

Los Angeles Times

Best of 2009 - Jazz / Chris Barton

Like the rest of the recording industry, jazz clearly has its issues going into 2010. But rumors of its death remain greatly exaggerated. In the last 12 months, a variety of performers released remarkable, forward-looking music that in some cases showed little regard for barriers between genre or culture. A sampling of the year's best, ranked from 1 to 10.

5. John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble, "Eternal Interlude" (Sunnyside): One of the nicest surprises of this year's Grammy nominations was the recognition received by the 20-piece group led by the drummer-composer behind New York's eclectic Claudia Quintet. Whether touching on brassy film score dramatics or offering a bent nod to Thelonious Monk with the punnily named "Foreign One," Hollenbeck is taking the big band into the future.



John Hollenbeck (naturscopy.pl)

The New York Times Music

Notable Dispatches From the Edge of Jazz and Beyond

By BEN RATLIFF
Published: December 18, 2009

6. JOHN HOLLENBECK LARGE ENSEMBLE
"Eternal Interlude" (Sunnyside) Profound, imaginative, well-developed pieces for 20 musicians, grown out of jazz and classical music, built around soloists but never subservient to them. As a big-band jazz composer, Mr. Hollenbeck was already good; now he's become great.



Soundcheck / December 16, 2009

Critics' Week:
The Decade in Jazz and World Music

We continue our Critics' Week coverage of the decade in music with a look at the best of world music and jazz. **Siddhartha Mitter**, world music critic for the *Boston Globe*, and **Will Layman**, jazz critic for PopMatters.com, give us their picks for the decade that was.

Will Layman's Top Ten Jazz Albums:

2. John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble, Eternal Interlude

Detroit Free Press

www.freep.com

Posted: Dec. 20, 2009

BY MARK STRYKER
FREE PRESS MUSIC WRITER

Top 10 new jazz recordings for 2009

4. John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble, "Eternal Interlude": : The gifted drummer-composer leads a 20-piece band with an orchestral palette through music that lives on the border of jazz and contemporary, the long title track unfolding like a shimmering vernacular symphony.

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

The 10 Best Jazz Albums of 2009

By Devin Leonard
December 23, 2009 | 10:15 a.m

John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble, *Eternal Interlude* (Sunnyside Records)

Calling the drummer-composer John Hollenbeck a jazz musician is like referring to Thom Yorke as a mere rock and roll crooner. It seems a rather narrow description for someone with such prodigious talents and ambitions. Mr. Hollenbeck writes pieces for his large ensemble that are almost symphonic. They share a lot with the more ecstatic strains of contemporary classic music, the kind practiced by John Adams and the drummer's longtime employer, Meredith Monk. And yet if David Binney is a jazz musician then so is Mr. Hollenbeck. They are both reinvigorating the art form with influences from the broader culture. Jazz needs more of this.

The New York Times

December 2, 2009

MUSIC REVIEW | JOHN HOLLENBECK

A Big Band Reaches for Bold Sounds

By BEN RATLIFF

Writing decent music for a jazz big band is hard, and keeping the band working is harder. For the bandleader and composer, maintaining the integrity of a group sound with a dozen or more players — and maintaining a core style with enough tooth and identity that it can reach beyond the closed circuit of jazz students — takes up a lot of the job. As a consequence, concertgoers don't usually expect a jazz big-band show to rearrange their heads.

People forget that big bands have been places of real aesthetic boldness. Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Bill Finegan, Bill Russo, Gil Evans, Bob Brookmeyer, Gerald Wilson, Muhal Richard Abrams, Maria Schneider: these were and are no slouches, and there are clear signs that a few younger composer-arrangers will join that list. Let's start with John Hollenbeck, whose 20-piece Large Ensemble played a superior show at Le Poisson Rouge in Greenwich Village Monday night. His music was playful, profound, attentive to the soloists' strengths and pretty much continuously imaginative — even though the band hadn't had a gig since March.



Like most of the people on that list, Mr. Hollenbeck uses strategies in his music that don't necessarily come from the core of the jazz tradition and uses them well enough to extend that tradition. Not just bits of writing, but instrumentation, too: among the sources of sound in Monday's set were English horn, marimba, glockenspiel, crotales (small, tuned, bell-like sets of cymbals played with mallets), digital loop machine and smartphones.

The concert drew from a new album, "Eternal Interlude," Mr. Hollenbeck's second record with the big band. (He spends more time in a smaller group, the Claudia Quintet, and his show at Le Poisson Rouge opened with two other ensembles he's been getting off the ground: a trio with the classical violinist Todd Reynolds and the vibraphonist Matt Moran, and Future Quest, a band dedicated to the repertory of Meredith Monk.) After its predecessor, "A Blessing," "Eternal Interlude" represents a major step forward. It's richer,

better developed and more aggressively orchestral; its strangeness isn't self-conscious. It's the sound of a composer who's really grown into himself.

As a drummer Mr. Hollenbeck is contained and steady. He doesn't swing much in this group, though there's so much else going on that's rhythmically interesting — rolling arpeggiated chords, tremolos, marches, fast-over-slow, cross-rhythms, hints of Steve Reich and gamelan and Indian hand drumming. But he probably got closest to jazz-as-we-know-it in "Foreign One," a kind of creative mistranslation of Thelonious Monk's "Four in One." It focused on and exploded small details of the original's frenetic theme, set it up verbatim over low unison horns, allowed a tenor saxophone solo to arise, cut back and forth between glimpses of Monk and other agendas.

"Perseverance" — which, Mr. Hollenbeck said, he wrote toward the end of the presidential race when campaign-trail speeches and recriminations were in the air — was all conflict, bluster and queasiness: a steady gallop of rhythm, battling tenor-saxophone solos by Tony Malaby and Ellery Eskelin, moments of percussionless drift and unease with long notes from the vibraphone (played with bows against the edge of the keys), and finally an intricate, beautifully constructed drum solo.

