Ole Devil Called Love; You Go To My Head; Autumn Leaves; Liza; My Lean Baby; East Of The Sun; I Want A Little Girl; Swingin’ The Blues; Please Don’t Talk About Me When I’m Gone; Outro. (74:04) Disc 2 (DVD 1): (59:55). Disc 3 (DVD 2): (54:24).

Personnel: Terry Gibbs (2, 6, 9, 12), vibraphone; Buddy DeFranco (4, 13, 14), clarinet; Clark Terry (8, 16–18), Steve Campos, trumpet; Bryan Gould, trombone; Jim Rothermel, Ray Loeckle, Howard Dudune, Pee Wee Claybrook, reeds; Jim Pitman, guitar; Ruth Davies, Dean Reilly (8), bass; Tony Johnson, Harold Jones (8), drums; Jackie Ryan, vocals (6, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18).

Ordering info: openartproductions.com



Randy Brecker The Brecker Brothers Band Reunion

PILOO 007

★★★★

If you want to party like it was 1971 with some cats who wrote the book on jazz-rock fusion, check out Randy Brecker’s new album, which offers crisp precision, orchestral tapestries, seductive grooves and crystalline separation—hallmarks of the genre—with solos ranging from good to marvelous. Unfortunately, Brecker doesn’t discriminate between the appealing optimism of that era and its cheesier aspects, such as wah-wah effects, guitar heroism, come-hither soul-jazz vocals and, most objectionable (even if in jest), sexist lyrics and vocal antics.

The highs are dazzling, among them the speedy, multi-part “First Tune Of The Set” (so named because it is); “The Dipshit,” a jukebox boogaloo with a “Snake Rag”-style tag, with David Sanborn; and the slow and sexy “R N Bee” with Will Lee’s spooky bass line. Brecker salutes his 4-year-old daughter on flugelhorn with “Stellina” and his wife, Ada Rovatti (who plays lovely soprano saxophone on the tune), on “Adina.” The bittersweet, synth-orchestrated “Elegy For Mike” is touching. The DVD features Rovatti’s big-toned tenor more liberally than the CD, though it also has her triggering silly wah-wah passages.

From such heights it is a great tumble to Brecker impersonating a hapless hustler on “Really In For It” and a rural blues singer on “Musician’s Ol’ Lady Dues Blues.” And while guest vocalist Oli Rockberger’s hoarse whisper may well find a spot on the adult contemporary charts, “Merry Go Town” sounds ever so much like something Blood, Sweat & Tears might have recorded decades ago.

—Paul de Barros

The Brecker Brothers Band Reunion: Disc 1 (CD): First Tune Of The Set; Stellina; The Dipshit; Merry Go Town; The Slag; Really In For It; Elegy For Mike; On The Rise; Adina; R N Bee; Musician’s Ol’ Lady Dues Blues. (73:07) Disc 2 (DVD): First Tune Of The Set; The Slag; Adina; Really In For It; Straphangin’; Stellina; Merry Go Town; Inside Out; Some Skunk Funk. (1:38:03)

Personnel: Randy Brecker, trumpet, flugelhorn (2, 9), vocal (6, 8, 11); Ada Rovatti, tenor, soprano saxophones; David Sanborn, alto saxophone (3, 6); Jim Campagnola, baritone saxophone (6, 8); Mike Stern (1, 6), Adam Rogers (2, 3, 8), Dean Brown (1, 4, 7, 9), Mitch Stein (5, 6, 10), guitar; Will Lee, Chris Minh Doky (7, 9) bass; Dave Weckl, Rodney Holmes (5, 6, 10) drums; George Whitty, keyboards, percussion (1, 2, 9, 10), programming (1, 2, 9, 10), sound design (4, 7, 8), organ (3); Oli Rockberger, vocals, keyboard (4, 8).

Ordering info: piloorecords.com

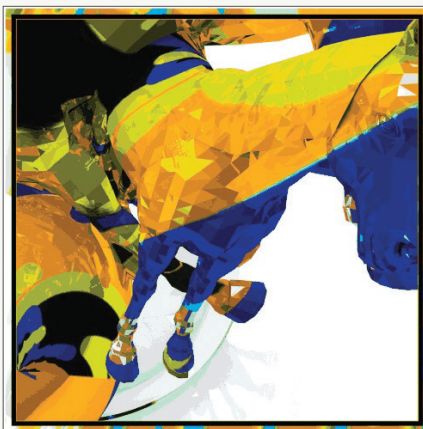
The Claudia Quintet September

CUNEIFORM 377

★★★★

John Hollenbeck’s Claudia Quintet has a signature sound. Rhythmic modulation, tricky times, chamber-y textures, cyclical minimalist devices mix with open and structured improvisation, virtually always hewing to a strong pulse. It might be a blend of downtown jazz and Bang On A Can, but on their seventh CD, nothing is left partially digested. You’d never mistake Claudia for anyone else.

When the beat briefly breaks down or evaporates, as on “18th: Lemons,” miraculous little sonic universes open up, soon to be subsumed in a riff or repetition. As a drummer, Hollenbeck’s got a tendency to put 10 notes where two might do, filling everything up, bursting with nervous energy. His playing has an inorganic sensibility—the brushes feel a bit like a washing machine, everything has a pristine quality, sometimes cool and calculated. One might wish for an accident or two, but that’s not the vibe. And to be honest there’s also an underlying, countervailing warmth, a deep humanity that all the players convey. That might be the result of the leader’s interest in oral transmission, reportedly the main manner of composition on *September*.



On “29th: 1936 ‘Me Warn You,’” a recording of FDR’s sarcastic voice is dissected and recast, extracting its musicality, reminding of Steve Reich’s voice loops or Jason Moran’s forays into text. “12th: Coping Song,” an elegy on 9/11, shows Hollenbeck has depth as a conjurer of unclassifiable melodies.

