



Abstraction Is Deliverance
James Brandon Lewis Quartet (Intakt)
by Jeff Cebulski

Abstraction Is Deliverance, saxophonist James Brandon Lewis' fifth album with his well-established quartet—Aruán Ortiz (piano), Brad Jones (bass) and Chad Taylor (drums)—finds the leader in a solemn state, rendering songs that clearly connect him to the lineage of tenor saxophonists John Coltrane and Albert Ayler, but largely without the occasional associated histrionics and instead leaning toward balladic expression. Displaying emotional depth, Lewis sounds as superb and grounded as ever. This album also continues his longstanding, mellifluous partnership with Taylor, in particular: the drummer shines as the often-contrapuntal element in the midst of near-meditative harmonies.

Album opener "Ware" is a *Love Supreme*-ish paean to the late saxophonist David S. Ware, whose spiritual free jazz influenced Lewis. The song structure is reminiscent of Coltrane's classic composition and work of that time, especially in the sturdy, melodic bass work by Jones. The saxophonist's flowing cadences continue on "Per 7", where his interplay with Ortiz is noticeably striking. Taylor's superbly-

recorded (subdued but effective) Caribbean mallet work augments the pensive piece that dovetails with "Remember Rosalind", which calls to mind the luxurious work of Keith Jarrett's European Quartet with saxophonist Jan Garbarek. The title cut is a departure; with the drummer's animated pounding, Lewis and Ortiz commence on a neo-classical melody that evolves into the album's most spirited display, as if the trio decided that Taylor's agitated percussion offered a preferable context. As it turns out, the beginning is the "abstraction," while the middle part is the "deliverance" that eventually returns to the forefront, still attached to its beat guru. It also foreshadows the most abstract number, "Multicellular Beings", where this utterly comfortable band delivers a short lesson on group improvisation.

Demonstrating its versatility, the quartet proceeds into "Mr. Crick", a pleasing modal blues, before playing a rendition of Mal Waldron and Billie Holiday's "Left Alone", wherein Lewis sensitively 'sings' Holiday's part as Jones' arco and Taylor's mallets provide a darker layer before Ortiz chimes in with McCoy Tyner-esque commentary. Ortiz' lovely intro is featured in the closer, "Polaris", atop which Lewis plays a heart-rending passage prefacing the piano trio's garrulous interlude, with the leader and his friends moving back-and-forth until the end.

On *Abstraction Is Deliverance*, one of 2025's best albums, the James Brandon Lewis Quartet evinces significant rapport and instrumental command, rendering a flawless collection that rewards relistening, over and over again.

For more info visit intaktrec.ch. Lewis is at Drom Jan. 9 (part of Winter Jazzfest.) See Calendar.



A Reflection Distorts Over Water
Camila Nebbia, Marilyn Crispell, Lesley Mok
(Relative Pitch)
Dream Brigade
Lesley Mok/Phillip Golub (Infrequent Seams)
by Kurt Gottschalk

In function, "Longing", drummer Lesley Mok's sole composer credit on *A Reflection Distorts Over Water*—a trio album with Camila Nebbia (tenor) and Marilyn Crispell (piano)—is at least as much a composition as it is a step in their shared process. It starts off this new release's second half, its title laying bare the emotion, and it's an achingly beautiful piece, beginning with bowed cymbals and a slow piano melody, subtly underscored by soft saxophone tones. It's barely a scene; it seems not much more than a moment, but a moment that's clear enough to visualize (there's almost certainly rain on the window). It's no surprise that all three players are improvising through the piece. Other selections are, according to the credits, inspired by Nebbia's open scores, but all three get composer credits for those remaining seven tracks. There's a camaraderie at play here, reflected in the music (as distorted over water). Not all is as subdued as "Longing", but even on the mid-tempo burners, the sentiment seems prevalent. Mok and Nebbia have played and recorded together before. Crispell, the elder of the group, seems the newbie, and is as

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