But the stunner, and the evening's most unquantifiable music, was the record's title piece, 20 minutes of high and wide ambition, full of foreshadowings and echoings, the natural world and the digital world. Theo Bleckmann, singing high tones wordlessly, sometimes through a digital octave shifter and a sampler, helped establish a serene melody. The rhythm dropped out for a few stretches as the piece moved along, once for Mr. Bleckmann to build up a weave of vocal sounds and once for Gary Versace to play a solo organ cadenza.

Then the band rejoined for the final section, first in a slow, pastoral ensemble passage then breaking off in parts to produce short, birdlike phrases. (Those who weren't playing took out their phones instead, activating the voice-recording function for an as-yet unclear purpose.) Eventually, the phrases mashed together and became one bar-length phrase, repeated and aggressive, an unbroken steamroller; and as that abated, the phones, held up to the microphones, replayed the original bird-song phrases in a faint, disjointed echo, all other sound fading away. This is the kind of thing that could provoke laughter from an audience, but I don't recall any. It was too logical and beautiful to be funny.

Newsweek

MUSIC Seth Colter Walls

PUT YOURSELF IN THIS JAZZ MUSICIAN'S shoes for a minute. Your record label just dropped two of its most acclaimed acts from the roster in order to aggressively pursue pop artists. Still, you think you have a sound that's relevant to the moment—and to prove it, you need a stay of execution from what's starting to look inevitable. So you pick up the phone, dial the label president, and beg for release from the adjective that's become pure poison in the marketplace. "If you stop calling me a jazz man," you promise the boss, "I'll sell more." That's exactly what Miles Davis said to Clive Davis at Columbia Records—more than 40 years ago.

This anecdote—first related by the record mogul in his autobiography—also appears in *Jazz*, a new, close-listening history of the genre by critics Gary Giddins and Scott DeVeaux. Even though the trumpeter was right—Miles's *Bitches Brew*, complete with psychedelic cover art pitched at the Summer of Love crowd, would go gold after its release in 1969—you can't help but read *Jazz* and not realize that the art's economic fortunes have been dicey for decades. Every few years, a new piece of data comes along to kick up the hoary question: is jazz dead? This year has been particularly ominous. In June a National Endowment for the Arts survey found that the number of Ameri-



The music may never again be a pop force, but it is still swinging if you know what to listen

Jazz Is Dead.

cans attending live jazz concerts had declined precipitously and consistently Davis's *Kind of Blue*, Charles Mingus's *Mingus Ah Um*, and Dave Brubeck's *Time Out*

Long Live Jazz.

dent Eisenhower over the Little Rock integration crisis of 1957 counted as breaking news? In his book, which benefits from engagement with the musician's archive of more than 650 personal audiotapes, Teachout argues that Armstrong became a star as much for his appearances in movies (*Hello, Dolly!*) than for his early blazing, high-C solos. Satchmo's first surviving role, in the 1936 film *Pennies From Heaven*, was orchestrated by Bing Crosby, who made sure Armstrong received proper billing. And although Armstrong taught Crosby how to swing—"He is the beginning and the end of music in America," Crosby said—Teachout makes a persuasive case that the crooner gave the trumpeter as many lessons on how to become a pop sensation. Perhaps unwittingly, this answers Teachout's question about jazz's future, since his own book shows how serious instrumental jazz music was just one cause of the fame accrued by one of its best-known entities.

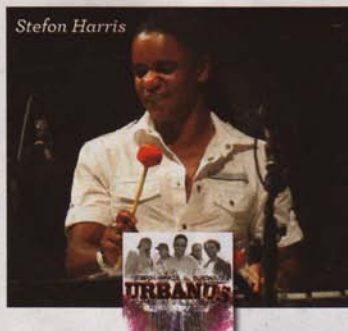
It's time, finally, to separate the question of "Is today's jazz good?" from the question "Is today's jazz popular?" It's a difficult, slightly counterintuitive thing to do, particularly because jazz—even before that watershed year of 1959—started out as a dance-hall craze. But the radical blues Armstrong blew—and which Teachout capably helps you hear during several passages in *Pops*—is no longer the strict language of top 40, which is now ringtone-based as

much as it is 12-bar-based. If anything, today's jazz boasts a surfeit of excellent stylists who can speak to that splintering pop audience: pianists Vijay Iyer and Craig Taborn are both brilliant, though in nearly opposite ways. Iyer is a sometimes cerebral, always impressive player of tunes, whether they be those of Stevie Wonder and M.I.A., or his own compositions (all are featured on the new album *Historicity*). Taborn is an enthusiastic free-form player, both on his own extended-jam albums like *Junk Magic* and when playing as part of the exciting, electric-based Chris Potter Underground. Two highlights from 2009—Steve Lehman's *Travail, Transformation, and Flow* and Stefon Harris's *Urbanus*—each kicked up a big ol' time by embracing avant-classical sounds and hip-hop sensibilities. Along with *Urbanus*, John Hollenbeck's bold album for his big band, *Eternal Interlude*, recently notched a progressive-minded nomination from Grammy voters.

