



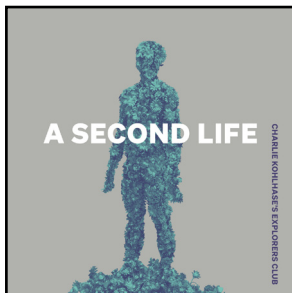
**The Surrounding Green**  
Fred Hersch, Drew Gress, Joey Baron (ECM)  
by Andrew Schinder

Fred Hersch, one of the great modern jazz pianists, returns with his third ECM album, *The Surrounding Green*—and it is stunning. A combination of originals and interpretations of standards and lesser-known classics, the recording already stands as one of this year's stronger releases and could wind up as one of the standouts of Hersch's long, storied career. Produced by legendary ECM founder Manfred Eicher, the album elicits a complex emotional response: pleasure derived from its pure beauty, yet with a haunting undercurrent—in a sense the sonic equivalent of finding beauty and joyfulness in an overcast sky.

Hersch's trio includes Drew Gress (bass) and Joey Baron (drums), each of whom he has performed with since the '80s, but this represents their first recording together, reflecting a chemistry that can only be achieved by decades of playing cooperatively. Moreover, no one musician dominates or runs away with the album. The covers and originals are given equal weight, and the originals are strong enough to hold their own against the pantheon of the genre. The title track, in particular, tightly encapsulates the album's atmospheric qualities by freely meandering along a gorgeous pathway of silkiness. Opener "Plainsong", which first appeared on Hersch's 2017 solo *Open Book*, finds Gress and Baron's additions completing the piece, making the original seem like a strong first draft. After the melancholic beginning, the trio then zig-zags to mid-period Ornette Coleman with a cover of the free jazz classic "Law Years". On this track they straight-up jam, Hersch melding Coleman's saxophone musings into tones befitting a more straight-ahead, classically influenced identity—a brilliantly original interpretation of a standard usually reserved for woodwind players.

As unlikely it may seem, there was room for another interpretation of the Gershwins' popular "Embraceable You". The trio takes plenty of liberties with the classic, offering a refreshing take on a song that could easily seem tired and overdone. This version is uncommonly up-tempo and bouncy, and while they play around the margins for much of the cover, the full, familiar chorus doesn't appear until the last minute of the song. By then, the listener has almost forgotten they are hearing a Gershwin classic. The trio has taken the standard to places it rarely goes.

For more info visit [ecmrecords.com](http://ecmrecords.com). Hersch is at Village Vanguard June 10-15. See Calendar.



**A Second Life**  
Charlie Kohlhase's Explorer's Club (Mandorla Music)  
by Jeff Cebulski

One way to understand the creative process of baritone saxophonist and bandleader Charlie Kohlhase

is to listen to "Lennette", the third piece on his latest album, *A Second Life*, which features his Explorer's Club octet. The tune is an attempt to meld two unlikely-matched jazz savants, Lennie Tristano and Ornette Coleman. What emerges is a two-note ying figure that is passed around the ensemble, Tristano-like, before an asymmetric section of free playing provides the Coleman-ish yang. Certainly, "Lennette" fits in with the whimsical arrangement approach he inherited from his time in the Boston-area's Either/Orchestra. Fans of the saxophonist's work and of the ensembles he has led or inhabited—including the Charlie Kohlhase Quintet, the Saxophone Support Group, The Makanda Project and the since defunct Mandala Octet—are grateful for the whimsy, given his story. In 2015, Kohlhase, who in the last several years has been open about being gay, learned that he was infected with HIV. Realizing he was indeed fortunate to avoid full-blown AIDS, something friends and acquaintances had become unwitting victims of prior to advanced medicine, he crafted this musical statement as a remembrance of those lost, as well as gratitude for those who've influenced him musically and for his medical care. *A Second Life* represents the joy of a second chance.

Two major influences represented in the album are former collaborators in saxophonist John Tchicai (1936-2012) and trombonist Roswell Rudd (1935-2017). Tchicai's "Berlin Ballad" receives a chamber horn treatment. Part of the melody is reminiscent of "In a Sentimental Mood", but the song turns into a free interplay with staunch support by drummer Curt Newton. Rudd's tribute to Pythagoras, "Tetraktys", is playfully rendered, with swinging instrumentation. Meanwhile, Kohlhase has his own fun. "Character Building Blues" is an inside joke about a blues played in A, with a confident baritone leading a trifecta of horn solos; "No Such Explorer" is built on a Burundi tune, featuring a pleasantly bleating tuba from Josiah Reibstein and a funky display from Kohlhase; "Airport Station" is the leader's take on an "accidental" rhythm derived from escalators at the Boston airport. Newton's rim work here, as on "Explorer", creates an infectious percussive edge.