—John Corbett

September: 20th: Soterius Lakshmi; 9th: Wayne Phases; 25th: Sombra Blanket; 29th: 1936 “Me Warn You”; 22nd: Love Is Its Own Eternity; 18th: Lemons; 17th: Loop Piece; 24th: Interval Dig; 16th: Mystic Klang; 12th: Coping Song. (67:19)

Personnel: John Hollenbeck, drums, percussion; Red Wierenga, accordion; Chris Speed, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Matt Moran, vibraphone; Drew Gress (1, 4, 7–10), Chris Tordini (2, 3, 5, 6), bass.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com

THE BUFFALO NEWS

January 11, 2014 - 6:02 PM

Listening Post: David Sylvian, Yes, Kate McGarry and Keith Ganz, the Claudia Quintet and Angela Hewitt's Beethoven

The Claudia Quintet, "September" (Cuneiform). So fresh and so bracing and so good is John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet (which contains no one named Claudia) that it can even make an abstract and powerful New Jazz disc with a group including the unpromising combination of accordion and vibraphone. Lest anyone think that the worst of Art Van Damme had turned into some sort of zombie from beyond stalking current avant-jazz, it's important to note that accordionist Rod Wierenga is playing his instrument in an entirely new way in jazz and vibraphonist Matt Moran isn't exactly doing things Lionel Hampton, Milt Jackson or even Gary Burton would have done either. This is music by musicians eager to tell us it was recorded "on Earth Day and the birthdays of ... Gyorgi Ligeti and Iannis Xenakis." It's drummer/composer Hollenbeck, though – one of the most creative musicians in current jazz – who gives this music its remarkable and entirely fresh flavors. Hollenbeck tells us in the notes that September is the month of retreats into composition for him. He tells here that for this disc "I wrote down as little as possible. I felt that the longer I was able to work out the piece without notes on a page, the easier it would be for the band to learn and memorize the music without having to rely on notation." It's a leap into "a world without music stands" and it's altogether stunning at its best. ΩΩΩ½ (Jeff Simon)

<http://www.buffalonews.com/gusto/disc-reviews/listening-post-david-sylvian-yes-kate-mcgarry-and-keith-ganz-the-claudia-quintet-and-angela-hewitts-beethoven-20140111>



CRITIQUE

TAKING THE REINS

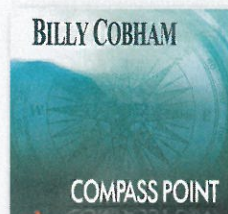
DRUMMER/LEADERS MAKING THEIR MARK



NARADA MICHAEL WALDEN *THUNDER 2013*

Fresh off a couple years of touring with Jeff Beck, the legendary producer and drummer returns sounding hungrier than ever.

On *Thunder 2013*, Narada Michael Walden sings lead and blows hard on a selection of tunes showing an impressive array of pop, rock, and funk flavors. From the Motown stomp of "Throw Your Hands Up" to the slick syncopated tom-and-snare pattern of "Shirley Mae," Walden is bringing it like only a veteran can, and his expertise behind the glass means the record has a variety of different drum sounds and some cool production touches to keep things spicy. Also dig Walden's interplay with the excellent young guitarist Matthew Charles Heulitt, who's simply *ripping* throughout. (tarpanrecords.com) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



BILLY COBHAM *COMPASS POINT*

Going back—but not too far—for some classic Cobhamisms.

With a backstory including a dangerous makeshift stage and a lottery-winning piano tuner who had quit a day earlier, this 1997 concert almost didn't happen. And that would have been a great loss, since Billy Cobham and his superb band play beautifully across these two discs of nicely recorded fusion. Cobham's trademark lightning-quick snare rolls still pack a wallop on the Return to Forever-esque "Fragolino," and the drummer drives a shuffle like nobody's business on "Mushu Creole Blues." Expectedly, plenty of solos abound, so those looking for their Cobham chops fix will be satiated. Of note is the unique rapport the drummer shares with the band's keyboardist, none other than master drummer Gary Husband. (cleopatrerecords.com) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



DAVE KING *TRUCKING COMPANY* *ADOPTED HIGHWAY*

Jazz? Rock? It's all one big stew in the hands of the prolific Bad Plus drummer—never one to rest, or allow us to either.

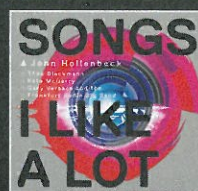
Dave King wastes no time bringing the outrageous on his own "I Will Live Next to the Wrecking Yard," whipping out jagged 16th-note metric modulation on the hi-hats and pushing and pulling the time until your ears have submitted. The circular melody from dual saxophones provides even more rhythmic horseplay atop the odd meters, so the gentle cymbal coda ending the track is a welcome respite. "Dolly Jo and Ben Jay" is as straight a swinger as King would conjure, though not before interjecting some signature tom fills to throw things back off course, while "When in North Dakota" is an open-ride backbeat groove for the solos. (Sunnyside) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



RON BRUNER'S *STRANGE JAZZ UNIVERSE* *NEW SPACE AGE MATERIALS*

A fusion vet keeps the shredding in check...mostly.

Ronald Bruner Sr. solos with such freedom and killer chops over the ending vamp of "Time Travel Made Easy" that you wish the track could go on forever. Thankfully, there are more delights in store within the funk and R&B styles of *New Space Age Materials*, with Bruner laying down some jazzy backbeats over the atmospheric keys and guitar of "Passion of Now" and a rock-steady 8th-note pulse that fits "Dealing With My Alien Feelings" like a glove. Whether it's hip drum programming on smooth vocal tunes or a couple of wild, reverb-drenched solo drum features, Bruner keeps his universe interesting, whipping out the pyrotechnics only when needed. (iTunes) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



JOHN HOLLENBECK *SONGS I LIKE A LOT* THE CLAUDIA QUINTET *SEPTEMBER*

A drummer/composer/conceptualist continues to astonish with his innovative scope.

On both of these releases, John Hollenbeck draws on jazz, classical minimalism, impressionism, and avant-rock. *Songs I Like a Lot* features reinterpretations of cover tunes from largely pop sources. Introducing melodies with a restrained purity, Hollenbeck subtly extracts motifs and then brilliantly overlaps rhythms and harmonies—both rich and dissonant—to create mesmerizing mini symphonies. A centerpiece is the gorgeous fourteen-minute rendering of Jimmy Webb's "The Moon's a Harsh Mistress" that gradually escalates to giddy, heart-swelling grandeur. And Queen's "Bicycle Race" avoids camp, making for serious fun, including Hollenbeck's percussive solo on...well...a bicycle. Handling mallets and percussion here, Hollenbeck conducts the Frankfurt Radio Bigband—featuring the superb drummer **Jean Paul Höchstädter**—joined by pianist Gary Versace and vocalists Kate McGarry and Theo Bleckmann. (Sunnyside)