All this music deserves wider hearing, and greater coverage. Sadly, unless you're already a diehard, you may think you don't have time to hear it all. That we need books like *Pops* or *Jazz* represents a double bind: at the point where a relatively young art like jazz amasses enough history to merit these important tomes and huge box sets, the more difficult it becomes for the culture to absorb what's happening in real time. And real time is how jazz is best experienced. Like baseball—another great American invention—part of jazz's appeal is in

how it unspools without deference to the clock. Just as drama asks for suspension of our disbelief, jazz asks us for the suspension of our need to program our every moment. Meantime, our contemporary mania for abbreviated text updates—think Twitter, Facebook, and BlackBerrys—feels as if it stands in direct opposition to jazz's deliberate, instrumental abstractions. Enjoying the music—really swinging with it—is a glorious sacrifice of the need to micro-manage the moment. And though it can be dreamy, this surely isn't a recipe for amassing a stable brand that can support itself in the modern marketplace. At the beginning of the 21st century, the economic status of jazz is more like that of the symphony orchestra, only without the economic safety net of foundation funding that undergirds concerts featuring Beethoven and Brahms.

In fact, the arts community should debate whether a greater share of the music endowment pie ought to be going to jazz musicians. The rub is that it never will, unless there is an understanding that jazz's economic status isn't a hideous reflection of poor aesthetic health. But even if jazz is finally buried in that (expanding) graveyard of former mass-culture obsessions, that doesn't mean the music isn't still happening, or that it isn't still perfectly capable of talking to us at an individual level. As long as they don't starve to death, committed jazz musicians will be there for you, the forbidding economics of their pursuit be damned. And even if no one you know is talking about what they're playing, be wary of any strangers who tell you they aren't swinging anymore.



Live From New York: Themselves, John Hollenbeck, Uri Caine, The Arditti Quartet & DJ Spooky

Published: December 23, 2009

By Martin Longley

John Hollenbeck

(le) Poisson Rouge

November 30, 2009

For a concert that crept ever closer to the dangerous three-hour mark, this was a remarkably engaging experience. Drummer, percussionist, composer and (now we discover) pianist John Hollenbeck was showcasing three of his very different groups and repertoires, with only two short intervals between the sets. The Claudia Quintet, his most renowned group, was taking a rest. On other memorably tedious occasions, such longueurs have inevitably led to the audience's attention being brutalized into submission, but with New Yorker Hollenbeck at the helm the night swept by without losing its sense of vitality and alertness.

The Poisson Rouge bookers had asked Hollenbeck to present his quintet arrangements of Meredith Monk music (he's now a regular player in her ensemble), but the drummer then seized the opportunity for one of his all-too-irregular Large Ensemble engagements. Hollenbeck also decided to open the evening with a trio that presented pieces he'd penned specially for his old college buddy Todd Reynolds, exploring the outer limits of violin technique. Hollenbeck soon found out that there weren't actually any limits to the interpreting skills of his chosen soloist. Besides the composer and Reynolds, vibraphonist Matt Moran (a Claudia cohort) completed the line-up.

With the Large Ensemble looming, Hollenbeck made the canny decision to unveil his wraith-like compositional aspects. Reynolds was scything sweetly, Moran glimmered across his magic metallophones, Hollenbeck barely struck his skins as he set up soft clockwork patterns, scuttling gracefully. They enveloped the audience in a spangled enchantment, creating an aura of dreamlike lucidity.

The Future Quest quintet possesses greater density, but it still observes a respect for stillness. This combo is involved with the Meredith Monk Ensemble, performing earlier in the year as part of her Whitney Museum retrospective. Hollenbeck is joined by Ellery Eskelin, Tony Malaby (saxophones), Gary Versace (piano/organ), and then it looks like some uninhibited soul is performing a hippy gyration in front of the stage. No! It's Theo Bleckmann, normally known for his singing. He wafts from right to left, throwing static poses before joining the band onstage to shape his perfectly controlled choirboy tones. He's become a virtual Meredith Monk, aping her vocal delivery accurately, as Future Quest performs a micro-history of her works. The composer is in the house, and she looks very pleased with these prime evocations of her pieces. They simultaneously match authenticity with a shape-shifting re-interpretation.

Hollenbeck had gradually introduced some sturdier beats, hinting at the full pulse that would soon drive his Large Ensemble. Eskelin and Malaby were both issuing statements of coiled, understated power. Following another short break, the full big band colonized the stage. The last time I caught them, at the Jazz Standard, the music seemed not too removed from conventional big-band history. This time, it still sounded jazz-like, but was toppling that vocabulary more towards minimalism, which is not to say the full ensemble was either too gentle, too quiet or too homogenised.

It was well into the evening when Hollenbeck remembered that it might be an idea to promote the *Eternal Interlude* album that was providing his repertoire. He was too busy entertaining the crowd with his eccentric wit: half-bumbling, half-rapiered. The album's title composition was actually the grand finale of the night, managing to surpass an already outstanding sequence of epic excursions. It was here that the Large Ensemble's sparkling layers of minimalist build-up were most apparent, with Versace surely in thrall to Terry Riley as he set up tantalizing curlicues of electric organ, whilst Bleckmann gradually rose up from inaudibility, swelling against a gleaming wall of steadily intensifying repeats. Hollenbeck's composing for his Large Ensemble has now developed a deeply personal language, retaining jazz values as it launches into a pan-stylistic orbit.

MUSIC

POSTED: DEC. 6, 2009

PLAYLIST

BY MARK STRYKER

FREE PRESS MUSIC CRITIC

...
The exceptionally gifted drummer-composer John Hollenbeck leads several groups, from a chamber trio to his Claudia Quintet to his 20-piece Large Ensemble heard on "Eternal Interlude" (****, Sunnyside). Hollenbeck's aesthetic is essentially about finding new ways of merging composition and improvisation. The orchestral palette of Large Ensemble -- a jazz band adorned by an unusual amount of woodwind doubling and extra ranks including mallet percussion and voices -- allows for a broad range of textures and strategies.

