



**Reflections on:
The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man
Mark Turner (Giant Step Arts)
Spindrift
Benjamin Lackner (ECM)
by Tom Greenland**

Mark Turner is a (tenor) saxophonist's saxophonist, combining the long-lined, elegantly ornamented precision of a Baroque craftsman with the percolating passion of a romantic artist. Lately he seems to be emphasizing the latter quality, most noticeably on the first of these two recent releases.

Although Turner has previously used science fiction for narrative inspiration, such as 2022's *Return from the Stars*—a genre in which artificial future worlds provide a framework for observing uncomfortable truths about our own world. On this year's *Reflections on: The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* he confronts such truths more directly. Inspired by James Weldon Johnson's 1912 semi-autobiographical novel about a biracial man with a talent for ragtime music who abandons his gift in order to "pass" in a safe but unfulfilling life as a white man, Turner narrates short passages from the book, expressing Johnson's candid and cogent thoughts on race and class. Turner, who has personal experience with passing in his family, speaks Johnson's truths in calm cadences that belie the continuing urgency of these issues, while in and around his recitations the music unveils even deeper, inarticulable truths. Composed and arranged for quintet—Turner (tenor), Jason Palmer (trumpet), David Virelles (piano, synth, organ), Matt Brewer (acoustic, electric bass), Nasheet Waits (drums)—the original suite is united by Turner's vibrant melodies and poly-functional harmonies. Virelles contributes carnivalesque organ tones, futuristic synth-scapes and vibrant piano parts. Waits is a writhing, roiling flame, simmering without burning, allowing the music's subtle flavors to emerge from his considerable heat. Palmer, a close adherent of the bandleader's *oeuvre*, proves a proficient foil, engaging the saxophonist in stimulating duos, delivering a strong soliloquy on "The Texan...The Soldier". Turner, excellent throughout, is in especially fine form on "Pulmonary Edema", "Europe", "Mother...Son...Lover" and "Pragmatism", the latter a textbook example of the state of the tenor in our times.

Other aspects of Turner manifest on *Spindrift*, German-American pianist Benjamin Lackner's sophomore release on ECM. This quintet date—Lackner (piano, compositions), Mathias Eick (trumpet), Turner (tenor), Linda May Han Oh (bass), Matthieu Chazarenc (drums)—differs from the first in significant ways. In contrast to Turner's soaring melodies and suggestive harmonies, Lackner's writing recalls European hymns, often composed in and hewing to minor modes—the colorful chords on the title track and "Out of the Fog" being notable exceptions—though even his hymns are full of small surprises. The leader's melodies are deftly-constructed for trumpet and saxophone, many of his arrangements providing space for simultaneous soloing, Eick's warm, buzzy timbre an apposite counterpart to Turner's cool clarity. The trumpet/saxophone exchanges on "Mosquito Flats", "Chambary", "Fair Warning", "Anacapa" and "More Mesa" (the latter including piano in a three-way improvisation) are album highpoints. Oh's upward arching solo on "Ahwahnee" is another. Turner seems more relaxed on this date, toning down the pyrotechnics, finding his voice in chorus with the others. Lackner's playing,

dependably delicate, tastefully understated, floats over clouds of time, letting silences speak, contributing to the album's overarching air of gentle melancholy.

For more info visit giantsteparts.org and ecmrecords.com. Mark Turner is at Smoke Nov. 28-30 (with Billy Hart). See Calendar.



**Pistoleros
Mac Gollehon & the Hispanic Mechanics
(WFO Music)
by John Pietaro**

Trumpeter/multi-instrumentalist Mac Gollehon is the quintessential studio musician. But for a burgeoning catalog as a leader, he's also at home in the shadows. Film and television scores, plus noted dates with Blondie, Laurie Anderson, Madonna, Grace Jones, Mick Jagger and David Bowie made him an insider's legend—this, after coming of age with Lester Bowie, Ray Barretto, Hector Lavoe, Hilton Ruiz and Mighty Sparrow. In recent years, releases by Gollehon and his Hispanic Mechanics caught fire in ways rarely seen in the session player's realm. Urgent cross-rhythms, muscular brass, Mafioso street lore and raw NYC, leave the records raging.

His latest, *Pistoleros*, picks up where *Bite of the Street* left off, and we're once again amid underground culture, frighteningly danceable within new music crossfire. Here, Gollehon's tireless trumpet (Miles Davis crowned Mac "Lips" decades ago) with doubles on trombone, tuba, keyboards and guitars, keep good company with the smoldering Anthony Carillo and Elvis Ferrara (percussion), Greg Meisenberg (drums, bass) and David Brenner aka Gridfailure (electronics). And you'll hear spoken word by actors Vincent Pastore (of *Sopranos* fame), Joe Ferraro (*The Irishman*) and jazz club owner Atiba Powers. The blistering begins with the title cut's driving rhythms and found Spanish-language voices, severed by a perpetual-motion Gollehon solo surrounded by his overdubbed horn section. "Stud Poker" brims with the stripped heat of a hushed late-night backroom gambling session in the Heights. The leader's trumpet, left to its own devices, carries us into the next early morning where one can almost smell the corner BBQ lighting up for business.

Our city's culture, Fort Washington to South Brooklyn, is captured within, signaling the notion of *Pistoleros* replacing the old warning pamphlet "Fear City." "Vinny aka Bay Parkway" speaks to this writer's own humble Bensonhurst beginnings, where the made guys, piss boys and strongarms walked among us, far too sure of themselves. The track's a slow burn, with Gollehon's lamenting and shouting in call-and-response with the overdubbed horns and hovering rhythm section. Listen too for the spoken samples calling in the lost boys of "Killer Joe Zillionario", then "Atiba Side Eye" with Gollehon's blue-going-purple trumpet and plummeting keyboard triplets, all wanderlust, all the time.

Pistoleros is our frozen moment recalling *The Taking of Pelham 123*, crossing 110th Street with John Shaft, commandeering Tompkins Square Park long after Bird took off and embarking on the all-night N train ride into Coney Island.

For more info visit facebook.com/mac.gollehon. The album release concert is at Francis Kite Club Nov. 5. See Calendar.

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