



Sextet
Pitch, Rhythm & Consciousness (Reva)
by Tom Greenland

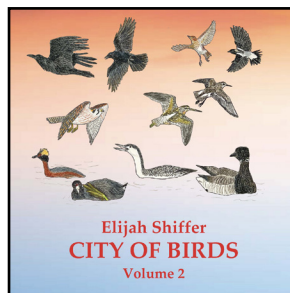
Pitch, Rhythm & Consciousness' third album, *Sextet*, reflects the musical and self-growth of its founders Charlie Burnham (violin) and Tony Jones (tenor), the first two terms of the group's name serving as a vehicle to explore and express the third. After its 2011 debut *Trio* with Kenny Wollesen (drums) and 2019's *Quartet* with Marika Hughes (cello), this release adds Jessica Jones (tenor) and Rashaan Carter (bass). The lasting friendships within the group, combined with the spiritual intent of the repertoire, which is inspired by Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Taoist texts, gives this session an atmosphere of gentle determination.

Burnham is the trigger, his coarse soulful vocals opening the set with an ecstatic excerpt from the 23rd Psalm titled "I Shall Not Want", bookended by Jones' two-part, free-form tenor chorale. On "The Beginning of the Universe", Burnham's stream-of-consciousness singing is embedded in ambient rubbings, rustlings, whistles and whispers of the acoustic instruments; on "Prepare a Refuge", the final track, he exhorts listeners to free themselves from flaws and passions so that they "need never return to the cycle of birth

after death." The prickly pizzicatos and angular bow-strokes from his violin add the sharpest outlines to the music, in places recalling a koto, an oud, even a third saxophone. He, Hughes and Carter form a string section of sorts, their tones blending and layering with subtle but telling differences. Hughes employs sliding double-stops on her solo feature "This Herein Goes Nowhere" that suggest a muezzin's call to prayer. Wollesen's presence, somewhat subdued in the mix, comes to the fore on "Shadow Box", where he combines low malleted tom-tom tones with airily brushed cymbals, something like echoes from the deep ocean floor.

The Jones' tandem tenors are a marvel, he a bit mellow and burnished, she a shade lighter and brighter. Their sounds and styles are deeply simpatico, as heard in the opening prayer, Nasheet Waits' "Kush" (the album's only cover), "Whose Tears Are These" (perhaps the project's emotional highpoint) and especially on their improvised duet, "Fundamental Blue", where each takes and shares the initiative, breathing and phrasing as one. Their bond, stretching back over four decades when they first sat together in the saxophone section of the Berkeley High School jazz band, is just one of many shared between sextet members, bonds collectively responsible for the close, personal and musical chemistry that pervades and elevates this album.

For more info visit revainc.org/revarecords. Charlie Burnham is at Shirt Factory Jul. 29 (with Creative Improvisers Orchestra). See 100 Miles Out.



City of Birds, Volume 2
Elijah Shiffer (Star Jelly)
by Fred Bouchard

Alto maven/birdwatcher Elijah Shiffer again assembles his cheery gaggle of Big Apple mockingbirds in wry homage to avian denizens of, and migrants through, the five boroughs of NYC. Kevin Sun (tenor), Dmitry Ishenko (bass) and Colin Hinton (drums) follow their leader's keenly observed and briskly portrayed sketches of familiar and unusual species, capturing their voices, plumage and essential character in engaging post-bop melodies. Sam Day Harmet (mandolin) plinks subtle unison lines at beak, and at tail, the electrifying *skreek!* of a Horned Grebe.

Be advised that Shiffer's entertaining catalog offers neither cursory generalizations (i.e. Charles Mingus' "Bird Calls") nor bucolic excursions (such as Dave Holland's "Conference of the Birds") but rather focused snapshots homing in on key aspects of eleven species. The leader is compiling a veritable jazz-oriented guide to Northeast American birds. (The astute TNYCJR review of *Volume 1* [Mar. 2024 issue], by Elliott Simon, who passed away just last month, outlines the basics.) So we "hear" the elegantly no-wasted-motion soaring Kestrel (small falcon), the dreamy, downward spiral of a slowed-up Veery (robin-like thrush) and shyly nasal braying of a Brant (coastal goose). Shiffer instantly proves himself an accomplished student of birdlore when, not content to portray waves of shorebirds' skittering sandy strands stilettoing micro-mollusks, he troubles to reproduce the dry triplet titters of Short-billed Dowitchers and Semipalmated Sandpipers. Lively interplay is a given

with such largely gregarious subjects.

The lean, mean (economical, laser-focused) quartet aptly mirrors spartan if exuberant bird life. Alto and tenor toss off angled unison lines, solo with passion, engage in the aerial antics of sparring Crows. Sun slap-tongues the Raven's dry sagacity. Shiffer wails klezmerifically, quirkily Coot-like. Each has his unique take on the Bobolink's chatterlalia: manic burble vs. split-reed larynx. Bass and drums nail Crows' smart-ass 3/4 swagger and swoon bluesy balladry of a lonely Loon. Hinton's exquisite subtlety and feather-breadth sensitivity is netted by accurate micing. Ishenko limns the roost.

A congenial musical excursion on any listener's level, *City of Birds* adds serious tools of appreciation to any birdwatcher's apologia or expedition. *Volume 3* is likely in the works: perhaps Shiffer will zoom in on heretofore overlooked families: shy Sparrows, elusive gemlike Warblers, stunning Raptors. My note to the leader suggests unique challenges: Ruffed Grouse? Chimney Swift? BTW, kudos on excellent cover sketches of the birds!

For more info visit elijahshiffer.bandcamp.com. Shiffer's *City of Birds* is at Sherman Creek Park Jul. 19. Shiffer is also at Little Honey Jul. 15. See Calendar.



Shadows and Silence: The Erik Satie Project
Tessa Souter (NOANARA Music)
by Andrew Schinder

French composer and avant gardist Erik Satie neatly fit the cliché of the brilliant yet eccentric artist. He was a noted iconoclast who adopted many personas in his life and who made his living as a cabaret pianist. Yet he was a critically important figure in early 20th century classical music, influencing the works of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, and later John Cage. This month marks the 100th anniversary of Satie's death (Jul. 1) and his influence is still felt. His oeuvre forms the inspiration for the new release, *Shadows and Silence: The Erik Satie Project*, by powerhouse vocalist Tessa Souter.

Souter lightens up Satie's compositional eccentricities and avant garde tendencies despite the often serious and solemn themes on the resultant recording, making the album eminently listenable and joyous. Her crackerjack backing band features, among others, Luis Perdomo (piano), Yasushi Nakamura (bass) and husband Billy Drummond (drums, percussion), who support and lift up her vocals. Guest appearances include Nadjé Noordhuis (trumpet), Steve Wilson (soprano) and Pascal Borderies (spoken word).

Here Souter has taken certain Satie works, including his notable "Gymnopédies" and "Gnossiennes" compositions, and adapted them as sultry vocal jazz pieces, adding lyrics in both English and French. The songs examine such subjects as beauty, loss and renewal. While Satie lived his life and composed in eccentric and modernist fashion, the vocalist has repurposed many of his works as romantic odes or meditations on human emotions. Her interpretation of "Gnossienne No. 3", entitled "Holding on to Beauty", a love letter to her husband, is a brilliant addition to the canon of jazz love ballads. "D'Ou Venons-Nous (Gymnopédie No. 3)"

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