



### 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.

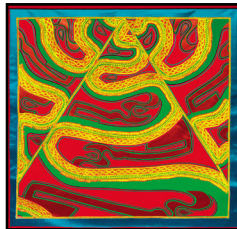
The trio resists the conventional jazz architecture of soloist and accompanists. Instead, they emphasize collective invention, weaving the source material into malleable, constantly-shifting textures. Themes surface obliquely—hinted at in phrasing, refracted in rhythmic turns—then dissolve before they 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](http://sunnysiderecords.com). Ban and Maneri are at The Perch (Philadelphia, PA) Oct. 5 and Barbès Oct. 11. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



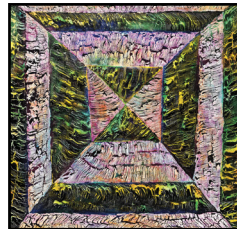
### Perseverance Flow

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](http://eremite.com) and [dragcity.com](http://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.

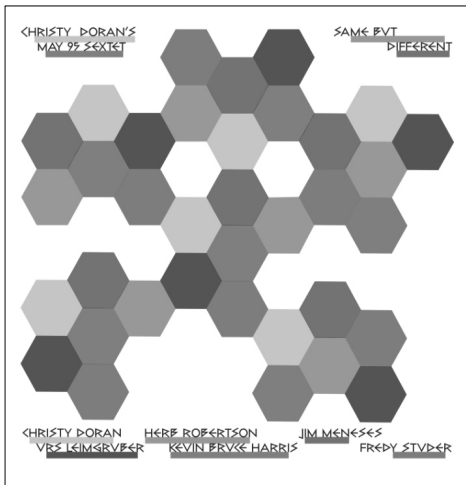
Album opener is "Siorai", a somber piano piece with breathy sax and gentle celeste stylings. "Sevensixfive" switches gears with a soulful electric piano riff and bouncy Kraftwerk-like Moog bass, Guiliana later adding a groove alongside Rigby's fluid saxophone playing. "Burn" (in honor of saxophonist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



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