

sensibility. A native of Hartford, CT (and proponent of that city's famed saxophonist Jackie McLean), Hellmuth cut her teeth in LA before relocating to NYC, where she's been building a relationship with the ever-thoughtful pianist Sylvie Courvoisier. It's a good place for her to land, at least for the moment.

For more info visit leiter-verlag.com. Hellmuth is at The Jazz Gallery Aug. 13 (with Sylvie Courvoisier) and Aug. 19 (with Joel Ross), as well as Close Up Aug. 19 (as leader). See Calendar.



REX
Christopher Hoffman (Out Of Your Head)
by Jeff Cebulski

In 2023, cellist Christopher Hoffman, whose recorded output includes a longtime membership in Henry Threadgill's Zooid quintet and his vigorous, urbane albums as a leader, decided to move his family from Brooklyn to somewhere further north, away from the city. While looking for properties, Hoffman was introduced to the bucolic estate of the late Rex Brasher, considered by many to be the premier painter of birds, having created over 1,200 watercolor images and 88,000 hand-painted prints that comprise 100 sets of a 12-volume printed collection. Concurrent to the domestic change, with Threadgill's encouragement, Hoffman wrote and performed his first solo excursion for Tomeka Reid's String Summit in Chicago. The conjunction of encouragement, environment and imagination has culminated in his first solo recording, *REX*, a "conversation," in Hoffman's words, "with Brasher's world...where place and memory continue to shape one another."

The album's 13 selections were written and recorded on site, using the cello as the only creative mechanism, rather than his usual piano. The music is inspired by art, surroundings, personal loss, tributes to members of Brasher's family and reactions to Brasher's book of poems and musings, *Spindrift*. Many of the pieces are double-tracked combinations of acoustic and electric cello, meant to be continually improvised in live performance. Once the listener becomes acquainted with the album's background, Hoffman's music takes on deeper connotations. The opener "Snow Owls", based on the first Brasher image Hoffman encountered, has a dramatic edge representing a breakthrough for the cellist. "Swallowtail Kite", the image of which adorns the album cover, pairs a loping plucked-note acoustic intro with another such melodic statement on electric cello, meant to represent a weaving road through the property. The short piece is attached to "Steer Home", where the electric cello turns reverberant and mechanically angular in anticipation and longing for a return to domesticity, perhaps a mirror to Hoffman's soul. A similar echo-affected approach dominates "Buffalo Mountain", perhaps emphasizing the appearance and presence of the summit that looms over the property. "Heavy" is an exquisite, in-tandem paean to an old friend who passed away. "Sabateur" opens with a thick, death metal-ish bass line, over which Hoffman places a catchy, melodic line.

Throughout *REX*, Hoffman's acoustic and electric reflections uncannily blend, forming a

naturalistic, two-cello narrative of two artists, a shared habitat and mutual experience.

For more info visit outofyourheadrecords.com. Hoffman is at Sisters Aug. 4 and Barbés Aug. 11 (both with Kenny Warren's Sweet World). See Calendar.



Klang
Teiku (Ginkgo)
by Ariella Stok

While Passover is my favorite Jewish holiday, it's because of the food—chopped liver, charoset, brisket—not the music: for most American Jews, standardized, sung by rote, banged out on tables. Teiku's premise is that the songs once were as personal as a family's accent. *Klang*, the group's second album, makes the case six times over.

The band began with a coincidence: Chicago pianist Josh Harlow and Detroit drummer Jonathan Barahal both grew up singing Passover melodies each believed existed nowhere outside their own families, uniquely and privately quirky. Then they met and learned otherwise. The tunes actually trace back to ancestral villages in the Pale of Settlement—proscribed lands, a vast territory and ghetto for Jews, created by the Russian Empire in 1791 under the reign of Empress Catherine the Great. After Teiku's self-titled 2024 debut, others with their own family melodies began getting in touch, and the project turned partly ethnomusicological: documenting, transcribing and translating Hebrew and Yiddish sources, including the *Musikalischer Pinkes*, the 1927 anthology of Jewish folk melody.

Five of the album's six tracks set the same liturgical text, "Ki Lo Naeh", a medieval hymn with singular family melodies—none sounds like another. The Krumholz version opens the record, festive and bright. The Fendrick is a study in texture—ringing bells, scraped and pulled strings, electronic burble—until a chanted Hebrew voice surfaces through it. The Chasman melody of "Khasul Seydur Peysakh", the album's one outlier text, broods like an Albert Ayler anthem. Harlow moves to Rhodes for the Shlita version, which chimes toward funk, and stays there for the Gerster, all noir languor under Jason Stein's bass clarinet. Stein (Natural Information Society) is the band's portal: stating a melody, he transports you to the shtetl; pushing the timbre, he puts you at the music's outer edge, as on the closer, "Odir Bimlikhe (Lunski melody)", which opens into free improvisation.

Last month at Nublu (Jul. 1), the band dedicated the set to the people of Palestine—noting the shared liberation theme of Passover and creative music—and treated each melody as a starting point. Barahal triggered electronics from a pedalboard beside his kit, his light touch on drums lending fluidity; Harlow's Rhodes swirled above; the great bassist Jaribu Shahid, a mentor to both leaders via the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Sun Ra Arkestra, anchored everything; Stein, front and center, supplied the fire. These musicians seem to be getting something extra from this band: a route into their own histories. Also, their mothers come to the shows (Stein's was there!).

For more info visit
ginkgorecords.bandcamp.com/album/klang



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