At times, he works on the border between contemporary classical music and jazz. The meticulously scored "Clouds," with its bed of voices and brass and quick bursts of flutes and vibes is one example, and the post-minimalist rhythmic ground that bubbles up here and there is another. On "Foreign One," he reinvents a corkscrew fragment of Thelonious Monk's "Four in One" into a labyrinthine spiral culminating in a loose tenor saxophone solo over a rockish piano, electric bass and drum groove.

The tour de force 19-minute title track unfolds like a shimmering vernacular symphony, merging detailed cornice work with large architectural blocks. A long meditative, pastoral episode is ornamented with wind and keyboard flurries that remind me of similar squalls in Benjamin Britten's "Four Sea Interludes." The motifs expand, building forcefully and logically into a steady rhythm with deft bits of controlled improvisation integrated into the weave.



John Hollenbeck

(Le) Poisson Rouge; Mon 30



John Hollenbeck
Photograph: Amani Willett

John Hollenbeck's 19-piece Large Ensemble can explode with rhythmic drive and technical dazzle, or it can evoke serene calm, tone poetry and even prayer. It's a big band for a new eclectic world, building on the legacy of seminal big-band composer Bob Brookmeyer and other role models. Hollenbeck holds it together with intricate drumming, compositional acumen and searing wit as he marshals the resources of top jazz improvisers, including saxophonist Tony Malaby, trombonist Alan Ferber and vibraphonist Matt Moran. This week the group celebrates *Eternal Interlude*, an eagerly awaited follow-up to *A Blessing*

(nominated for a Grammy in 2006) and *Joys and Desires*, a memorable side project with Europe's Jazz Bigband Graz.

Hollenbeck is one of a few jazz-and-beyond artists who can stack a triple bill with his own varied groups, and he'll do this in part by breaking the Large Ensemble into smaller ones. First we'll hear his intimate, perplexing chamber music from *Rainbow Jimmies*, a new CD with Moran and violinist Todd Reynolds. Next up is Future Quest, devoted to the sounds of new-music visionary Meredith Monk, with whom Hollenbeck has worked for years. Featuring Large Ensemble members Theo Bleckmann on vocals and Gary Versace on keyboards, Future Quest is essentially an expansion of the Refuge Trio, adding saxophonists Malaby and Ellery Eskelin to the mix.

There's still more to Hollenbeck's multifaceted output. This show won't involve his stunning Claudia Quintet, for instance, but it will do much to reveal the breadth of his playful aesthetic and flat-out percussion chops.—David R. Adler

Jazz Today

Spinach and Broccoli Music: An Interview with Composer and Drummer John Hollenbeck

[24 November 2009]

By Will Layman

Jazz—or creative/improvised music if you prefer to take an artsy stance—doesn't get much more incandescent than *Eternal Interludes*, the latest recording by the John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble. Hollenbeck's music shimmers like Phillip Glass, it dances crazily like Thelonious Monk, and it pulses vibrantly like Fela Kuti. At the same time, it is fresh and new at every turn. It collects some familiar sounds but creates a whole that is, ultimately, different.

Hollenbeck is a drummer, which is part of why the music he writes sounds melodically fresh at every turn. It may also be why it sounds effortlessly layered and compelling, as if the voices, flutes, trombones, and so on were all just toms and snares and cymbals. Here is music that could come from only one man, but from many different impulses—or limbs.

Binghamton Beginnings

In talking about his music, Hollenbeck rarely comes off as a sensitive artist or a mystic. Rather, you get the strong sense that he is a dedicated craftsman who just happens to be chasing magic. From early on, growing up in Binghamton, New York, he was inspired to be versatile and creative.

"It really started happening when I was 16 or 17. I was pretty normal, but I had a brother who was into everything—and he was feeding me records and knowledge. He was the person who was getting me to hear music."

Early on, for example, his brother introduced him to one of his most important teachers. "I met Bob Brookmeyer when I was twelve. He came to Binghamton for a week. I still have the cassettes of five nights of his band playing." At around the same time, Hollenbeck starting taking lessons from his brother's drum teacher. "He was pretty old school. He believed in the rudiments and being versatile, playing all the different percussion instruments. He was coming from a different time when you had to learn timpani, other instruments."

Hollenbeck was inspired to compose as well as play from an early age. "From watching my brother, I assumed that all musicians should be composers. As a drummer you don't have to deal with pitches and harmony. You can get by without that. But to write music you have to know that. As a drummer you have to work hard to play catch-up with people who deal with pitches all the time. I learned all about theory at Eastman [School of Music] in arranging and composition classes. But there are advantages to being a drummer, too. You don't gravitate automatically to certain patterns—chord progressions maybe—that are really conventional."

Ultimately, Hollenbeck would seek out Brookmeyer as a teacher and mentor as well. "When I had just gotten to New York, I applied for an NEA grant to study composition with him. I had a few lessons with him and was about to go to a school he was starting in Holland, the World School of Jazz. Unfortunately it got canceled. He started a band in Cologne, Germany, the New Art Orchestra, which I also played in during the mid-'90s.

"He is very, very important to me and to many other writers. I got so much out of my few lessons with him, but probably more out of just playing his music, rehearsing his music with him. He is always thinking of the next thing, experimenting."

"Spinach and Broccoli Music"

The lesson that music should be different, that it should reach for the new, is something that Hollenbeck seems to have hard-wired into his ear. "I have always had this need to hear and therefore create music that somehow sounds new to me—not something I've heard before. For me, that's what motivates me to create something unique."

Eternal Interlude, the brand new recording by Hollenbeck's Large Ensemble, is a perfect example of how the drummer manages to create fresh sounds without necessarily reverting to what music fans may deem to be the avant-garde. Much of the disc is breezy and consonant, even grooving, while still sounding fresh and contemporary. "Guarana", for example, blends percolating polyrhythms and stabbing piano figures with a soothing wordless vocal and a sprightly dance melody. That it is hard music to describe is a good part of its pleasure.

