DROP THE NEEDLE



Pneuma
Henry Fraser (Kou)
by Sarah "Flake" Grosser

Bassist Henry Fraser has managed to develop a signature timbre of exceptional darkness. For the majority of *Pneuma*, he layers multiple takes of alternative bass techniques in a careful blend of resonances. The illusion is that all sounds are played in a single take and on a single harmonic instrument. The result is a totally-immersive, viscerally-satisfying collection of eight homogenous pieces, averaging around four and a half minutes each. The overtones and sustain carry the album, inviting listeners to dispense with their preconceived notions of what solo double bass music is supposed to sound like.

"Blood, is" showcases sharp, ominous creaks slowly oscillating between left and right channels. You can feel the splintery, spiky high frequencies of each individual crack—tactile and kinetic, like a hundred-year-old tree finally breaking and falling. In "Turn", drawn-out bowing is paired with harmonics to create devastating, stirring chords. The melodies that appear through the harmonics are simple, but these are complemented by the complexity of the sounds that Fraser creates. There is also a great respect for silence, and the negative space between each articulation. Deep listening is essential.

This album could be summarized with the usual descriptors—"modern contemporary, experimental avant garde, partially composed, partially improvised"—but that might limit the appeal to a select niche. This recording certainly has crossover appeal in other genres outside of the jazz world: it would be of particular interest to fans of drone or dramatic instrumental scores. Co-producers Randall Dunn (Sunn O)))) and Ben Greenberg (Marc Ribot) have realized Fraser's vision with a clear unity of purpose. The design team at Kou have similarly knocked it out of the ballpark with two limited-edition variants: the "Cohort" edition on mint-colored vinyl, and the exquisite "Gemstone" edition, featuring a beautiful translucent violet and orange melt, plus signed graphic scores!

Pneuma is for connoisseurs of impeccable sound (and graphic) design, richly textural sonic palettes and attention to the very tiniest of details. It may be a solo record, but it's a team effort—one of 2026's darkest horses.

For more info visit kourecords.com. Fraser is at Close Up Dec. 6 (with Sam Weinberg) and Dec. 11 (as leader). See Calendar.



Passerine
Stephan Crump (Out Of Your Head)
by JR Simon

With *Passerine*, bassist Stephan Crump presents seven original compositions that are subtle, restrained and intricate. He is joined by frequent collaborator Ches Smith (drums, percussion), Kenny Warren (trumpet) and David Leon (alto, flute); together, the musicians share an instinctive understanding of how much, and how little, to play.

"Glide" is an album standout. Its lilting bass figure supports intertwining trumpet and flute, which enter at slightly offset intervals. Although it is inspired by the different ways birds build nests, the music avoids literal references, though little flutters and swoops emerge in the phrasing (Crump has made the scores available for purchase, and they include evocative directions such as "swooping" and "horns flit around.") The interplay between Warren and Leon is particularly effective throughout. Crump makes generous use of their overlapping registers, allowing their complementary timbres to blend and resonate. Slight rhythmic offsets and staggered entrances add surprise, keeping the music moving without disturbing its unhurried character. On "Weavers", trumpet and flute interlace, weaving the