Less accessible yet equally gratifying is *September*, featuring Hollenbeck's ongoing iconoclastic unit the Claudia Quintet. Employing the unlikely palette of drums, reeds, vibraphone, and bass, Hollenbeck superimposes the hyperkinetic atop the serene, creating fascinating textures and surprising transformations. Employing everything from James Brown-inspired grooves to free and orchestral touches, Hollenbeck's expressive drumming ties it all together. Disorienting yet strangely beautiful, Hollenbeck's ensembles sound like no one else's. (Cuneiform)

Jeff Potter

Two years away from its 50th anniversary, in its tenth year under the direction of bassist Ike Sturm, Saint Peter's annual **All Nite Soul** (Oct. 13th) honored two veterans: vocalist Sheila Jordan and pianist Barry Harris. After the seven-tuba boom-bast of Howard Johnson's Gravity, the concert showcased Jordan in an intimate duo with bassist Cameron Brown, with a quartet and a final duet with pianist Steve Kuhn, all demonstrating her continuing versatility and vitality. Harris was next, with solo musings, a trio outing and a 24-voice choir delivering his fine originals "If I Had But One Dream", "Like This", "We Are One", "Paradise", plus an instrumental waltz, "To Duke With Love". Jordan joined Harris for an impromptu blues-rap about their early days in Detroit, ending with an excerpt from a vocalese by Skeeter Spight. The eight-hour-plus event comprised 24 short sets interspersed with videos of featured performers discussing the impact of the Jazz Ministry and former pastor John Gensel. Concert high points included bass clarinetist Don Byron's solo on Tommy Dorsey's "When I've Sung My Last Song"; Jay Clayton and Peter Eldridge's traded scats over "It Could Happen to You"; Gene Bertoncini and Ingrid Jensen's solos on "East of the Sun" (with string quartet); a trio of young hoofers; pianist Connie Crothers' dramatic soliloquy; organist Sarah McLawler's "In a Sentimental Mood" and tenor saxophonist John Ellis' smoky "Emily".

- Tom Greenland

In a moving program honoring their fallen comrade, several of the most celebrated soloists in jazz today joined the Juilliard Jazz Artist Diploma Ensemble at Paul Hall for **A Tribute to Mulgrew Miller** (Oct. 2nd). The young quintet featuring saxophonist Lukas Gabric and guitarist Greg Duncan with Reuben Allen, Paolo Benedettini and Jordan Young on piano, bass and drums, respectively, opened the concert with arrangements of Miller's Latin-tinged "Leilani's Leap" and soulful "All Blues" variant "Hand In Hand". Vibraphonist Steve Nelson and alto saxophonist Steve Wilson, two longtime members of Miller's Wingspan group, joined the ensemble for a powerful rendition of "Grew's Tune". Pianist Donald Brown, one of Miller's oldest friends, humorously told of first meeting Miller in college before taking the piano seat to perform his own "Waltz For Monk" (a staple of the Wingspan repertoire). He was joined by Miller's co-director of the jazz studies program at William Paterson College, tenor saxophonist David Dempsey, to conclude the first half of the show with Miller's "Soul-Leo". Surprise guest, pianist Eric Reed opened the second set with a stirring reading of the spiritual "Blessed Assurance" and Miller's "Song For Darnell". Saxophonist Javon Jackson joined the band on "Second Thoughts", a Miller piece from their days with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, and remained for Miller's "Farewell To Dogma" before all the guests returned to join the ensemble to close with "Promethean".

- Russ Musto



Photo by George Council / poetimagephotos.com



Photo by Jim Anness

Steve Nelson @ Paul Hall

For a dozen years and now seven albums, **The Claudia Quintet** has been an expressive outlet for drummer/composer John Hollenbeck's distinctive musical vision. Its latest release, *September* (Cuneiform), was duly celebrated at Le Poisson Rouge (Oct. 3rd), following a typically raucous warm-up set by Claudian Matt Moran's Slavic Soul Party. The quintet kicked off with "12th Coping Song", a minimalist meditation on the lingering effects of the World Trade Center terrorist attacks, its looping unison melodies slowly falling out of phase to produce denser textures, topped by Moran's theremin-like vibe trills. They then moved to "24th Interval Dig", another looping figure - this time in 15 beats - featuring Chris Speed's hoarse but cool tenor saxophone tone over the tessellated chords of Moran and new accordionist Red Wierenga, followed by "18th Lemons", one of Hollenbeck's most compelling compositions, a hypnotic experiment of overlain lines of varying lengths, syncing and de-syncing like an acoustic rave soundtrack over bassist Chris Tordini's steady pulse. "29th, 1936 Me Warn You" juxtaposed triggered samples of an FDR speech against a backdrop of roving diagonal lights, unpredictable ensemble accents and quirky harmonized melodies. The light, floating "25th Somber Blanket" had an equally compelling light show of rotating stars and the closing "9th Wayne Phases" (for Shorter and Gretskey) built from a chorale to parade funk, with fine vibe work by Moran.

(TG)

Bringing together members from six separate editions of one of the most famed groups in jazz history, **The Messenger Legacy** held forth for four nights at Jazz Standard (Oct 3rd-6th) for a program celebrating Art Blakey. Organized by drummer Ralph Peterson, second chair in the Jazz Messenger Big Band, the group, with trumpeter Brian Lynch, alto saxophonist Donald Harrison, tenor saxophonist Billy Pierce, pianist Donald Brown and bassist Reggie Workman, recalled the powerful sound of the popular hardbop group (active from the '50s-80s), performing a wide selection of the band's classic repertoire. The sextet opened their final set of the week with a fiery rendition of "One By One", which featured all hands soloing energetically on the lyrical Wayne Shorter line, propelled by the incendiary drumming of Peterson, which recalled Blakey in its dynamic strength and thorough knowledge of the Messenger-In-Chief's extensive percussive vocabulary. The group opened "Along Came Betty" softly, blowing the well-known Benny Golson melody before opening the floor up to solos by Lynch, Harrison, Pierce and Brown that displayed the original sounds honed during their days under Blakey. Peterson began Shorter's "On The Run" with an explosive solo, setting the tone for another round of intense soloing buoyed by inspired horn riffing. Brown was heard beautifully on the ballad "Misty" before the band ended with requisite performances of "Moanin'" and "The Theme".

(RM)

WHAT'S NEWS

The winners of the **2013 Kennedy Center Honors** have been announced and will be celebrated at an event Dec. 8th. Among the five winners are Herbie Hancock and Carlos Santana. For more information, visit kennedy-center.org.