"Dissonance or consonance is not important me, though those could be important elements, depending on what I'm going for. It depends on what kinds of sounds I'm trying to avoid. I like plenty of things I've heard before but I get much more excited about any kind of music that I hear that sounds even a little bit different. Sometimes the elements I work with might be familiar but perhaps they've never been put together this way before."

Hollenbeck's other main band, The Claudia Quintet, has a similar sound. It's creative, new music that doesn't have to make you claw at your ears with alienation. It's even—and this is too rare in jazz, maybe—entertaining.



*John Hollenbeck recombines the familiar in compositions that are startlingly new. His new *Eternal Interlude* is among the best jazz of 2009. Here, he explains his quirky, fresh methods.*



**John Hollenbeck
Large Ensemble
Eternal Interlude**

(Sunnyside: US: 18 Aug 2009;
UK: 17 Aug 2009)

"I have to write for myself, so I am the first audience. 'Entertain' might not be the right word for me. I sometimes leave concerts kind of resenting the feeling of being entertained. But I understand that some musicians take it all too seriously. In performance, when I'm talking, I know that I'm about to say something funny. I do make some conscious effort to want to find ways to give people access to the music. Unfortunately people sometimes come to concerts thinking it will be nerdy or incomprehensible or that they don't really like jazz—afraid that they're not going to get it. I don't want people to think I'm on my high horse."

But nearly all of Hollenbeck's music has a playful quality, even if he isn't resorting to covering hip hop tunes and the like. In fact, Hollenbeck even has a sense of humor about the fact that his music might take more than one listen to absorb and enjoy. "My original name for my publishing company was going to be 'Spinach and Broccoli Music' because those were two vegetables I initially hated—I couldn't even stand the smell of them—but now they are among my favorites."

Monk-ian Playfulness and More

Among the most enjoyable tracks on *Eternal Interlude* is "Foreign One", a grooving and expansive mutation of the Thelonious Monk theme "Four In One". Upon first listening, you probably won't realize exactly what's going on, even though snippets of the Monk melody are present in the beginning. By the tune's middle however, Hollenbeck shows his hand, quoting the song directly and, surely, giving every jazz fan a thrill.

"For me, Monk is the most important jazz composer," Hollenbeck states without hesitation. "'Foreign One' was a commission for a concert of Monk tunes. It's hard to play a Monk tune without it sounding like a parody. The best is to hear Monk play a Monk tune. When people try to play his tunes the way they thought he would play them, it's just... ugh. I approached it the way Bob Brookmeyer approached 'King Porter Stomp.' I took it apart, keeping the form mainly, and came up with something original. In the end, I put more of the original in it because it was being performed for a concert of Monk composition. The original tune is in there in the middle. A good deal of the tune is played backwards—the notes in reverse order astounded me—and then it took on its own life."

Hollenbeck attributes his love of Monk in part to being a drummer. "When I want to teach a drummer how to play a melody, I always start with a Monk tune. That have so much more space, and they're much more about rhythm. He was just a really weird guy and came up with idiosyncratic things that were in his playing and came out in his composing. He was so *different* from the other greats of his time. I admire the simplicity, the space, the rhythm."

At the same time, Hollenbeck's composing suggests other influences. The title track "Eternal Interlude" pulses strongly with the so-called minimalism of Steve Reich. Its repetitions and slow harmonic movement are, beyond everything else, beautiful.

"Along with a lot of other music, I do love that music. I love rhythm and the power of repetition. I like the emotional effects of something that is repeating but slowly changing or something that suddenly changes dramatically. Steve Reich is very interested, like me, in African music and Balinese music. I never looked at those scores or tried to figure out that music, but I appreciate it. I try to use elements you would find in minimalist music combined with elements you would not find there. I'm not trying to copy it or do my take on it, but I think it's inevitable that I have somehow been influenced by that music."

New York, Teaching, and Making It

Eternal Interlude was released on Sunnyside Records, one of the elite "independent" labels in jazz, and John Hollenbeck is a kid from Binghamton who came to The Big Apple and made a name for himself in a great art form. But that doesn't make his career anything like Easy Street. He struggles to find venues for his bands, even though he has to turn down sideman gigs. "It's tough to learn to say 'no'", he says, "but you need time for your own work."

"Struggle" and "tough" are words that come up often when you ask Hollenbeck about the business side of creative music. "It is a big struggle, but it's always been like that. If you want to compose or perform music that's not out there to entertain from the first listening—it's tough. I know for a fact that the economic collapse hasn't yet hit musicians, but it's starting to. Things that are funded—like festivals and promoters—are only going to see the squeeze in the coming year. That looks pretty dark. Once you lose funding, it's hard to get it back."

And being based in New York can be both an advantage and a problem. "I moved to New York in the early '90s. I think I got out of it what I needed—you get your ass kicked every day and you just get better. Just being able to say that you are from New York gives you a certain clout as a musician. But the older you get, the worse it is for your health."

I don't hate it, but it's not long-term for me. You have to fight it out to get a gig here. It was sooo hard to find a venue for the record release party for the Large Ensemble. One venue said they could put me on the waiting list for a certain date, but we would be eighth on the list. There is such a huge weight of musicians who are really good."

Hollenbeck works as a player, of course, but also as a composer and teacher. "I'm competing for gigs with people who have a team helping them. I'm constantly trying to find people who can help me, but it's hard to move up to that level. I have a better chance doing this as a composer, getting commissions for example."

Teaching is not something that Hollenbeck does just for the income. He is currently a professor in Berlin, and he teaches individual students through the New School in New York. "I like teaching more than playing. I love schools—I even love the way they smell. It's a utopian environment. I've always loved them. It's a big part of what I am right now. I've needed to work a lot and play a lot to get the experience to become a good teacher. And it goes well with my preferred lifestyle choices. I like to be a get-up-in-the-morning guy rather than a be-up-all-night, traveling-all-the-time guy."

