

Myths of Origin
Jason Kao Hwang (True Sound Recordings)
by JR Simon

Recorded live at the Vision Festival at Roulette in Brooklyn in June 2022, violinist-composer Jason Kao Hwang's latest album *Myths of Origin* is a striking feat of scale and cohesion. Hwang conducts a 24-piece improvised string orchestra (Charles Burnham, gabby fluke-mogul, Rosi Hertlein, Gwen Laster, Melanie Dyer, Lester St. Louis, Tomas Ulrich, et al.) with three guitarists (Che Chen, Anders Nilsson, Hans Tammen) and drummer Andrew Drury, together shaping a single nine-part suite. Improvisational groups are usually small, since coordination becomes more difficult with each added voice, so the very premise of an orchestra improvising together is fairly unusual; and that it unfolds with such focus and momentum reflects Hwang's dedication to and command of his craft. The album's demanding work rewards listeners open to shifting textures, evolving structures and collective invention.

Drawing from the "conduction" tradition pioneered in the '80s by Butch Morris (in whose

ensembles Hwang was a frequent participant), Hwang similarly uses a "lexicon of gestures" to direct real-time improvisation. Composed moments and improvised passages are interwoven, producing music that feels both spontaneous and inevitable. The stated aim of the work is to counter Orientalist myths, but what it attains is even broader. Hwang and his ensemble create and discover sounds that evoke elemental, cosmological origins. The opener, "The Collapse of Gravity", begins with four blunt sounds—bang, twang, bang, hit—before the orchestra develops a primordial soup of strings. "Spin Fast and Burn" rides a driving rhythmic figure, with violin and guitar cutting across it. "Dust Gathers Around Sleep" shifts to a unison melody over cymbals, offering a revelatory moment of focus and uniformity. "Anthem of Knowing" introduces a real change of atmosphere: it's looser, more intimate, almost like a late-night club scene. Drury lays down a steady groove, while the soloing carries a more lyrical tone. The suite closes with "Never Forgotten", showcasing a composed theme that works as both resolution and renewal. The drummer, Hwang's longtime collaborator, is an album standout. His playing provides unity and momentum, alternating between steady pulse and shifting textures. Around Drury, the strings fracture and regroup, moving through cadenzas, flurries, and climaxes.

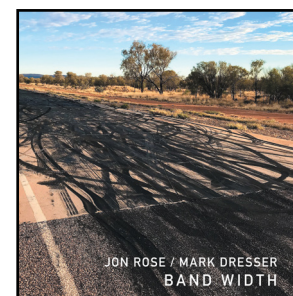
Myths of Origin is ambitious and challenging. Blurring the lines between creation and performance, it is, at the same time, new and ancient.

For more info visit jasonkaohwang.bandcamp.com. Hwang is at Ibeam Brooklyn Nov. 13. See Calendar.

by Blade's flourishing rides around his kit. The album turns to more expansive production with "You Are", a dramatic statement that exudes encouragement. The pianist's lilting McCoy Tyner-esque refrain, again supported by inserted strings, promotes a positive vibe, with an ebullient aside from Colley that is climaxed by Potter's eloquent yet powerful solo (akin to Wayne Shorter's contribution to Steely Dan's *Aja* title track) and a Simon-written, spoken-word coda from Jana Dagdagan. Following is a pop-jazz diversion, "Wanna Be With You", featuring the multi-genre singer Becca Stevens, who performs a Caribbean-flavored, '90s-ish R&B song anointed with steelpan support from Rogério Boccato. The finale, "Far Rockaway", bookends the album with another song of recollection.

This collaboration of musical compadres offers some jazz romanticism and emotional rapport in the midst of the current socio-political cacophony. May these three visit again.

For more info visit groundupmusic.net. The album release concert is at Dizzy's Club Nov. 18-19. See Calendar.



Band Width
Jon Rose/Mark Dresser (Relative Pitch)
by Stuart Broomer

Australian violinist Jon Rose and California bassist Mark Dresser, among the most intrepid of string improvisers, first encountered each other's work in the early '80s. United in their interests in altered instruments and extended techniques, they exchanged cassettes of their work. Limited by the distance between their respective homelands, the two attempted early electronic hookups to collaborate online but were further frustrated. The recently developed SonoBus software eventually provided a solution, permitting the real-time interaction heard here, with Rose playing violin and tenor violin, Dresser playing four- and five-string basses.

There are seven duets, ranging from 3:52 to 8:22. Drawn from five two-hour sessions conducted over a year, each reveals the kind of close listening and interactivity you might expect from empathetic musicians playing together in the same room, rather than in the deserts of San Diego, California and Alice Springs, Australia, over eight thousand miles apart. However different their musical devices, the pair have much in common in technique and vocabulary, whether repeating strongly rhythmic figures, complementary or deviating, grinding gritty textures at the frog of the bow, or exploring high harmonics resonating in their respective, very different-sized instruments.

In the brief, almost six-minute span of "Band Width 2", an exemplary track, the musicians' parts are as interconnected as the two hands of a virtuoso pianist, sometimes as dense as piano for four hands, whether complementing or contrasting one another's materials. Pizzicato flurries turn instantly into bowed flights; either musician might span his instrument's range in a matter of seconds. Chaos and order are constant companions and corollaries, with Rose's shift to the lower tenor violin rendering the instruments' harmonics indistinguishable at times. The more expansive interplay of "Band Width 6" often has the two musicians operating in a cello register.



Three Visitors
Scott Colley, Edward Simon, Brian Blade
(GroundUP Music)
by Jeff Cebulski

The biblical Three Visitors who delivered a divine message to Abraham may or may not be the title inspiration for *Three Visitors* by the musical trio of Scott Colley (bass), Edward Simon (piano) and Brian Blade (drums), but the suggestion of a metaphysical experience points to the trio's affective propinquity, creating jazz that improvises sentimentality from compositional remnants. And while the piano trio is the central focal point here, added elements provide artistic touches to the proceedings, including a string quartet, percussion, voices and on one selection a rousing appearance by tenor saxophonist Chris Potter. The poignant tone on much of the album is balanced by a striving for personal connection and reconstruction, with an emphasis on memory and place.

Simon's "Nostalgia" introduces the album with a mildly plaintive piano intro supplemented by strings, after which Blade joins in with a soft percussive touch before Colley's brief solo. Blade's "Kintsukuroi" (a reference to the Japanese art of restoring broken pottery) is a thoughtful ballad that rides an Asian trope atop reverberating bass lines. "Ellipsis" emerges as a Bill Evans-ish composition, with a subtle swing that fits Blade's stick and cymbal style to a tee. Colley's "The Thicket" is an intense, serpentine menagerie of three collaborators. The title cut features Simon's dark chordal riff setting the scene for bass and piano solos, as the music again begins to swing, supported