The recipients of the 2013 **MacArthur Fellowship** have been named. Among the 13 individuals who will receive an unrestricted award of \$625,000 is pianist Vijay Iyer. Previous jazz musicians to have received the award include drummer Max Roach (1988), composer Gunther Schuller and pianist Cecil Taylor (1991), saxophonists Ornette Coleman and Anthony Braxton (1994), saxophonist Ken Vandermark (1999), trombonist George Lewis (2002), saxophonist John Zorn and violinist Regina Carter (2006), pianist Jason Moran (2010) and drummer Dafnis Prieto (2011). For more information, visit macfound.org.

Nominees for the **14th Annual Latin Grammys** have been named, winners to be announced during a ceremony in Las Vegas Nov. 21st. Nominees for relevant categories include: Record of the Year: "La Nave Del Olvido" - Buika (Warner Music Spain); Best Traditional Tropical Album: *Un Siglo De Pasión* - Arturo Sandoval (E35); Best Instrumental Album: *Dances From The New World* - Paquito D'Rivera y Sergio & Odair Assad (GHA Records); Best Tango Album: *Amsterdam Meets New Tango* - Pablo Ziegler & Metropole Orkest, Jules Buckley (ZOH0); Best Latin Jazz Album: *What's Up?* - Michel Camilo (OKeh/Redondo Music/Sony Music); *¡Ritmo!* - The Clare Fischer Latin Jazz Big Band (Clavo Records); *On The Way* - Negroni's Trio (AA Records); *Live In Hollywood* - Poncho Sanchez And His Latin Jazz Band (Concord Picante); *Border-Free* - Chucho Valdés & The Afro-Cuban Messengers (Jazz Village/Comanche Music); *Grand Piano Live* - Chuchito Valdés (Music Roots Records). For more information, visit latin Grammy.com.

November 29th is annual **Record Store Day**. Coming on what is traditionally called "Black Friday", the first official shopping day for the holiday season, a number of labels are scheduling special releases for that day, hopefully driving consumers to their local independent record stores. For more information, visit recordstoreday.com.

An open-house event will be held at Jazz at Kitano Nov. 19th promoting the **Samba Meets Jazz Workshops**. The week-long immersion program takes place in Rio de Janeiro Feb. 15th-22nd and focuses on Brazilian, Latin and mainstream jazz styles, taught by a faculty led by bassist Nilson Matta. Matta and his fellow faculty members Harry Allen, Claudio Roditi, Matt King and Fernando Saci will perform and answer questions about the program. For more information, visit sambameetsjazz.com.

Submit news to info@nycjazzrecord.com

CHOC

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET September

1 CD CUNEIFORM RECORDS / ORKHËSTRA

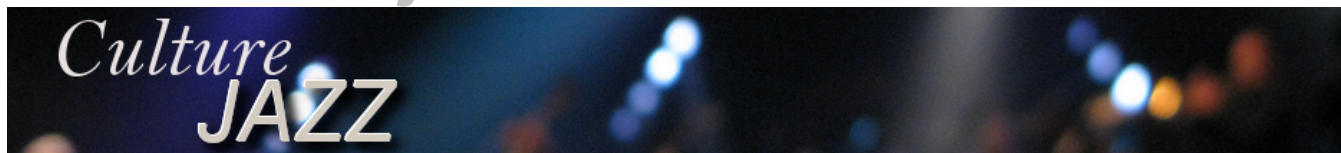
THE CLAUDIA QUINTET
SEPTEMBER



NOUVEAUTÉ. De récentes conclusions scientifiques révèlent que la totalité de l'atmosphère terrestre se trouve à présent polluée. Il convient donc de respirer à plein poumon les quelques rares bouffées d'air pur qui pourraient encore nous parvenir. Dans le ciel du jazz contemporain, le Claudia Quintet est sans conteste l'un de ces zéphirs désirés. Pour fêter dignement les quinze années d'existence du groupe, John Hollenbeck démontre de nouveau qu'il possède un souffle précieux autant que raréfié : il a pour nom "originalité". Ce septième album du groupe repose en effet sur une musique qui ne rappelle rien d'autre qu'elle-même. Cela ne signifie

pas que nuls modèles ou sources d'inspiration n'y soient repérables, le minimaliste américain étant peut-être le plus évident. Mais, lorsque Hollenbeck s'inspire par exemple de la musique répétitive, ce n'est nullement dans un rapport à l'Histoire (musicale) : seule sa dimension expressive, ritualisante, l'intéresse. Ainsi, cette musique me semble-t-elle dégager un charme ambigu sans équivalent. Souvent longues, les structures solidement élaborées se révèlent autant familières qu'imprévisibles. L'extrême élaboration de certaines parties écrites, *Interval Dig* (magnifique Drew Gress !), sonne avec le plus parfait naturel, le complexe ne se confondant jamais avec le compliqué. Chaque pièce possède son atmosphère bien particulière, avec une progression dramatique chaque fois différente. *Somber Blanket* s'apparente par exemple au *Nefertiti* de Wayne Shorter, une pièce déclinant en ses deux tiers une ligne mélodique infinie accompagnant la création de climats par le batteur. *1936 'Me Warn You'* musicalise des extraits d'un discours de Roosevelt sur les ruses politiques partisans (clin d'œil vers Obama ?). Les solistes, est-il besoin de le préciser, sont tous magnifiques, Red Wierenga, qui remplace Ted Reichman à l'accordéon, ou Chris Speed, à l'aise en toutes circonstances, ne versant à aucun moment dans les schémas rebattus du solo improvisé. Un nouveau jalon dans l'œuvre d'un artiste de tout premier plan. • LUDOVIC FLORIN

Chris Speed (cl, ts), Red Wierenga (acc), Matt Moran (vib), Drew Gress, Chris Tordini (b), John Hollenbeck (dm, perc). New York, les 21 et 22 avril et 28 et 29 mai 2013.



THE CLAUDIA QUINTET : "September"



THE CLAUDIA QUINTET :
"September"
Cuneiform Records / Orkhèstra

C'est bien en septembre (2013) qu'est paru ce nouvel opus du **Claudia Quintet** que dirige le batteur, percussionniste, compositeur, architecte sonore **John Hollenbeck**. Une date de publication incontournable puisque ce disque (le sixième du groupe depuis 2004 sur Cuneiform records) est entièrement consacré à ce mois où l'été se délite dans l'automne, le mois préféré de John Hollenbeck :

"Septembre est un mois merveilleux et, pour moi, l'équivalent du jeudi, mon jour préféré de la semaine que j'ai célébré dans une composition sur le premier disque du Claudia Quintet !"

