



Cantica Profana

Lucian Ban, Mat Maneri, John Surman (Sunnyside)
by John Sharpe

Béla Bartók's early 20th-century field recordings of Transylvanian folk songs continue to generate new tributaries. Pianist Lucian Ban, violist Mat Maneri and reedman John Surman's previous release, *Transylvanian Folk Songs* (2020), animated Bartók's archival fragments with startling immediacy. *Cantica Profana*, drawn from 2022-23 European tours, captures how those same pieces have been reforged in performance: recast into pliant, living shapes. The result is a program that honors the sublime, melodic spine of the originals while conceiving a vocabulary all its own.

The trio resists the conventional jazz architecture of soloist and accompanists. Instead, they emphasize collective invention, weaving the source material into malleable, constantly-shifting textures. Themes surface obliquely—hinted at in phrasing, refracted in rhythmic turns—then dissolve before they can harden into statements. Ban and Surman frequently trade responsibility for propulsion, the pianist dampening strings for percussive resonance or repeating figures that double as riffs, while Surman's bass clarinet and soprano saxophone oscillate between breathy lament

and folkloric lilt. Maneri's viola, with its expressive inflections and curdled sonorities, adds a sorrowful undertow, even when paired with Surman's more plump buoyancy.

Variation is central to the album's design. Two versions each of "Violin Song" and "Dowry Song" appear in contrasting guises, underscoring the trio's refusal to treat these melodies as fixed. In these readings, the tunes often pivot between celebration and foreboding, echoing the austerity of the peasant life that produced them. At times, other idioms briefly emerge: klezmer hues, Middle Eastern modalities, even a muezzin-like cry from Surman at the opening of "Up There". These fleeting echoes never dilute the focus; rather, they enrich the trio's dialogue with wider folk traditions. The interplay remains egalitarian throughout. Ban offers moments of hushed tunefulness, notably in "A Messenger Was Born", where his introspective lines entwine with Maneri's gossamer counterpoint. The violist's shadowed glissandi in "Evening in the Village" deepen the aura of haunted reflection. Surman displays remarkable control across both horns, at times mirroring Maneri's microtonal pitch bends, at others blossoming into the aching lyricism of the title track.

Cantica Profana thrives on ambiguity—joy shading into regret, clarity into blur. In avoiding the codification that touring often breeds, Ban, Maneri and Surman have found something rarer: folk songs reborn as mutable, ungovernable art.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. Ban and Maneri are at The Perch (Philadelphia, PA) Oct. 5 and Barbès Oct. 11. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Perseverance Flow

Natural Information Society (Eremite)

Totality

Natural Information Society/Bitchin Bajas
(Drag City)

by Stuart Broomer

An outstanding Chicago bassist, Joshua Abrams regularly contributes to a host of bands, drawing on roots from hip-hop to free jazz. He also leads a singular project, Natural Information Society (NIS), a band that stretches across time, origins, technologies and sources, and one which has mutated significantly in its 15-year history, documented on a series of Eremite LP releases. Abrams also plays guembri, the bass lute of the Gnawa people of North Africa, introduced to free jazz circles by Moroccan master Maleem Mahmoud Ghania, who in the '90s stepped outside traditional circles to play with saxophonists Pharoah Sanders and Peter Brötzmann and percussionist Hamid Drake, the latter an occasional member of NIS. Recent NIS recordings include two double-LP sets, *Since Time Is Gravity*, by an 11-member Community Edition and *descension* (*Out of Our Constrictions*) by the current core quartet of Abrams, Lisa Alvarado (harmonium), Mikel Patrick Avery (drums) and Jason Stein (bass clarinet), with Evan Parker (soprano) joining them on a single 75-minute piece.

With *Perseverance Flow*, Abrams, as composer and producer, takes NIS in another direction, composing a piece for the quartet's distinctive members and instruments, then editing and processing the results into a serene, pulsing, repeating work with regular shifts and time markers, transforming instrumental identities into novel sounds and short modular phrases. There's a melody that's regularly an extended and

shifting ostinato, there's another that's a high-pitched soprano, more minimal still and not readily traceable to an originating sound, though the bass clarinet may be the likeliest contender. These alterations are such that only percussion and guembri are frequently identifiable. Stein's bass clarinet only becomes strongly evident as itself nine minutes in. A certain repeating jump-start suggests a grand piano's bass figure or the clicking of an MRI machine, yet this technological dream with its resonating soprano melody remains so fiercely human and fundamentally American that the album forms loose affiliations with music as far flung as Santo & Johnny's "Sleep Walk" and Harry Partch's *Delusion of the Furies*. The submerged instrumental identities contribute to the dream-like state, as if original sonic personalities have gone to sleep, and the results suggest a sustained techno-lullaby, a kind of mechanized bliss, a harbinger, perhaps, of the music currently most needed.