Talking to John Hollenbeck, frankly, makes it easy to imagine this get-up-in-the-morning kind of guy, a kid from Binghamton who wanted to see Bob Brookmeyer for five nights straight at the age of 12, even if he wasn't yet eating all his spinach and broccoli. He is mild-mannered and thoughtful, funny in a quiet kind of way. But his music still seems bigger than that: shambling with different mad influences, witty and backwards and sly, pulsing with Afro-Cuban groove and also shimmering like *Einstein on the Beach*.

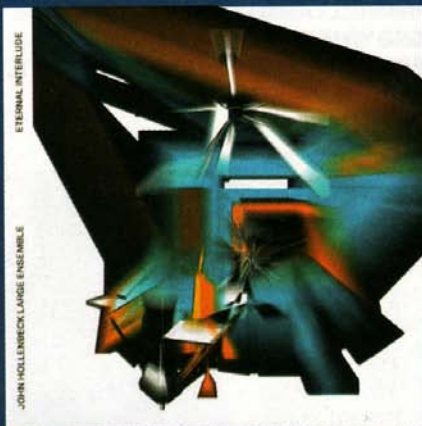
It is music, in short, that sums up a whole national culture, from the stride beginnings of Monk to the post-modernism of a new generation. John Hollenbeck is working hard at it but also talks about it with a casual kind of ambition. "You can reach people all over the world through rhythm", he points out. And you hope he's doing just that.



CHOC
JAZZ jazzman

JOHN HOLLENBECK LARGE ENSEMBLE
ETERNAL INTERLUDE

1 CD SUNNYSIDE / NAÏVE



Sont ici réunies toutes les qualités pour frapper un grand coup. L'écriture d'abord. John Hollenbeck parvient à faire sonner son orchestre tantôt comme un big band à l'ancienne, tantôt comme un ensemble contemporain. Il se situe ainsi entre Britten, Kenny Wheeler, Vince Mendoza et Steve Reich, comme par exemple au début d'*Eternal Interlude* à l'onirisme enchanteur. Les voix se superposent, se confrontent, se mêlent de façon tout à fait

jouissive. Le tout servi par une vraie science de l'orchestration qui propose des combinaisons elles aussi assez inédites. Mais surtout, Hollenbeck, en bon jazzman, n'en oublie pas pour autant les qualités "orales" des musiques dites "populaires" : le swing et le groove, qu'ils viennent du jazz ou du rock. Il est d'ailleurs remarquable que le batteur ne soit pas tombé dans l'incohérence. Car ces longues plages d'un seul tenant ont une dimension à la fois organique et narrative, une charge émotive puissante, quelque part entre Charles Mingus et Andy Emler ! Enfin, et cela ne gâche rien, les solistes sont tout simplement admirables. Il suffit de citer les noms de Tony Malaby (sur *Foreign One*) et Ellery Eskelin (merveilleux sur *Perseverance*) pour imaginer le résultat. Avis aux programmeurs : il y a là un musicien créatif à ne pas louper, capable de faire lever n'importe quel public !

■ LUDOVIC FLORIN

Tony Kadleck, Jon Owens, Dave Ballou, Laurie Frink (tp), Rob Hudson, Mike Christianson, Jacob Garchik, Alan Ferber (tb), Ben Kono, Jeremy Viner, Tony Malaby, Dan Willis, Bohdan Hilash, Ellery Eskelin (bois), Kermit Driscoll (elb), Gary Versace (k), John Hollenbeck (dm), Matt Moran, John Ferrari (perc). 8 et 9 mars 2009.

*"Here all the qualities are brought together to make a big impact. The writing first. John Hollenbeck has come to make his orchestra a lot like an old-time big band, a lot like a contemporary ensemble. Thus he's situated himself between Britten, Kenny Wheeler, Vince Mendoza, and Steve Reich, for example as in the enchanting, dreamy opening of *Eternal Interlude*. The voices layer, confront, and meld in a joyful fashion. All of it serves as a true guide to orchestration that proposes combinations that are rather unedited [i.e., not in the book]. But above all, Hollenbeck, as a good jazzman, doesn't forget the "oral" qualities of music designated as "popular": "swing and groove, coming from jazz and rock. It's otherwise remarkable that the drummer doesn't tumble into incoherence. Because these long stretches have a dimension that are simultaneously organic and narrative, a powerful emotional charge, somewhat between Charles Mingus and Andy Emler! Finally, and this is no small thing, the soloists are simply admirable. It suffices to cite the names Tony Malaby (on *Foreign One*), and Ellery Eskelin (marvelous on *Perseverance*) to imagine the result. Advice to programmers: don't miss out on this creative musician, capable of raising up any audience!"*

Le Monde

Sélection CD

John Hollenbeck

LE MONDE | 12.12.09 | 18h58 • Mis à jour le 12.12.09 | 18h58

Eternal Interlude

A la rubrique de la pochette de disque la plus moche de l'année 2009, celle d'*Eternal Interlude* du batteur et compositeur américain John Hollenbeck pourrait bien être dans le Top 5. Mais, heureusement, la musique présentée par Hollenbeck et son imposante formation d'une vingtaine de musiciens est l'une des plus enthousiasmantes de l'année. Par la richesse de l'écriture, sa densité, son sens du mouvement, l'équilibre entre la sophistication et l'évidence d'écoute. Il s'y combine des emportements rythmiques qui peuvent rappeler le travail de Bob Moses et les délicatesses de Gil Evans. *Eternal Interlude* est une oeuvre forte, qui ouvre l'esprit à bien des imaginaires.

