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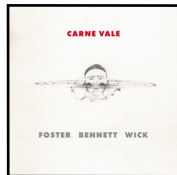
JUNE 20TH BRUCE EDWARDS

*A dynamic jazz guitarist and composer
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Carne Vale

Michael Foster, Ben Bennett, Jacob Wick
(Relative Pitch)

a veces me veo en el espejo y pienso en ti
Jacob Wick (Ropeadope)

Solfège

Ted Byrnes/Michael Foster (Torn Light)
by Brad Cohan

With June being Pride Month, the invaluable contributions of two chief queer avant-gardists, the Mexico City-based Jacob Wick and NYC's Michael Foster, need to be highlighted. Both the trumpeter and saxophonist, respectively, have been at the jazz, improvised music and noise forefront, crucial forces in which each have wedded queer culture and its ethos with their art. Each Wick and Foster express their queer identities their own ways: the former writing in his bio that "his work is dedicated to and informed by queer feelings and queer politics", while the latter has been a local scene driver, co-founding "Queer Trash," a curatorial platform for LGBTQIA+ experimental artists.

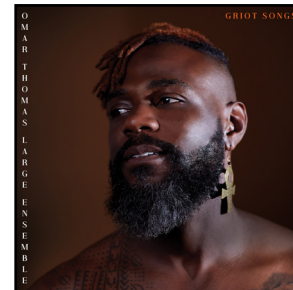
Out of these three stellar yet disparate releases, one features Wick and Foster together. In 2018, the pair teamed with Philadelphia-based percussionist Ben Bennett for Glove Issues (recorded live at Issue Project Room). *Carne Vale* reunites the shapeshifting trio for another set of intensely probing improvisations that blur the lines of noise music, drone and minimalism. Each musician here may employ the traditional instrumentation associated with jazz, but Foster, Wick and Bennett aren't your garden-variety players. Extended techniques and preparations, found objects and junkyard contraptions and circular breathing are just a smattering of the components that manifest on this album. The explorative and hypnotic timbres and textures they sculpt from their instruments and stash of gizmos clink, clank and rattle like an arrhythmic wrestling match, first occupying their own sonic universes then improbably striking a heady balance that results in a frenzied but strangely soothing sound collage.

While *Carne Vale* shows a more reserved Foster focusing on abstract vocabularies, *Solfège*, a set with Los Angeles percussionist Ted Byrnes, is paint-peeling nirvana. Foster, heard here on tenor and soprano saxophones alongside the gonzo Byrnes, make for a take-no-prisoners duo of one mind. *Interstellar Space* this is not. This is 21st century fire music for inquisitive ears and minds, a "brutal-prog"-type maelstrom that blows apart the exhausted saxophone and drums format, giving it a fresh perspective. The Foster/Byrnes partnership goes back to 2013 when the lo-fi *Astringent* was released; *Solfège* is a studio recording and every gale-force blow, meditative hush and percussive crash comes in loud and clear, thanks to the production sheen. Foster and Byrnes ride the same harsh wave over the set's nine spasmodic pieces, the two forming the ultimate kinship.

As *Solfège* unleashes a controlled chaos, Wick's *a veces me veo en el espejo y pienso en ti* (translation: "Sometimes I look in the mirror and think of you") is poles apart. In the press release, Wick calls it "a love letter to jazz" and it's just that: gorgeously intimate with delicate restraint, sweetness personified. An accessible recording, whereas *Carne Vale* and *Solfège* would be tagged experimental, this album conveys such deep warmth, specifically from Wick's harmonious trumpet lines, that it serves as a heal-all balm. The leader's Mexico City-based group, made up of Federico Sánchez (guitar), Alonso López-Valdés (bass) and Gibrán Andrade (drums) are fantastic, an ideal match who together bring the compositions of the trumpeter and vocalist (Wick lends his baritone to a lovely cover

of Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer's "Charade") to sublime heights. Wick writes further that the originals "on the album are based on a notion of queer time, time that stops, starts and shifts, chasing sentiment and desire." And he captures that vibe perfectly with an elegance beyond compare on this deeply personal homage to jazz.

For more info visit relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com, tornlight.bandcamp.com and ropeadope.com. Michael Foster is at Creature Space Jun. 13. See Calendar.



Griot Songs

Omar Thomas Large Ensemble (s/r)
by Terrell K. Holmes

Composer-arranger Omar Thomas claimed his place among the vanguard of contemporary big band leaders with the acclaimed albums *I Am* (Sound Silence, 2013) and *We Will Know: An LGBT Civil Rights Piece in Four Movements* (Sound Silence, 2014). He returns with the outstanding *Griot Songs*, an album which should further affirm his prominence. Thomas' expansive arrangements contain challenging harmonies and opulent instrumental layering that produce intriguing sonic textures.

"The Sun in September", inspired by composer-bandleader Bob Brookmeyer, has an elegance that recalls another great, Oliver Nelson. Lihi Haruvi (soprano) solos splendidly above the brass, initially ruminative and joyful, then impassioned and cyclonic. Jason Palmer (trumpet) is equally energetic, delivering an incessant flow of ideas. The beginning of the dynamic "Obeah Woman" recalls John Coltrane's "Africa". The ghost-like playing of Josh Reed (trumpet) brings soft-voiced chords until a blast of grouching brass, led by Evan Amoroso (trombone), who clears the way for the pulsating jazz-rock shredding of Mark Cocheo (guitar). Jon Bean (tenor) gives the lush and reflective "Nothing There" an added soulfulness and poignancy, with the band supporting Bean's urgent stridency. Cocheo's powerful electric guitar playing on "The Path" seamlessly blends rock and blues lines, while he makes his acoustic guitar sound more like a mandolin on the Mingus-ly titled "A Touch of Obsidian, A Flash of Scarlet". Mark Zaleski (alto) contributes robust playing, along with Cocheo's flamenco licks, completing this sensual metronome. Thomas' arrangement of Radiohead's airy, brooding "Sail to the Moon" has strong free jazz elements, with Alex Brown (piano) sharing the dolorous melody with Amoroso's lyrical performance. The leader expands the tune and investigates its contours, reconfiguring it for the big band idiom by adding avian flutes and mercurial trombone grunts. All of these elements combine to transform this modern standard into an unconquerable anthem. The band's take on Lyle Mays' (Pat Metheny keyboardist) "Episode D'Azur", with Palmer Harmon-muted and pianist Brown, adds a funky dimension to the tune, with the band swinging fiercely on it.

A griot is someone who, through word and songs, preserves the rituals, traditions and history of a community. A contemporary griot, Omar Thomas' music filters history and tradition through a unique lens, making relatable and invaluable connections between the past and the present. *Griot Songs* is the energizing, involving work of an important modern visionary.

For more info visit omarthomas.com