Totality, another single LP, combines the core quartet of NIS with another Chicago band with 2010 origins, the Bitchin Bajas, consisting of founder Rob Frye (flute, synthesizer) with Cooper Crain (organ, synthesizer) and Daniel Quinlivan (electronics). The two groups, with different personnel, previously collaborated on *Autoimaginary* (2015). The music here is densely layered, deeply involving modal improvisation, with the winds of Frye and Stein weaving through keyboards and electronics and Abrams and Avery's pulsing undercurrents. The sole composition of the four tracks is Abrams' 13-minute "Always Nine Seconds Away", a slowly unfolding work that shares some of the hypnotic quality of *Perseverance Flow*.

For more info visit eremite.com and dragcity.com. Natural Information Society's *Perseverance Flow* album release concert is at Fabric Workshop Museum (Philadelphia, PA) and Roulette Oct. 13. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.




Mayhem

Jason Rigby (Endectomorph Music)

by Jason Gross

With the impressive credentials of performing with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Arturo O'Farrill, Aretha Franklin and Darcy James Argue, saxophonist Jason Rigby began the new millennium with a trio of solo albums demonstrating his interest in bop, ballads, spiritual jazz and the Great American Songbook. Pausing from his fruitful tenure in drummer Mark Guiliana's Jazz Quartet, Rigby returns to leader status with his first album since 2016, *Mayhem*—his first duo recording, appropriately enough, with Guiliana. The release is Rigby's most varied and surprising album, beginning with pieces he brought to the session, followed mostly by improvisations by the pair. Both contribute as multi-instrumentalists: the leader on woodwinds, keyboards, percussion; Guiliana on drums, cymbals, percussion and keyboards. Recording engineer, Pete Min was also responsible for signal processing, in addition to mixing and mastering.

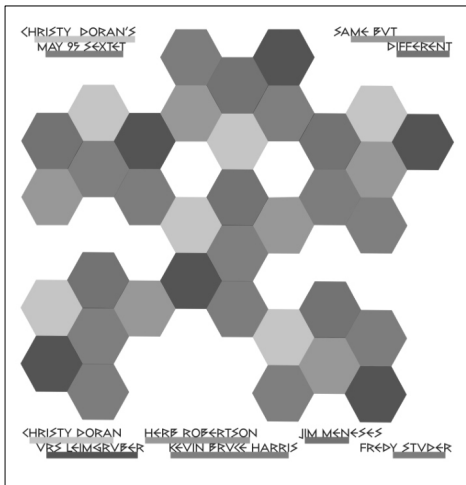
Album opener is "Siorai", a somber piano piece with breathy sax and gentle celeste stylings. "Sevensixfive" switches gears with a soulful electric piano riff and bouncy Kraftwerk-like Moog bass, Guiliana later adding a groove alongside Rigby's fluid saxophone playing. "Burn" (in honor of saxophonist Tim Berne) features Rigby's quizzical, light tenor saxophone alone



NEW RELEASE

Christy Doran's May 95 Sextet

«SAME BUT DIFFERENT»



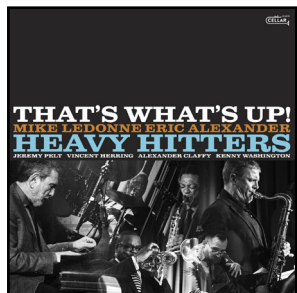
feat. Christy Doran guit | Herb Robertson tp
Urs Leimgruber reeds | Kevin Bruce Harris b
Fredy Studer dr | Jim Meneses dr

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before meshing with Guiliana, who provides a formal, Anthony Braxton-like march. From there, “Fifths” has spacy ’70s-era prog-rock synths, light drum rolls and sweet, warm and smoothly processed, echoing tenor saxophone lines. “Terra Firma” starts with eerie percussion and noir-like layers of bass clarinet à la Tom Waits, providing a background for Rigby’s tenor to float above with flurries of notes, climaxing in a scream and an overdubbed horn chorus. “Chimera” shifts gears again with stately piano and a peaceful flute performance, giving the feel of traditional Japanese music, as Guiliana provides a pump organ for celestial background. “YEAH BOiii” commences as a low-key saxophone/drums duet but becomes an aggressive, intricate and immersed-in-bop swing as it progresses. Yet another vibe comes into play on “Museum Piece” with Guiliana’s hazy miniature piano, while his partner joins on bass clarinet, creating a dreamy feel. “Mark”, with its rowdy drum intro and fluttering reed lines, leads to back-and-forth solo spaces. The musicians’ instinctive reactions to each other culminates in a buoyant ride cymbal-heavy drum solo with calypso-style Rigby tenor fills, before “Finality Transcends” ends the program as a mournful solo piano piece dedicated to the leader’s late brother.