Si les *jazzfans* français curieux connaissaient Hollenbeck depuis belle lurette, d'autres auront découvert son talent d'écriture, son goût pour les atmosphères sonores en fondu-enchaîné, les jeux de timbres et de couleurs à travers sa collaboration avec l'Orchestre National de Jazz de Daniel Yvinec pour le projet et le disque *"Shut Up and Dance"* (2010).

C'est bien cette science de l'assemblage des timbres et des rythmes, des harmonies sophistiquées et des aspérités sonores (la voix ici et

là) que l'on retrouve dans ce nouvel album. On oublie les structures conventionnelles du jazz pour fondre et diluer les voix dans une musique de groupe, un jeu de plans successifs qui fait apparaître-disparaître les solistes sans ruptures.

Une impression délicieuse d'apesanteur tempérée par l'énergie d'un batteur qui s'implique dans une musique qui est aussi support de messages porteurs de convictions comme en témoigne par exemple *"September 29th, 1936 -We Warn You-"* qui reprend et détourne des éléments d'un discours de F. D. Roosevelt. Inévitablement, J. Hollenbeck avait en tête le 11 septembre 2001 mais s'est bien gardé de réveiller la mémoire de ce jour terrible.

Aux côtés du batteur, on retrouve les fidèles **Matt Moran** (vibraphone) et **Chris Speed** (anches), présents depuis l'origine du groupe, alors que le contrebassiste (très sollicité !) **Drew Gress** partage son poste avec **Chris Tordini**. L'accordéoniste **Red Wierenga** est une nouvelle recrue, discret mais parfaitement intégré à l'ensemble, il lie avec finesse les sonorités des anches et du vibraphone.

Même si ce disque est paru il y a six mois, il mérite amplement qu'on le mette en avant car la musique qu'il contient est d'une richesse et d'une fraîcheur qui peuvent résister solidement à l'usure du temps.

. ::Thierry Giard ::.

> Cuneiform Records RUNE377 / Orkhèstra

John Hollenbeck : batterie, percussion, voix, compositions / Red Wierenga : accordéon / Chris Speed : saxophone ténor et clarinette / Matt Moran : vibraphone / Drew Gress : contrebasse sur 1, 3, 7-10 / Chris Tordini : contrebasse sur 2-3, 5-6

01. September 20th- Soterius Lakshmi / 02. September 9th- Wayne Phases / 03. September 25th- Sombre Blanket / 04. September 29th, 1936- -We Warn You- / 05. September 22nd- Love Is Its Own Eternity / 06. September 18th- Lemons / 07. September 17th- Loop Piece / 08. September 24th- Interval Dig / 09. September 16th- Mystic Klang / 10. September 12th- Coping Song

THE IRISH TIMES

The Claudia Quintet: September

Cormac Larkin

Fri, Nov 29, 2013, 00:00



Album: September

Artist: The Claudia Quintet

Label: Cuneiform

Genre: Jazz

American jazz may still be a place where the “masculine” values of individuality and virtuosity have the upper hand. This is in contrast, perhaps to the more inclusive, “feminine” jazz now emerging in Europe. But the best jazz is usually produced by groups of musicians who stay together long enough to develop a group sound.

From the legendary groups of Miles Davis and John Coltrane to contemporary bands led by composers Tim Berne and Dave Douglas, the most compelling statements in this artform usually come about through collective improvisation.

To that list must now be added composer and drummer John Hollenbeck and his Claudia Quintet. The group is named for an enthusiastic fan at one of the drummer’s early gigs who promised faithfully to return with all her friends and, of course, never did. Hollenbeck says he chose the name because he wanted his all-male quintet “to maintain a female quality”.

A decade and seven albums later, The Claudia Quintet have carved out their own defiantly androgynous niche in contemporary improvised music. Some call it post-jazz, which is one of those terms just begging to become obsolete. Whatever you want to call it, this is music that pushes traditional acoustic instruments and conventional jazz forms into new territory – aesthetically, sonically and socially.

The quintet’s last, acclaimed album *What Is Beautiful?* (2010), had singers Theo Bleckman and Kurt Elling channelling the politically charged words of beat poet Kenneth Patchen. For *September*, Hollenbeck set himself the challenge of composing tunes that could be taught to his fellow musicians without any charts – quite a feat for a contemporary jazz composer. Each tune is given a date in September when it was “written”, with further enigmatic descriptors such as *25th/Somber Blanket*, *29th/1936 Me Warn You* and *12th/Coping Song*.

There are jagged grooves from Hollenbeck and bassist Drew Gress, multi-layered harmonies from vibraphonist Matt Moran and accordionist Red Wierenga, and sinuous melodies from saxophonist Chris Speed. But in the end, it’s the freshness of the ensemble sound that sets The Claudia Quintet apart. It’s as if this is what music will sound like 100 years from now. claudiaquintet.com



Live Reviews

The Claudia Quintet at The Workmans Club

Dublin
Ireland
November 25, 2013

By **IAN PATTERSON**, Published: December 1, 2013

"Real fans do it on a Monday night," [Improvised Music Company's](#) Gerry Godley said in an address to the crowd that acknowledged the economic and logistical challenges facing promoters, musicians and fans alike. The Republic of Ireland's economy is still struggling half a decade on and at a time when incomes are stretched semi-improvised music isn't necessarily on the top of everybody's list a month before Christmas. So, it was encouraging to see a good crowd in The Workmans Club to greet The Claudia Quintet on its first visit to Ireland.



Two 45-minute sets showcased music from [September](#) (Cuneiform Records, 2013). The first set, however, began with a new piece, "(September 5th) Ansia di Seperazione"; [Matt Moran's](#) twin bows brought forth ethereal hues from his vibraphones, merging with [Chris Speed's](#) bass clarinet in a short-lived drone. Drummer [John Hollenbeck's](#) tribal rhythms and bassist [Drew Gress's](#) more blues-oriented lines drove the quintet as Speed stretched out on tenor. The combination of groove and minimalism, composed lines and improvisation—and a notable lack of chords—set the tone for an absorbing evening's music.

