

SAX QT (Lorraine) 2022
Anthony Braxton Saxophone Quartet
(i dischi di angelica)
The Music of Anthony Braxton
Steve Lehman Trio + Mark Turner (Pi Recordings)
 by John Sharpe

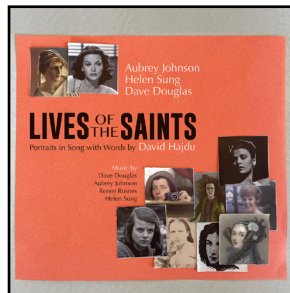
One of the towering presences in contemporary music, composer, educator and improviser Anthony Braxton needs little introduction. His influence is colossal and even as he nears his 80th birthday next month (Jun. 4), he continues to push his musical vision into futuristic territory.

SAX QT (Lorraine) 2022, a four-CD set, presents sets from Vilnius, Antwerp, Bologna and Rome for a quartet completed by three younger acolytes as versatile as they are technically gifted: James Fei, Chris Jonas and Ingrid Laubrock, with André Vida filling Laubrock's place on the first volume. Braxton's new Lorraine system involves multiple scores for each musician, combining graphics and notation, as well as interactive live electronics, which become a spectral, gurgling fifth participant. (Your correspondent was lucky enough to witness the Vilnius performance and can attest that each musician was constantly juggling scores, as well as responding to the sporadic hand-gestured directions from Braxton, and sometimes even each other.) Participation, instruments and direction shift in perpetual flux. Poised figures unite the foursome in brief moments of calm, before the siren voices of unfettered adventure once again exert their pull. They each traverse the full gamut of unconventional saxophone vocabularies, but transcend the abstraction to generate an array of feelings: poignant, abrasive, vulnerable, disconcerting, impassioned and not least enthralling. Braxton portrays his Lorraine system as concerning breath and wind, the realm above the ground floor structures of his Tricentric music, however that doesn't preclude the eruption of earthier rhythmic components such as the unison rendition of "Composition 34" in the final section of the Rome piece, some 50+ years after it was originally performed.

Alto saxophonist Steve Lehman affirms the piece's enduring vitality through its inclusion on *The Music of Anthony Braxton*, which draws much of its repertoire from that early '70s period when Braxton developed a wealth of options for small group improvisation. Another live recording, this time from the now defunct ETA space in Los Angeles in 2023, the sound is slightly muffled, although the quality of the music more than makes up for any sonic shortcomings. Accompanying Lehman are his regular bandmates, Matt Brewer (bass) and Damion Reid (drums), joined by Mark Turner (tenor). Lehman's crew delivers dynamic interpretations of seven of Braxton's jazziest charts, as well as two of his own and a Monk classic (naturally also covered by Braxton in the past) in a program shorn of flab. The contrast between the leader's acerbic nervy alto and Turner's velvety tenor works well, while Brewer steers a sure-footed course and Reid mixes up the beat with such invention that it often seems as if he is soloing the same time as supporting. Their relaxed playful approach incorporates pithy features and snaking interaction between the horns, notably at the end of the convoluted proto bebop of "40b". Lehman's originals, with their dizzily interlocking lines, fit snugly into a blowing date with a difference.

For more info visit idischidiangelica.bandcamp.com and pirecordings.com. Anthony Braxton's *Composition No. 19* (For 100 Tubas) is at Fort Greene Park May 3 (part of

Long Play Festival) and Braxton is the honoree of Roulette's 2025 Gala May 8 (featuring Steve Lehman and others). See Calendar.