With a spring tour and new quartet on tap, it will be fascinating to see where Rigby (with or without Guiliana) goes from here.

For more info visit endectomorph.com. Rigby is at *Close Up* Oct. 3 (as leader), *Brooklyn Artery* Oct. 9 and *Mezzrow* Oct. 15 (both with David Cook), and *National Sawdust* Oct. 29 (with Miho Hazama). See Calendar.



**That's What's Up!
Heavy Hitters (Cellar Music)**
by Jim Motavalli

The Heavy Hitters share a straight-ahead landing space with The Cookers. It's safe ground for hard-bop players who've achieved jazz veteran status, with some up-and-comers thrown in for seasoning. The rooted model is the shifting personnel—and sound—of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers.

That's What's Up! was recorded, live and smoking, at Frankie's Jazz Club in Vancouver, BC. Pianist Mike LeDonne is the principal architect, as composer of the bulk of the material. Ten minutes of the classic-sounding “Continuum” starts things off with the swagger of Eric Alexander's big-toned tenor sound and aggressive cries, serving as part of an extended workout, leading into Jeremy Pelt's brash trumpet playing and LeDonne's lightly swinging piano touch. The group is rounded out by a younger member of the fraternity, Alexander Claffy (bass), plus sexagenarians Vincent Herring (alto) and Kenny Washington (drums). Yes, it's a head-plus-solos outing, but an exciting one that the Canadian crowd is clearly digging. “JB” has some of Miles Davis' “Milestones” in it, though it veers off and progresses from there. Alexander leaps in for a short solo, then a concise workout by Pelt and some fleet, exciting playing by Herring and LeDonne rounds it out, with finger-blurring intensity. So far, so uptempo!

The title tune, an eight-bar blues, is a boulevardier's stroll down Bop Street. The horns, especially Herring, audibly have some fun with it. “Shadows” has low-key mystery, though Pelt blows away some of the smoke.

It probably takes some effort not to sound like Lee Morgan in this context, but he convincingly pulls it off. “Groundation” is a midtempo delight, with Pelt again leading off the solos with firm support from the pianist and rhythm section. LeDonne is in particularly fine form here, with shades of early McCoy Tyner. The two standards, both lyrical ballads, are the Guy Wood, Robert Mellin “My One and Only Love” and Jule Styne, Sammy Cahn's “It's Magic”. Both serve as welcome palate cleansers, with the pianist turning the former composition into a rhapsodic solo excursion. The latter showcases the horn players, matching the pianist in the tenderness department. “Blues for All” is Alexander's sole composition contribution to the session and it's a framework for 1959 Blue Note Records. One can almost hear that blue-and-white disc spinning. There are two additional short, bonus tracks, including “Bleeker Street” (clocking in at just under three minutes), which features LeDonne's bluesy piano playing.

For more info visit cellarlive.com. The Heavy Hitters are at *Dizzy's Club Oct. 24*. See Calendar.



Slow Crawl (Performing the Music of Tim Berne)
Gregg Belisle-Chi (Intakt)
by Ken Waxman

Transforming avant gardist alto saxophonist Tim Berne's sometimes spiky compositions into controlled chamber-style music may seem like an impossible task—or at least a brave one. But Brooklyn-based Gregg Belisle-Chi has done so on this brief (less than 37-minute) session in transcribing Berne's lines for solo acoustic guitar. While the idea may appear precipitous, if not completely foolish, the youthful, Brooklyn-based Belisle-Chi would seem to be the perfect interpreter. Not only does he now frequently play with Berne as a duo, or in a trio with drummer Tom Rainey, but this is his second album of Berne interpretations, having performed the same musical alchemy on *KOI* in 2021.

Since Berne has usually worked with rugged electric guitarists such as Marc Ducret and the more textural David Torn in the past, Belisle-Chi's acoustic recasting of eight Berne compositions offers unique variations. With the tracks encompassing lively or languid performances, expressive string slides and stops, measured strokes and a few embellishments are worked into the interpretations. Still, even when a track such as “No White Out” evolves with a few ringing chords, swift, strained slides up and down the frets and a tempo that moves from andante to allegro and back again, a certain sameness can be felt throughout. Other tunes, which are in the main played at midrange tempos, often with similar patterns, skirt ennui more often than produce excitement.

With its give-away title, *Slow Crawl* doesn't promise any more than it delivers. Belisle-Chi can certainly be commended for offering an idiosyncratic translation of Berne's music for solo guitar. Six-string fanciers will be particularly drawn to the session, yet those who have long followed the alto saxophonist may be either intrigued or repelled.

For more info visit intaktrec.ch. Belisle-Chi is at *Pete's Candy Store* Oct. 7 and *Owl Music Parlor* Oct. 26. Tim Berne is at *Greenwich House Music School* Oct. 11 (part of *Progressive Chamber Music Festival*). See Calendar.

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