A five-note ostinato, variously played by accordionist [Red Wierenga](#), Gress and Moran provided "Coping Song"'s simple framework, from which subtle harmonic combinations developed. It was a moody piece and perhaps the most obviously through-composed of the set. A rock-inspired beat formed the spine of "(September 18th) Lemons," dedicated to pianist [Jason Moran](#). A swirling tenor sax, vibraphone and accordion motif gave way to an abstract passage anchored by Gress's bass pulse. Gradually, a groove re-emerged, launching Speed and then Moran into punchy improvisations. The reflective, almost cinematic "(September 25th) Sombre Blanket" and the energetic "(September 9th) Wayne Phases"—an episodic yet lyrical dedication to saxophonist [Wayne Shorter](#)—closed the first set.

The second set began with "Just Like Him" from *I Claudia* (Cuneiform, 2004); Hollenbeck unleashed driving hip-hop rhythms, against which accordion, vibes and clarinet created little interlocking eddies where the lines between notated and improvised sounds blurred. A greater sense of freedom colored "(September 24th) Interval Dig," another lively number with Moran, Wierenga and Speed all enjoying more individual space to really push their instruments. The gently-paced "(September 22) Love Is Its Own Eternity" charted more tuneful territory, with vibes and saxophone in lyrical unison.

The knotty "(September 29th 1936) Me Warn You" departed from pounding drums and a looped segment of a Franklin D. Roosevelt speech, with Hollenbeck's rhythms falling into step with the vocal cadences. Start-stop rhythms, percussive bustle and flowing vibraphone and tenor lines all shared elbow-room on the set's longest composition. It provided an unusual yet arresting finale to the gig. The crowd cheered the four musicians back on stage for "Loterius Lakshmi," a curious slice of punchy, Morse Code jazz.

With dedicated promoters like IMC and venues such as the funky The Workmans Club supporting truly progressive bands like The Claudia Quintet, great music will always have a chance. Importantly, the vibrant creative music scene in Dublin has a following that makes it possible to stage such a left-field concert on a Monday night in the first place—and recession and those thirty shopping days until Christmas be damned.

Photo Credit

Courtesy of [Dublin Jazz Photography](#) / Devi Anna Chacon

http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=45974#.Uqw-ayhQ0_s

Love is its own eternity



The Claudia Quintet

September

Cuneiform****

REVIEW

The seventh Claudia Quintet album, *September*, written in and inspired by the ninth month of the year, finds drummer-composer John Hollenbeck's band line-up shuffled a little with a new accordionist, Red Wierenga replacing Ted Reichman, and bassist Chris Tordini appearing on some tracks (a returning Drew Gress the others). It feels different, and yet the writing is as strong as ever. It seems more vibes-informed in key places even if everything hinges on the group ethic. Yet Matt Moran's role, Greek chorus-like in key places, sticks out, and tenor saxophonist/clarinetist Chris Speed adds a mobility to the ensemble sound. An album that loops in a sprinkle of tellingly apposite spoken word in the sense of it amounting to a warning from history, the cadences of the scaldingly sarcastic voice of Franklin Delano Roosevelt ('29th: 1936 'Me Warn You'), an interruption from the outside world. And, in keeping with awareness of the world beyond music, there's also an inspired reaction to a news report's theme music, but also in musical terms returning to looking within music there's also an influence taken from saxophonist Wayne Shorter as heard on his phrasing in solos on Joni Mitchell albums, here to be heard on '9th: Wayne Phases'. All these strands are framed quite cinematically in the writing. While Hollenbeck professes September to be his preferred month of the year, it's also a month cloaked in sadness: and the elegy for 9/11 ('12th: Coping Song') is a fitting memorial. An album that makes you think inside and outside the music. ***Read an interview with John Hollenbeck:*** www.marlbank.net/interviews/1084-disappearing-labels

Details

Category: Reviews

Published: 06 October 2013

<http://www.marlbank.net/reviews/1118-love-is-its-own-eternity>

MUSIC REVIEW: The Claudia Quintet

Composer John Hollenbeck performs his 9/11-inspired album in full at The MAC

By **Gary Kelly** Updated: 28/11/2013

Ever since the tragic events of 9/11, every song that composer and percussionist John Hollenbeck has written has been a 'September Song'. Hollenbeck, founder of the influential avant garde band the Claudia Quintet, was in an artists' retreat in the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York on September 11, 2001 when he heard news of the attack on his native city. He immediately wrote a reactive piece entitled 'September 12th (Coping Song)', which appears on his new album, suitably entitled *September*, all of which he performs during the Claudia Quintet's masterful concert at The MAC.

Hollenbeck tells a large and appreciative audience during the performance – the band's first in Ireland – that the 9/11 attack had a profound effect on him. Since then, he has composed all of his music in September. 'I came up with this idea because I have that date imprinted in my head,' he admits. All ten tracks on the album depict a different date in September with another title in brackets. Each song is like a tone poem, telling a story, establishing a mood or expressing a political insight.

The first track in the band's two-hour Belfast concert is 'September 17th (Loop Piece)'. On the album track, a man's voice is heard to say 'In hindsight' over and over again, accompanied by a shimmering, melodic soundscape of vibes, accordion and clarinet. But this gig takes place just two days after the 50th anniversary of the death of John F Kennedy, and in tribute, the quintet adds the looped phrase 'At 1pm central standard time, two o'clock eastern standard time' – a nod to the famous announcement of Kennedy's death by an emotional Walter Cronkite.

Hollenbeck likes to reference important events in American history in his music, and another piece entitled 'September 29th (1936 'Me Warn You')' features the lofty tones of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, talking about his New Deal programme to lift the US out of the Great Depression. This is another piece with phrases repeated on a loop, and FDR's anachronistic, patrician voice combined – with the modern, electronic ambient music – produces a dramatic, eery effect. The piece would not feel out of place as a video art installation at the Tate. Hollenbeck informs the audience that this particular speech came up a lot during the last presidential election: 'He (FDR) was saying that politicians just say what they need to say to get elected. It's a simple message but a good one.'

The Claudia Quintet was formed in New York in the late 1990s, and has gone through a range of personnel since then. The latest incarnation of the band features Red Wierengs on accordion, Chris Speed on clarinet and tenor saxophone, Dre Gres, acoustic bass, and Matt Moran on vibraphone. All are perfectly in tune with Hollenbeck's vision of avant garde chamber music that blurs the boundaries between jazz and classical, and is at once cerebral and accessible. Hollenbeck is one of the world's great drummers, endlessly inventive and also a composer of great passion, skill and humanity. He is able to express a wide variety of moods, from joy and exultation, sadness to despair.

