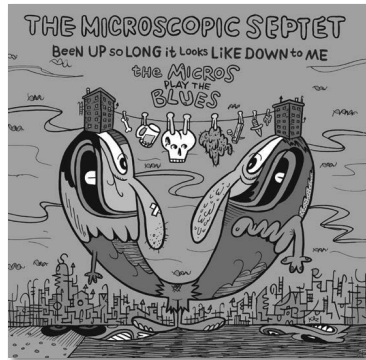


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Sélébéyone

Steve Lehman (Pi)
by Tom Greenland

If our government wanted to create a think tank to strategize progressive improvisational music (perhaps it has?), alto saxophonist and CalArts professor Steve Lehman would probably make the short-list of potential recruits. *Sélébéyone* is bedded on the cerebral funk of the M-BASE school, rife with mercurial meters and asymmetrical rhythms, anchored by keyboardist Carlos Homs, bassist Drew Gress and drummer Damion Reid, augmented by Lehman and soprano saxophonist Maciek Lasserre's supple lines lacing the morphing textures and two very different rappers out front: local alternative hip-hopper HPrizm (aka High Priest, a founding member of the Antipop Consortium) and Gaston Bandimic, a Senegalese wordsmith who 'spits' in the distinctive Dakarian dialect, a mashup of Wolof, French and Arabic. Mixer Andrew Wright is one last essential ingredient in this heady stew.

Heavily influenced by French spectral composition (where form follows the physical properties of sound) and by what trombonist George Lewis has termed an "Afrological" approach to improvisation, Lehman's musical imagination also draws on the drum programming, sampling and sound design of hip-hop, especially its more iconoclastic adherents. The result is, as the album's Senegalese title translates, an "intersection". HPrizm's clever internal rhymes and layered meanings are immediately accessible to English speakers, but Bandimic's are more opaque, requiring a perusal through the online translations to uncover the many proverbs and ancestral and spiritual references enriching his oratory. His "Shaking the cat's tail doesn't make him eat" or "When you step in the mouth of an anaconda, you better be ready" offer a poignant counterpoint to HPrizm's proverbs ("Walking through fire either scars you or it charges you"), ancestral references and poetics of urban angst ("Scattered ash, empty cigars on park benches, Stared at my reflection in project elevator mirrors"). A rich, densely layered work, this musi-cultural confluence rewards repeated listening.

For more information, visit pirecordings.com. This project is at Merkin Concert Hall Mar. 27th as part of the Ecstatic Music Festival. See Calendar.



Still Life With Trouble
The Jazz Passengers (Thirsty Ear)
Oh Yeah Ho!
Papanosh (Enja/Yellowbird)
Nearness and You
Roy Nathanson (Clean Feed)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Roy Nathanson's Jazz Passengers may have slowed their collective pace with age, but the gait of late shouldn't be taken as a sign of growing weakness. *Still Life With Trouble* is only the third record they have released in the last decade but when the old band comes around again, it's worth paying them some mind. The album marks the band's 30th anniversary

(with some changes in personnel) and it's a pleasure to report that Nathanson still suffers no shortage of ideas. There are a couple of soulful slow songs, as per usual sung by trombonist Curtis Fowlkes (including a warm rendition of The Main Ingredient's "Everybody Plays the Fool") but there's also surprising hints at Latin jazz, most notably in Nathanson's "Trouble". That groove-upon-groove is abetted by Ben Perowsky, who has been added as a second drummer alongside E.J. Rodriguez, rounding out the violin (Sam Bardfeld), vibraphone (Bill Ware), saxophone, trombone melodic frontline. The album ends with a double-hit of songs by Ware: "Friends" is a near-perfect testament for all of the singers (and non-singers) in the band that could have fallen out of a Bob Hope/Bing Crosby vehicle while "Spring Flowers" is a catchy bit of jazz circus psychedelia that will make you want to start the album over from the beginning again.

If The Jazz Passengers have the warmth and knowledge of old comrades, Papanosh comes off with the wonderfully brash arrogance of a group of young guns. The French five-piece is joined by Nathanson and trombonist Fidel Fourneyron on *Oh Yeah Ho!* for a bold live outing with more than a little Mingus in the mix. They open with an exciting, slightly sloppy "Los Mariachis", pushed into new realms by some blistering organ, before taking advantage of Nathanson the poet with his "Snow Day" set to Mingus' "Canon". They also take on "Peggy's Blue Skylight" and a couple of originals, but what makes the disc special is their reworkings of one of Mingus' worst and then one of his best long-form pieces. They take the turgid "The Clown" as an opportunity for a Nathanson recitation talk about meeting Mingus who, as he makes clear, was anything but a clown. The disc closes with a riotous take on what is easily one of Mingus' most underrated works, the expansive 1977 suite "Cumbia & Jazz Fusion". They play it with love, like a gang of punks that ain't stopping for no one.

Nearness and You falls, in a sense, between the Passengers and Papanosh discs. It's mostly old friends but largely in new environs. Nathanson used a week's residency at The Stone in 2015 to record a series of duets (and one trio) and wove from the recordings a pair of suites that use extrapolations from Hoagy Carmichael's "The Nearness of You" as a recurring theme. With fellow Passenger Fowlkes and pianists Anthony Coleman, Myra Melford and Arturo O'Farrill, guitarist Marc Ribot and trombonist Lucy Hollier, Nathanson works through an array of spiky improvisations of a sort almost as 'standard' as the old chestnut they use as an anchor.

For more information, visit thirstyyear.com, jazzrecords.com/enja and cleanfeed-records.com. The Jazz Passengers are at Roulette Mar. 28th. See Calendar.



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