Thanks go to doctors, medicine...and Charlie Kohlhase's indomitable spirit for *A Second Life* and the continuance of his intoxicating postmodern orchestrations.

For more info visit [mandorlamusic.net](http://mandorlamusic.net)



**ØKSE**  
ØKSE (Mette Rasmussen, Val Jeanty,  
Petter Eldh, Savannah Harris)  
(Backwoodz Studioz)  
by Stuart Broomer

"ØKSE" means axe in Danish, a fundamental tool for chopping, yet it's also a word with many additional connotations, such as "Ashe": the life-force that runs through all things, living and inanimate, including a current or flow—the groove that initiates can channel so that it carries them along the road of life. That radical and contradictory aesthetic, chopping up as continuum, an uncanny compound of free jazz, studio tech and hip-hop, makes this quartet a signal contemporary band, residing at a compound frontier. "ØKSE" consists of Norwegian Mette Rasmussen (alto),

Swedish Petter Eldh (bass, synthesizer, sampler), NYC-based Savannah Harris (drums) and Haitian Val Jeanty (electronics). Half of the album (in LP format) consists of eight tracks featuring vocals, whether rappers or singers. Multi-tracking, looping and foregrounded editing is everywhere, not a knock but an index of the special complexity in which free improvisation becomes compositional component.

"Amager", featuring rapper Billy Woods (also credited with A&R, suggesting the particular mix of rappers might have been his responsibility; the others are ELUCID and Cavalier), is a brilliant explosion of the band's Hydra-headedness, an uncanny absorption of hot/cool, intense/abstracted, visceral/cerebral, from Woods' own intensity to the myriad approaches that Rasmussen brings to individual moments: stratospheric bleeps to hard-edged melody, a free jazz saxophonist with a focused intensity, but with a certain distinguishing elegance. All the parts in an ØKSE track seem simultaneously independent and ideally connected, a music that matches spontaneity and design with dream-state precision.

"The Dive", featuring singer Maassai, has extensive processed percussion as well as the multi-tracked voice, sometimes rapping, sometimes as singer, sometimes multiplied as vocal group, with an occasional male background voice. Rasmussen is again featured, but within collective music, the conclusion matching her with a wall of Jeanty's chiming electronics, the cumulative effect a kind of pop radio from a distant planet. The concluding "Onward (keep going)" is tuneful pan-cultural hi-life, with Rasmussen and Harris simultaneously foregrounded, further animated by sampled chanting and tightly-locked bass and drum patterns, ultimately concluding in Jeanty's sampled voices, flute and percussion—an

## RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Peter Ehwald, Tom Rainey, Stefan Schultze — *Public Radio* (Jazzwerkstatt)
- Nicole Glover — *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Savant)
- Muriel Grossmann — *MGQ Live in King Georg, Köln* (Dreamland)
- Joe Henderson and Woody Shaw — *Jazz Patterns* (Everest-Real Gone Music)
- Fred Hersch, Drew Gress, Joey Baron — *The Surrounding Green* (ECM)
- History Dog (Lesley Mok, Shara Lunon, Chris Williams, Luke Stewart) — *Root Systems* (Otherly Love)
- Gwen Laster New Muse 4tet — *Keepers of the Flame* (Muffymarie)
- Dave Liebman, Billy Hart, Adam Rudolph — *Beingness* (Meta/Defkaz)
- Myra Melford — *Splash* (Intakt)
- Johnny O'Neal — *Everybody Loves Johnny O'Neal* (Cellar Music)
- ØKSE (Mette Rasmussen, Val Jeanty, Petter Eldh, Savannah Harris) — *ØKSE* (Backwoodz Studioz)
- Michel Petrucciani Trio — *Jazz Club Montmartre - CPH 1988* (Storyville)
- Alberto Popolla — *Really the Blues* (AUT)
- Potsa Lotsa XL — *Amoeba's Dance* (Trouble in the East)
- Matthieu Saglio/Camille Saglio — *Al alba* (ACT Music)
- Irène Schweizer, Rüdiger Carl, Johnny Dyani, Han Bennink — *Irène's Hot Four* (Intakt)
- Bill Stewart — *Live at the Village Vanguard* (Criss Cross Jazz)
- Omar Thomas Large Ensemble — *Griot Songs* (s/r)
- Dan Weiss Quartet — *Unclassified Affections* (Pi Recordings)
- The Westerlies — *Paradise* (Westerlies)
- Jacob Wick — *a veces me veo en el espejo y pienso en ti* (Ropeadope)