His final piece, 'September 9th (Wayne Phases)' is a tribute to the great octogenarian soprano saxophone player Wayne Shorter, possibly jazz's greatest living composer. It is a ten minute-long piece full of dramatic changes in tempo, furious free jazz sax phrases and the fastest accordion and vibe playing you are ever likely to hear.

As the audience calls for more, Hollenbeck and his band play what he describes as the perfect encore piece – two and a half minutes of punk jazz entitled 'September 20th (Soterius Lakshmi)' – named after two presenters on public radio. 'It is my version of a public radio theme song. It is good for those who want an encore and because it is short, it is good for those who want to leave,' Hollenbeck jokes. It is fair to say that not too many people take the opportunity. This is a concert of exquisite musicianship, humour and intelligence.

Review: John Hollenbeck at LJF

Simon Adams enjoys a set characterised by adventure and innovation from drummer John Hollenbeck at the London Jazz Festival

The results of drummer and composer John Hollenbeck's (pictured right) short tutorial residency at the Royal Academy of Music were on display on London's Southbank as part of the 2013 London Jazz Festival. Steering the 18-piece band through some demanding charts, Hollenbeck demanded and got split-second attention to timing, close attention to texture and detail, and a great sense of fun. Monk's *Four In One* was radically reworked while *Abstinence*, which led inevitably into much post-abstinence imbibing, ran through a range of emotions from quiet introspection to cacophonous outcries. Hollenbeck recalled one of his favourite songs with a surprisingly straight version of Jimmy Webb's *Wichita Lineman*, ably sung by Jacob Collier. A jumping version of Kraftwerk's *The Model* ended proceedings on a high.



Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet (pictured below left) took the stage for the second half, featuring a new accordionist in Red Wierenga. They mostly played music from the group's new CD, *September*, a collection of songs associated in Hollenbeck's mind with different days of that month. Not surprisingly, there was an elegiac feel to much of the music, an introspection not much seen in their music before now. *Somber Blanket* was dominated by plaintive accordion lines while *The Coping Song* was a low-key clarinet-led shuffle.



In radically different style were the up-tempo *Lemons*, dedicated to pianist Jason Moran, and 1936 "Me Warn You", a theatrical piece incorporating a speech President Roosevelt made during his 1936 re-election campaign in which he stated the importance of state intervention and welfare. In its use of repeated speech, the piece recalled Steve Reich's seminal *It's Gonna Rain*, the start of his use of phases in building up a work. For sheer ingenuity, the concert ended with *Flocks*, Hollenbeck at piano leading his group through an eerie reconstruction of the sound of a flock of geese. Hollenbeck is always an adventurous musician, pushing at the compositional limits with whatever performers he has to hand. The two sets on the Southbank proved his sense of adventure is still intact.

Photography by [John Watson](#)



FEATURE

EFG London Jazz Festival 2013, Part Three.

Saturday, December 07, 2013



JOHN HOLLENBECK with CLAUDIA QUINTET and the ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC BIG BAND

Saturday evening at the Purcell Room was given over to the music of New York based drummer, composer and educator John Hollenbeck. Hollenbeck's main creative outlets are the long running and prolific Claudia Quintet and his more occasional Large Ensemble with both projects featuring some of New York's leading creative musicians.

I've been fortunate enough to see Claudia Quintet on a couple of occasions, "discovering" them at the 2007 Cheltenham Jazz Festival and catching up with them again in 2010 at the Harmonic Festival in Birmingham. Both performances were outstanding and I've also enjoyed exploring the band's recorded output on Cuneiform Records.

The music of Hollenbeck's Large Ensemble is equally intriguing and consistently inventive. Economically it wouldn't be viable to fly the whole ensemble to London for a festival appearance so instead Hollenbeck turned to the young musicians of the Royal Academy of Music Big Band to bring his large scale works to life. Also an acclaimed educator Hollenbeck was a visiting professor at the Academy during 2013 and had spent two days rehearsing and woodshedding with his young colleagues just prior to tonight's performance which saw Hollenbeck and the RAMBB playing the first half on the concert.

The first set began with Hollenbeck directing the RAMBB with JJ Wheeler at the drum stool. The opening piece was "Guarana", drawn from the Large Ensemble album "Eternal Interlude" (2009). This was a Brazilian flavoured tune named after a Brazilian herb with Viagra like properties (or so Hollenbeck informed us) and was inspired by a trio made by the Claudia Quintet to that country. The influence of Hermeto Pascoal could be heard on the music with Ralph Wyld's vibes a distinctive element and with Oliver Martin on trombone the featured soloist.

Hollenbeck has had a long running creative partnership with the American avant vocalist Theo Bleckmann. Bleckmann's role was filled here by young singer and multi-instrumentalist Jacob Collier, the subject of the "Taking Off" feature in the December 2013 edition of Jazzwise Magazine. Hollenbeck's recent output has placed a greater emphasis on the role of the human voice with Bleckmann's vocals an increasingly important component in Hollenbeck's recordings. The recent "Songs I Like A Lot" recorded with vocalists Bleckmann and Kate McGarry plus the Frankfurt Radio Big Band" puts Hollenbeck's unique stamp on an eclectic range of material that includes Jimmy Webb's "Wichita Lineman". For this Hollenbeck moved to the drum kit with a suited Nick Smart taking over the conductor's role. Collier made a good job of filling Bleckmann's shoes with guitarist Rob Luft also making a significant contribution.

Hollenbeck remained at the kit for the rest of the set, beginning with his arrangement of Thelonious Monk's "Four In One", a deconstruction that Hollenbeck has re-branded as "Foreign One" and which also appears on "Eternal Interlude". Embracing startling dynamic contrasts and hard driving rhythms the piece featured a rousing tenor solo from Sam Rapley, one of several band members who had also lined up with Troykestra earlier in the day.

"Constant Conversation" featured both non verbal vocalising and spoken word passages alongside avant jazz passages featuring bowed bass and Hollenbeck's cymbal scrapes. The drummer/composer has an abiding love of contemporary classical music as well as jazz and this is often reflected in his writing.

