

Judy Wexler



Tuesday, April 28th
9:30 pm



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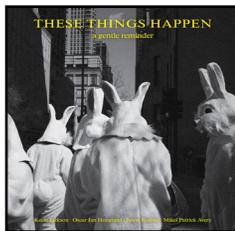
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A Gentle Reminder
These Things Happen (Corbett vs Dempsey)
Stinger
Keefe Jackson, Jakob Heinemann, Adam Shead
(Irritable Mystic)
by Ariella Stok

With two recent releases, the Chicago-based multi-reedist Keefe Jackson shows a collaborative practice that treats the past as raw material for pushing the music forward. The Arkansas-born musician moved to Chicago in 2001, and the city's porous improvising scene has helped shape that sensibility.

These Things Happen, Jackson's group with Amsterdam-based pianist Oscar Jan Hoogland, grew partly from encounters fostered by the concert series curated by Ken Vandermark and John Corbett at Chicago's Empty Bottle, which frequently introduced Chicago players to Scandinavian and European improvisers. Jackson has cited the ICP Orchestra as an early revelation, and the group's prankster spirit—along with the knotted lyricism of Thelonious Monk and Herbie Nichols, nudged by a faint punk edge—remains a guiding principle. Jackson and Hoogland deepened the partnership by visiting each other's cities, living as temporary roommates while developing a shared repertoire.

A Gentle Reminder, their second album, reunites them with drummer Mikel Patrick Avery and adds bassist Jason Roebke. (Their 2022 debut featured bassist Joshua Abrams, Avery's colleague in Natural Information Society.) Recorded at the Hyde Park Jazz Festival, the album feels both composed and mischievous. Jackson's "20 Years Past 12 O'Clock" twists through a Monk-ish architecture of pauses and angled phrases, while Hoogland's "Over Het Zijn En Het Hoera" nods toward Ethio-jazz, echoing the Dutch underground band The Ex and its collaborations with Getatchew Mekurya. A playful historical awareness runs through the album. The band renders Misha Mengelberg's "Een Beetje Zenuwachtig" in major rather than the original minor—a karmic play on the anecdote that the late ICP pianist and co-founder once flipped the key on Monk's "Round Midnight". Monk's "Well You Needn't" fares even more strangely: the quartet bypasses the tune's familiar entry point and circles a tense fragment of its opening hook, delaying resolution almost to the breaking point.

The group appeared last month at Sisters Brooklyn as part of Assembly, the residency curated by Luke Stewart and Lester St. Louis. Following a mesmerizing solo set from Lea Bertucci sampling wooden flute, voice and manipulated tape machine, These Things Happen played material from both albums alongside Mengelberg's "De Lachende Dwerg" and Duke Ellington's curious, rarely-heard miniature, "Zweet Zurzday". Hoogland's Wurlitzer, which replaced the piano he plays on the record, gave the band a swirling glow. Jackson's tenor moved with muscular clarity, while Avery colored each piece with different textures—bells on cymbals, chants and an idiosyncratic, captivating swing—and subbing for Roebke, Stewart's steady, yet open bass, widened the improvisational space.

Jackson's album *Stinger*, recorded at two Chicago strongholds, Constellation and the Hungry Brain, with Jakob Heinemann (bass) and Adam Shead (drums), adheres to the same ethos of collectivism. Jackson and Heinemann share composing duties alongside pieces by Bobby Bradford and John

Tchicai. The music churns steadily—Jackson's horn flaring at the end of "Regent", Heinemann's thick arco bass driving "12345". In their hands, Tchicai's "Oles Anders", once spare and elliptical, becomes a slow-moving procession, the trio filling the space with patient weight. In the rhythmic swing of the title track, Jackson's compositional voice is unmistakable—a near companion to *A Gentle Reminder*'s "20 Years Past 12 O'Clock".

Taken together, these two albums demonstrate Jackson working in two directions at once—toward collaborators and influences across the Atlantic and at home—both paths guided by the same idea that jazz history is most alive when it is slightly unsettled.

For more info visit corbettvsdempsey.com and irritablemysticrecords.bandcamp.com



Forbidden Flowers
Shoko Nagai (Infrequent Seams)
by Sophia Valera Heinecke

Forbidden Flowers is a tremendous, otherworldly offering from pianist-accordionist-improviser-composer Shoko Nagai, supported by an all-female ensemble that boldly navigates the boundaries of genre, riding a tidal wave of deep emotion. Working backwards into greater subtlety from its explosive opening, there are abrupt endings and mid-track silences, signature to the album, which give it an episodic, otherworldly build. Arriving at varied volumes throughout gives each piece the feeling of a distinct chapter in Nagai's personal rollercoaster, drawing on her life in New York as a female pianist navigating the male-dominated sphere of experimental music. The ensemble—Pauline Kim Harris (violin), Pam Fleming (trumpet) and Kate Gentile (drums, percussion)—brings virtuosity and responsiveness, rising to the occasion of these poignant works with solidarity and skill, continually surprising and shifting with ever-evolving lines and roles on each composition.

The album's multi-genre palette ricochets across a spectrum of styles, with moments reminiscent of a rock opera, others of a concerto and yet others something serpentine—moments that coil and strike into the future with tightly-wound electronic insertions. Throughout, Nagai's composing achieves intensity through the transposition and manipulation of dynamics: abrupt silences, electronic shatters that dissolve into quiet, and inversions of intensity that score conflict and resolution. "Pineal Gland" offers a soft start, but escalate with the leader's piano lines becoming more staccato, as cymbals and a mirage of electronics ramp up. "What Are the Hidden Things of Life" opens with a unique rhythmic march, then eventually winds into an inventive drum solo at the midpoint, trickling in and out to finally break into a whimsical trio, where piano and trumpet lines intertwine with harp-like strings. Nagai's range of instrumentation beyond piano includes keyboards, Nintendo DS, electronics and a Farfisa electronic organ with a bright, percussive sound, usually associated with the new wave. The ensemble's interplay is striking, with each member given moments to be central. The result is an album loaded with wonder, ever-shifting yet thematically unified by the idea of change.