*"Under the rubric of the ugliest CD sleeve art of 2009, that of *Eternal Interlude* by American percussionist and composer John Hollenbeck could well be in the Top 5. But, fortunately, the music presented by Hollenbeck and his imposing group of 20 musicians is among the most rousing of the year. Through the richness of the writing, its density, its sense of movement, the equilibrium between sophistication and the evidence of hearing. Here he combines transporting rhythms that may recall the work of Bob Moses and the delicacies of Gil Evans. *Eternal Interlude* is a strong work, one that opens the spirit to the imagination."*

The New York Times

By NATE CHINEN

Published: August 12, 2009



Amani Willett

John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble

The drummer and composer John Hollenbeck inhabits a world of gleaming modernity, and “Eternal Interlude” (Sunnyside), the second album featuring his Large Ensemble, reflects both the clarity and brightness of his vision. Timbre is his forte as much as rhythm: his strategies for the band often involve an autumnal rustle of woodwinds and a billowing swirl of brass. On the superb 19-minute title track he creates a gossamer shimmer of flutes, clarinets, piano and marimba; on “The Cloud” he finds use for a chorus of whistlers. There’s room for robust improvising in his music — the tenor saxophonists Tony Malaby and Ellery Eskelin both make hay on “Perseverance” — but it always feels transitional, like a means to an end. So too does Mr. Hollenbeck’s interaction with the jazz canon here, as when he beams Thelonious Monk’s “Four in One” through a complex prism, yielding something meaningfully titled “Foreign One.”

A version of this article appeared in print on August 16, 2009, on page AR21 of the New York edition.

THE IRISH TIMES

The Irish Times - Friday, September 11, 2009

Jazz

RAY COMISKEY

This week's jazz releases reviewed

JOHN HOLLENBECK

Eternal Interlude *Sunnyside* *****

This new CD by drummer John Hollenbeck’s Large Ensemble suggests he may be arguably the most original composer on the contemporary jazz scene. Its orchestral colours are more striking than his Grammy-nominated *A Blessing* and, with almost all that great band here again, it’s just as well executed. Despite an even stronger authorial presence, it inhabits a space neither wholly classical nor fully jazz. There is room for soloists and some (relatively) free improvisation in *Foreign One* (a radical recasting of Monk’s *Four in One*), *Guarana* and *Perseverance*, but Hollenbeck’s vision remains the key, unifying factor. It’s even more pronounced in *Eternal Interlude* and *The Cloud*, both through-composed, where he seeks to express matters spiritual in a very personal way. Thanks to the clarity with which Hollenbeck handles the material, they’re also remarkably accessible and singularly beautiful. www.sunnyside records.com



CD Reviews:

John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble “Eternal Interlude”

CD-2009 Sunnyside Records

Posted by:

editoron Thursday, August 27, 2009 - 10:39 AM

Grammy nominated composer/drummer/arranger John Hollenbeck has emerged as one of the more significant jazz artists of our time. Besides his “Claudia Quintet” and numerous solo and session activities, his large ensemble offers a rather all-encompassing glimpse into his craft, while marking his debut release as a leader on Sunnyside Records.

Hollenbeck offers a fusion of polytonal progressive-jazz movements, hued with minimalist like ostinatos, memorable hooks, and complex horn charts among other elements. These commissioned pieces, composed for a global array of jazz orchestras, summon notions of cinematic thrillers amid ethereal pastoral settings and much more. And the soloists acutely reconstruct the various melodies, featuring sax titans, Ellery Eskelin and Tony Malaby’s edgy phrasings atop jazz, and jazz-rock grooves.

“Eternal Interlude” is designed upon a flirtatious and quaintly melodic, flutes driven theme, perhaps sparking notions of a blissful day at the park, where Hollenbeck provides a snapshot of time, and the band gradually raises then lowers the pitch back down to a contrapuntal-based fadeout. Therefore, the program is teeming with mood-evoking patterns and radiant arrangements as the ensemble intermittently kicks matters into overdrive. Consequently, the musicians occasionally delve into the free-zone to inject some spicy hot improvisational episodes into the grand schema.

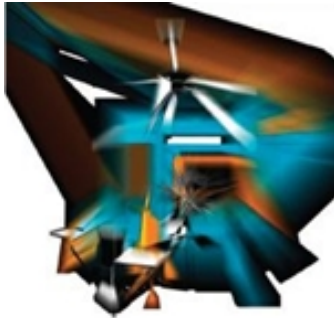
Theo Bleckmann’s spoken word on “The Cloud,” establishes a grave tone, offset by the mystical flutes and climactic horns. But Hollenbeck’s polyrhythmic drum solo and high-impact rhythmic charge spearheads a forceful, circular motif during the piece “Perseverance.” Simply stated, this album touches upon that often unattainable, “modern masterpiece” type classification. Among other attributes, Hollenbeck’s large ensemble presents a study in contrasts and lush harmonic overtures that uncannily intermingle with movements containing raw firepower and thrusting dynamics. More importantly, his magnetic compositions warrant repeated listens, as he aligns the best of numerous musical worlds here. – Glenn Astarita

Track listing: Foreign One; Eternal Interlude; Guarana; The Cloud; Perseverance; No Boat.