"Abstinence", which originally appeared on the 2005 Large Ensemble album "A Blessing" is a piece that Hollenbeck has returned to often. "It's really about abstinence and the about the absence of abstinence" explained Hollenbeck, and basically it's a second line tune cloaked in contemporary and avant garde trappings. With rousing ensemble passages including soaring wordless vocals, FX laden guitar and plenty of instrument swappage between the reeds this was actually great fun and it was easy to see why this piece has become something of a favourite in the Hollenbeck repertoire.

An intriguing first half ended with Hollenbeck's adaptations of Kraftwerk's "The Model" which included dramatic contrapuntal horn arrangements and the use of electric keyboards by pianist Nathan Morson. And should anybody be in any doubt Hollenbeck reminded us that it was his show with a closing drum feature.

This was an interesting first half with the RAMBB acquitting themselves well on some very challenging material. For the record the full line up was;

Composer/drums; John Hollenbeck

Conductor; Nick Smart

Vocals; Jacob Collier

Reeds; Alex Hitchcock, Matthew Sulzmann, Greg Barker, Ronan Perrett, Sam Rapley

Trumpets; Louis Dowdeswell, James Copus, Ben Rodney, Dan Walton

Trombones; Owen Dawson, Oliver Martin, Quinn Parker, Courtney Brown

Piano/keyboards; Nathan Morson

Guitar; Rob Luft

Vibes/percussion; Ralph Wylde

Bass; Fergus Ireland, Misha Mullov-Abbado

Drums; JJ Wheeler

The second half of the concert featured Hollenbeck at the helm of his most acclaimed and most prolific outlet Claudia Quintet. Formed in 2001 the personnel includes original members Chris Speed (tenor sax, clarinet), Matt Moran (vibraphone) and Drew Gress (double bass) plus newcomer Red Wierenga on accordion who replaced original member Ted Reichman in 2011.

This combination of instruments is almost unique in jazz and driven by Hollenbeck's artistic vision the group's music is richly textured and rhythmically complex, full of ingeniously interlocking melodic, harmonic and rhythmic patterns that draw on jazz and folk forms plus the influences of contemporary classical composers, particularly minimalists such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich.

The distinctive but continuously developing Claudia sound has been documented across a series of excellent albums, most of them recorded for the Cuneiform label. Their latest offering is the recently released "September", from which the majority of tonight's material was sourced, a semi conceptual affair named for the time of year when Hollenbeck does most of his composing.

Of course it's a loaded title, the name of the month forever associated with the events of 9/11/2001 (or 11/09 as we Brits would have put it). Indeed tonight's opener "Coping Song" was written at that time, a response to the horrific events of that never to be forgotten day. Hollenbeck himself was safely ensconced in the Adirondack Mountains at the time but there can't be an American, or any other citizen of a western democracy for that matter, who hasn't in some way not been touched emotionally by what happened. The song itself was full of the other worldly beauty that so often distinguishes the Claudia sound.

Each tune on the album has a date as well as a title. September 9th is represented by "Wayne Phases", Hollenbeck's tribute to Wayne Shorter. This was a good example of the tightly knit, finely meshed ensemble playing that is so representative of the group's work. Claudia don't do "jazz" solos as such but pass the baton around in more organic fashion. Nevertheless there were strong showings here from Wierenga on accordion, a worthy successor to the excellent Reichman, Moran on vibes, who attacked the bars with a surprising level of intensity, and finally Speed on tenor whose playing also became more impassioned as his solo progressed.

"Somber Blanket (25th September)" was more reflective in tone with Wierenga on accordion and Speed on clarinet exchanging melody and counter melody above a bed of gently shifting polyrhythms.

"Interval Dig (24th September)" began with an extended solo feature from the excellent Gress, the backbone of this quintet and of so many other adventurous jazz ensembles. Moran's dazzling vibes solo upped the pace with Wierenga on accordion and Speed on tenor making similarly spirited contributions before Gress stepped into limelight once more. This was Claudia at their most exuberant and joyous.

Hollenbeck's continued fascination with the human voice was expressed in this context by the use of samples of a Franklin D Roosevelt's "New Deal" speech of 24th September 1936. Subtitled "Let Me Warn You" Roosevelt's repeated phrases were a constant throughout the piece, mantra like incantations that meshed effectively with the quintet's playing, Speed providing the only instrumental solo on tenor. Reviewing the piece for Jazz Journal Simon Adams compared the piece with Steve Reich's "It's Gonna Rain", a perceptive insight as to just where Hollenbeck was coming from here.

The vocal theme carried over into the following "The Rapidity Of Silences" sourced from the previous Claudia album "What Is The Beautiful?" recorded with vocalists Theo Bleckmann and Kurt Elling. Inspired by the words of American poet Kenneth Patchen the piece saw Hollenbeck move to the piano for a piece of atmospheric and ethereal chamber jazz that began with a solo piano introduction and weaved the ghostly whisperings of Speed and Moran into the fabric of a tune that featured the gentle accordion drones of Wierenga alongside Speed's clarinet. This was a highly effective exploration of the interface between sound, space and silence.

The group returned to the new album for "Lemons (September 18th)", which Hollenbeck dedicated to pianist Jason Moran. This was a hugely successful set closer with its hypnotic bass and drum grooves fuelling solos from Wierenga, Moran and Speed. The vibraphonist made use of extended vibes techniques including the use of bows on the bars as the tune adopted a freer structure in mid tune. Moran has been a considerable influence on young contemporary vibes players such as the UK's Jim Hart and the American was at his most exploratory and adventurous here. When Gress picked up the groove again it was Speed's turn to shine with an increasingly impassioned tenor solo.

For the deserved encore Hollenbeck chose to calm things down again by moving to the piano for "Flock", an effective aural depiction of the behaviour of a flock of geese featuring Gress on grainy arco bass and with Speed making appropriately goose like noises on his clarinet. The addition of vibes and accordion took the music into area where the focus was on beauty rather than humour and the final result was a delightful minimalist miniature that perhaps drew its genesis from Messiaen and his use of birdsong as a source of inspiration.

On leaving the stage Hollenbeck thanked the RAM Big Band again as well as acknowledging the skills of his Claudia Quintet colleagues. Listening back to recordings by both Claudia Quintet and the Large Ensemble again post event it's even more clear what a distinctive compositional personality Hollenbeck is as he mixes genres with skill and daring. A true musical visionary.

<http://www.thejazzmann.com/features/article/efg-london-jazz-festival-2013-part-three/>