Lives of the Saints
David Hajdu (Sunnyside)
 by Anna Steegmann

Music critic, journalist, college professor and author David Hajdu's accomplishments are too numerous to list in full. As a multi-hyphenate he added songwriting to his résumé 15 years ago, and since then, his lyrics have appeared on eight albums, with *Waiting for Angels* (2015) being the first to feature only his own lyrics. He produced *Lives of the Saints* and wrote the words to ten portraits of remarkable women (none officially canonized by the Catholic church but ordinary individuals who, through their deeds, attained exalted status in his mind), some famous and others unknown. Dave Douglas (trumpet), Aubrey Johnson (vocals) and Helen Sung (piano) are listed as composers alongside Renee Rosnes, with other collaborators including Marika Hughes (cello), Rudy Royston (drums), Chet Doxas (clarinet, tenor), Samuel Torres (percussion) and Simón Willson (bass).

The album opener, "Enchantress of Number" (dedicated to Ada Lovelace and composed by Aubrey Johnson), sets the perfect tone for what's to come. Johnson's haunting and ethereal voice captivates the listener from the first note. The track opens slowly and deliberately, with sparse instrumentation that allows the beautiful melody to rise and the vocals to shine. The musicians achieve remarkable synergy, with Douglas and Sung genuinely standing out: together they create a mesmerizing sonic landscape. "Angelina's Cry" persuasively conveys the story of Angelina Napolitano, an Italian immigrant whose bravery in killing her abusive husband brought crucial awareness to the issue of domestic abuse. Sung's composition masterfully captures this narrative: starting tenderly with a melody reminiscent of southern Italian folk songs, the track showcases an intense vocal and musical climax coinciding with the lyric "she snuck up and chopped up his head with an axe."

Last month's album release concert at Dizzy's Club (Apr. 10) celebrated the work, which received an enthusiastic reception. Crowd favorites included "Pure Thought", with its captivating trumpet introduction, and "The Nanny on Her Day Off", a tribute to Vivian Maier (whose important and massive photographic work was only discovered after her death), which featured a mesmerizing instrumental piano/bass interlude. Deeply touching and poignant, "The White Rose" (for Sophie Scholl, a World War II German resistance activist) received massive applause for Hughes' exceptional cello performance. "Song for My Sister", dedicated to Hajdu's sister who died of cancer, exudes a sorrowful mood. The music, especially trumpeter Douglas' sensitively stated contributions, powerfully reflected the devastation of the illness.

Johnson's vocals, which dominate every selection on the album, are more than ably supported by musicians who also showcase exceptional skills, especially in instrumental sections. This project's innovative approach, emotional depth and unique sound leaves a lasting impression.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com

Blue Note JAZZ FESTIVAL
 NEW YORK CITY • JUNE 2025

GRACE JONES & JANELLE MONÁE

BRANFORD MARSALIS • CHARLES LLOYD

MARCUS MILLER

SANTIGOLD • RICKIE LEE JONES • EMILY KING

SAVION GLOVER • KENNY GARRETT

THE SOUL REBELS • TANK AND THE BANGAS

JOSHUA REDMAN QUARTET • LOUIE VEGA

SABA • BABY ROSE • BAS • GALLANT

INFINITY SONG • WARREN G FT. CHRIS RO

SPYRO GYRA • GINO VANNELLI

CHUCK PROPHET • REBIRTH BRASS BAND

BRANDEE YOUNGER • JULIUS RODRIGUEZ

MOSES YOOFEE TRIO • SUNGAZER • WILLIE NILE

DORA MORELENBAUM • THE BAYLOR PROJECT

AZYMUTH WITH BRAINSTORY • BALTHVS

JESUS MOLINA • BABEHOVEN

VOPLI VIDOPLASSOVA X EUGENE HUTZ TRIO

HARLEM GOSPEL CHOIR • FOREVER RAY

STRICTLY SINATRA • BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB

THE REVERENCE PROJECT:
 JOHN PATITUCCI, DARRYL JONES,
 NATE SMITH & JAMES FRANCIES

JAMES MOODY 100:
 CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE, MADELEINE PEYROUX,
 RANDY BRECKER, PAQUITO D'RIVERA AND MORE

VISIT BLUENOTEJAZZFESTIVAL.COM
 FOR THE FULL SCHEDULE