Personnel: John Hollenbeck: drums, composer, whistling (4); Ben Kono: flute, soprano and alto saxophone, whistling (4); Jimmy Viner: clarinet and tenor saxophone; Tony Malaby: tenor and soprano saxophone; Dan Willis: tenor and soprano saxophone, flute, English horn, whistling (4); Bohdan Hilash: clarinet, bass and contra-alto clarinet, whistling (4); Ellery Eskelin: tenor saxophone (5, 6); Rob Hudson: trombone, whistling (4); Mike Christianson: trombone, whistling (4); Jacob Garchik: trombone, tenor horn (2), whistling (4); Alan Ferber: trombone; Tony Kadleck: trumpet, flugelhorn; Jon Owens: trumpet, flugelhorn, whistling (4); Dave Ballou: trumpet, flugelhorn; Laurie Frink: trumpet, flugelhorn; Kermit Driscoll: acoustic and electric bass; Gary Versace: piano, organ, keyboard; Matt Moran: mallet percussion (1, 3, 4); John Ferrari: mallet percussion (2, 5, 6); Theo Bleckmann: voice, whistling (4); JC Sanford: conductor.

The Drummer Leads the Way

By Richard Kamins on August 16, 2009 6:30 PM |



***Eternal Interlude* - John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble (Sunnyside)** - John Hollenbeck is a very busy musician. He leads the Claudia Quintet, works and records with Meredith Monk and Bob Brookmeyer (among others) and has had works commissioned by the Bang on a Can Allstars, Ethos Percussion Group and the Painted Bride Art Center of Philadelphia.

"*Eternal Interlude*" is the second recording of his Large Ensemble, the first "[*A Blessing*](#)" released by OmniTone in 2005. Many of the same musicians appear on the new disk and the music has a similar expansive feel. Yet, there's a deepening in the emotional content that is striking.

One hears the influences of Steve Reich in the pulse/rhythms of "*Foreign One*" (an abstraction of Thelonious Monk's "*Four In One*") and the title track. His studies with Bob Brookmeyer are evident in the way Hollenbeck builds a piece, the importance of the melody taking precedent over the solo (in most instances) and his writing for the sections is impeccable. The work of the rhythm section is uniformly excellent, with Kermit Driscoll's bass used a pulse or for counterpoint and the vibes (either Matt Moran or John Ferrari) adding both percussive depth and melodic backbone. Theo Bleckman's voice is often used as another instrument, and his airy sound blends well with the reeds. "*The Cloud*", commissioned and originally recorded by the Bamberg Symphony Choir and Big Band, is a stunning piece. Opening with chimes and whistling, the melody moves to the flutes of Ben Kono and Dan Willis, flowing over the quiet hum of the reeds, voice and brass. Nothing is rushed and one must pay close attention to hear Bleckmann's recitation in the middle of the 13-minute piece.

"*Perseverance*" has great power, from the rumbling saxophones (and tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin's declamatory solo) to the leader's propulsive drum work. The splash of the higher reeds, the interjections of the brass, and Driscoll's mighty bass lines give way to Eskelin's (or Tony Malaby) and Hollenbeck's fiery dialogue; then the piece slows way down for 5 minutes for a contemplative clarinet solo. The drummer continues to work around his kit until everyone else drops out and Hollenbeck lets loose for a short time. When the band returns, there is power and subtlety, shifting dynamics, and a blazing finish.

There is much to absorb on "*Eternal Interludes*" and you should take your time. John Hollenbeck creates new worlds with his Large Ensemble and, while some of this music may sound familiar, it does not go where you may expect a Big Band to go. Listen to how the sections move with and against each other, check out the mallet work of Moran and Ferrari and the fine keyboard work from Gary Versace. The depth of the reeds, the brightness of the brass, the subtle work of Theo Bleckmann, all these ingredients and more make this CD stand out. In a year when there have been a number of excellent Big Band/large ensemble recordings released (Darcy James Argue's *Secret Society*, Jentsch Large Group, Bob Florence Limited Edition, Mike Holober's "*Quake*"), "*Eternal Interludes*" is a powerful and challenging addition.

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Discs

Updated: August 07, 2009, 10:09 AM

Jazz

John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble

Eternal Interlude

[Sunnyside, available Aug. 18]

One of the great jazz discs of 2009.

As long as we're at it, let's not stop there. This is one of the great jazz recordings of the past few years.

What it reaffirms in billboard-sized lettering is that one of the greatest jazz revolutions of the 1960s was not in vain, contrary to all appearances a decade ago. In the early '60s, courtesy of both the Third Stream and an onslaught of astonishing composer/arrangers (Charles Mingus, Gil Evans, Oliver Nelson, Gary McFarland, Eddie Sauter, George Russell), we suddenly knew the difference between a genuine jazz orchestra and a big band.

Ellington, suddenly, had finally achieved total hegemony over Basie. And now, largely through the influence of Bob Brookmeyer and his pupils, something gloriously post-Ellingtonian is blooming.

Nothing against big bands, but a magnificent, creative and sonically kaleidoscopic jazz orchestra like this one (as well as Maria Schneider's) is worth 10 jazz ensembles that call themselves "Big Bands" (exempting, of course, the ferocious repertory ensemble called The Mingus Big Band). Hollenbeck is a composer and percussionist who, among other groups, leads the innovative, progressive Claudia Quintet.

The music, though, of this huge orchestra (20 musicians are involved) is a rhythmic, textural and harmonic riot, from the hallucinogenic dissonance of its opening Monk tribute called "Foreign One" (a play on Monk's tune "Four In One") to "Perserverance," in which the rich, constant counterpoint coalesces over 18 minutes, from the simplest three lines of basic jazz (drums, bass, soloist) through sectional polyphony into powerful final chorales.

So orchestral is the music that individual soloists, as good as they are, aren't nearly the point here as much as the formidable power of melodic line against melodic line.

Hollenbeck's drums are post-rock drums but both the ensemble harmonics and individual solos are often bracingly dissonant. It is jazz that fully understands the visceral heft of a rock ensemble and, at the same time, the intellectual heft of a full symphony orchestra.

A disc to be listened to repeatedly after its official release in 10 days, with something new discovered every time.

—Jeff Simon