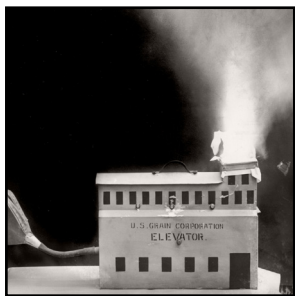


the leader turns “Cosmic Blues” into a quintet, and, at moments, what sounds like a sextet as the joyful melody skips lightly forward in octaves. It’s a blast to revel in Stewart and Taylor’s give-and-take, especially just before the two-minute mark, where the bassist’s sudden syncopations lead to nearly irreversible entanglement. The leader brings a bit of his own rhythmic freedom a few moments later, raising the temperature just before Brennan’s solo of harmonic daring and articulative diversity. The track, an album standout, fades on a delicious melodic fragment.

All players are obviously and audibly in top form, but Braufman is stunning. His easy unpredictability shines on his new record. Revamping a John Cage adage, he has nothing to prove, and he is proving it in every gesture. The simplest phrase brings depth and nuance that can stop the heart or move the feet. After the first minute of “The Journey”, he comes off a run only to execute a daring up-flip, and that is indicative of his energetic spontaneity. Long may the fire burn!

For more info visit [valleyofsearch.com](http://valleyofsearch.com). The album release concert is at Abrons Arts Center Jun. 27 (part of Vision Festival). See Calendar.



**Hellbent Daydream**  
**Brandon Seabrook (Pyroclastic)**  
by Ken Waxman

Except for mostly Dixieland combinations, the banjo fell out of favor in jazz in the early '30s—notably, for instance, when Fred Guy, who joined Duke Ellington’s Washingtonians as a banjoist in 1925, began doubling on rhythm guitar in 1932 and dropped the banjo completely in 1934. Recently though, some plectrumists are striving to adapt the distinctive banjo clangs and finger picking to contemporary sounds. One of these is Brandon Seabrook, a guitarist known for his work with, among others, Anthony Braxton, Peter Evans, Mostly Other People Do the Killing and Mike Pride. Besides his fretted instruments, Seabrook’s associates here include Austrian keyboardist Elias Stemeseder, with whom he plays in groups Stemeseder co-leads with drummer Christian Lillinger. The keyboardist here returns the favor adding his piano and synthesizers to the seven compositions played by the Seabrook String Society, already filled out by violinist Erica Dicker, who also works with Braxton and bassist Henry Fraser.

In truth, the distinctive banjo attributes are used sparingly, as in features “Bespattered Bygones” and “The Arkansas Tattler”. Although initially on both Seabrook’s twangs, Dicker’s fiddle squeaks and Fraser’s paced thumps suggest bluegrass musicians’ clawhammer strums and string slides, they eventually pinpoint spots in which their old-timey breakdowns can be slotted comfortably alongside splashy synthesizer shudders. *Hellbent Daydream* isn’t just a jazz-improv banjo primer: Seabrook’s other tracks lean into his guitar expertise. With strings and electronic blends added, the results suggest a variety of sources. The title track, for instance, could be a concerto wherein guitar fraills and flanges are cushioned by dense programmed tone washes, but also encompassing harsh discordant interludes. The multi-sectioned “I’m a Nightmare and You Know It” is different again. Following Stemeseder’s careful acoustic piano exposition that is harmonized with spiccato violin

squeezes and chiming guitar textures, the groove is quickly fractured with tandem pointed guitar riffs and staccato violin swipes. Seabrook’s swift string crunches and Dicker’s string sprays ratchet up the tension sustained by abundant electrified whooshes until a new sequence is established encompassing impressionistic inserts from the violin’s string set and positioned guitar fraills.

Banjo clanks aren’t oppressive in a session like this that express its timbral assimilation within creative music. Seabrook’s additional guitar skill, as well as the coordination of all the players’ tone construction, shows how innovation can be linked to sophisticated invention.

For more info visit [pyroclasticrecords.com](http://pyroclasticrecords.com). Seabrook is at Lowlands Jun. 2 (with Shawn Lovato) and Abrons Art Center Jun. 25 (with Ingrid Laubrock, as part of Vision Festival). See Calendar.



**Alkebulan**  
**Javier Nero Jazz Orchestra (Outside in Music)**  
by Ken Dryden

Dr. Javier Nero is a musician who wears many hats. He is a jazz educator at Johns Hopkins’ Peabody Institute, lead trombonist with the US Army Band “Pershing’s Own,” a sideman with various ensembles, and most importantly, an inspired composer and arranger for his own orchestra. There are a handful of composer-arrangers whose scores for large ensembles are instantly recognizable and Nero deserves to be considered as one of the top in his field.

*Alkebulan* stands out as a recording with richly-textured, diverse compositions, played by his ensemble, plus a few special guests. The title track blends a potent African rhythm with colorful waves of sound; guest trumpeter Sean Jones also adds a special touch. The delightful “Make It So” is an engaging Afro-Cuban-seasoned, extended work, in which the reeds and brass are voicelike. Trumpeter Randy Brecker, a frequent Nero collaborator, adds a fiery solo, while guest guitarist Shawn Purcell contributes an intense bop statement. The ballad “Radiant Flower (Zara)” cools the tone down, featuring a warm, engaging tenor saxophone spotlight. The ballad “Ayla” follows and glistens with statements by pianist Alex Brown, alto saxophonist Daniel Dickenson and brief statements by trumpeter Jones, with the leader on trombone.

The two vocal features are also highlights. The versatile singer Veronica Swift scats up a storm in the driving setting of Sigmund Romberg’s standard “Softly, As in a Morning Sunrise”, which also showcases guest vibraphonist Warren Wolf, along with pianist Brown. Rarely has an arrangement of this work packed such a punch. Vocalist Nicole Zuraitis’ sassy interpretation of Bob Dorough’s “Devil May Care” (the uncredited lyricist is Terrell B. Kirk, Jr.) is buoyed by Nero’s innovative, Latin-flavored scoring of this jazz standard. “Seminole” is the album’s breezy finale, with a peppy bossa nova rhythm and a cheery clarinet solo by Dickinson and the leader’s vocal-like trombone, the song sounding like a well disguised contrafact of Ray Noble’s “Cherokee”. The only thing lacking: identification of band soloists.

For more info visit [outsideinmusic.com](http://outsideinmusic.com). The album release concert is at Dizzy’s Club Jun. 15. See Calendar.



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