



Luminous Axis
duo B (Lisa Mezzacappa/Jason Levis) (Queen Bee)
Nature Channel
Green Mitchell Trio (Queen Bee)
Archimera
Bristle (Queen Bee)
 by Ken Waxman

Staten Island's gift to improvised music, bassist Lisa Mezzacappa, relocated to the San Francisco Bay area over two decades ago, and now she's celebrating Northern California creative music by featuring local players and releasing sessions once a month (until February 2026) on her Queen Bee imprint. Three of the most recent albums, which all include the bassist, confirm the musicians' wide-ranging skills. Equally stimulating, none sound alike, and Mezzacappa is not the only crossover. *Luminous Axis* features her and drummer Jason Levis as duo B, interpreting Wadada Leo Smith's graphically notated score. As the Green Mitchell Trio on *Natural Channel* the two join tenor saxophonist Cory Wright, who has worked with Vinny Golia on his advanced mainstream compositions. With *Archimera*, Wright and Mezzacappa are one half of chamber-jazz ensemble Bristle, united with Scottish fiddler, oboist, English hornist Murray Campbell, who does orchestral work, and Randy McKean, who adds alto saxophone, Bb and bass clarinets to Wright's tenor saxophone, Bb and alto clarinets and flute.

The most obtuse and dissonant creation, *Luminous Axis'* tracks strip sounds to their nucleus with restrained drum shuffles and cymbal clanks sidled up against the bassist's *sul ponticello* strokes. Methodically linear and pressurized, the resultant rumbles, rim shots and string pumps thicken into an undulating exposition slightly interspaced with string rebounds and metallic swipes. Climax occurs with "Three Vertical Structures (Energy Boot)" as the previously *lento* pace becomes *allegro*, with string stopping and measured drumbeats bringing foreshortened airiness to the lumbering narrative. The concluding "Stem Loop Form into Tower Structure, Inverted" adds liveliness with repeated bass string plinks and drum top splashes. Even as interpretations ascend in pitch and speed, near-atonality is maintained.

Wright's bright playing upends duo B's avant definition, with his more relaxed and casual compositions on *Natural Channel*. Mezzacappa often plays a horizontal walking bass line, while Levis' unforced rhythm encompasses springy beats and scatter shot asides. Spontaneous doesn't mean slack, however. Intensity rises, especially during Wright's bass clarinet title track feature. Chalumeau reed snorts and tongue stops are paired with doubled string plucks, emphasizing a stop-time theme. Pliable work extends to saxophone expositions as well. Although themes can be sweet and balladic, the saxophonist expands them with doits and scoops, most apparent on the nuanced multi-sectional "Valk". Starting with a syncopated march tempo, Wright subverts the rhythm section's linear introduction with saxophone variations that include slurry split tones and vibrations and

squirms to a wide-open reconsideration that unites reed techniques with reverberating string thumps and forceful drum pops. Finally the instruments recap the head in tandem.

Without Levis but with McKean and Campbell, Wright and Mezzacappa are transformed from tough Mr. Hydes to melodious Dr. Jekylls on *Archimera*. Tunes are half restrained and half resolute. Bass string slaps center the rhythm, with fiddling Campbell pushing Bristle towards folk sources, while his orchestral instruments suggest so-called classical sounds. Jolly harmonies and measured counterpoint, sometimes recalling jigs or sea shanties, are saved from preciousness by aviary saxophone freak notes and the bassist's bottom-preserving thumps. The band's identity is confirmed on tracks such as "Wraparound" and the concluding "Vape Trail". The first blends musical inferences as circular clarion reed projections are intercut with fiddle slices, while frenetic double bass stops roughen the ongoing syncopation. With a layered exposition as each instrument's textures bleed into the next, the album closer uses melodic transformation to subtly change dynamics as the narrative evolves, climaxing with a contrapuntal faceoff between reed bites and string sweeps.

Exposing both Northern California improvisers and Mezzacappa's bass versatility, these sessions make one anticipate the opportunity to hear these projects live, as well as the other sessions slated for release in this series.

For more info visit queenbeerecords.com. Mezzacappa's album release concerts are at The Stone at The New School Jul. 23-26. See Calendar.

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