



Blue Dream | Solo A Genova
Jamie Saft (RareNoise)
 by George Grella

In the difficult and essential musical balance between style and idea, keyboardist Jamie Saft's music-making has usually been heavily weighted toward the former. He has spent a good deal of time in John Zorn's Tzadik orbit and fallen into the trap of making music about how other music has been made—skillful and often pleasurable stuff, but a fleeting experience that leaves little impression after it has passed. So these two new albums are real surprises. The music is substantial, it has purpose and meaning, it has something to tell the listener and all the ideas come through clearly and with force. It has effect, not just affect.

The quartet on *Blue Dream* has an original sound. There's the Coltrane quartet in their foundation and Bill McHenry's hard-reed tenor saxophone often spits out Charlie Rouse-like tones, but on this record the group has the quality of working within the stream of modern postbop jazz while playing with an exhilarating lack of burden from historical antecedents. Coltrane is a mood that inspires, not a style to mimic.

There's a consistent range of medium tempos through the 12 tracks and the pairing of Saft's left hand and bassist Brad Jones builds layer upon layer of musical and expressive depth and power. With pauses for elegant, swinging readings of "Violets for Your Furs" and "Sweet Lorraine", Saft's nine originals plot a well-shaped journey through immersive listening. This is a throwback album, not a checklist of certain types of tunes but an end-to-end climb-off involving tension, with the cool exhale of "There's a Lull in My Life" to bring the listener back to level ground at the conclusion.

Solo A Genova has a similar compelling musical narrative and is superb through and through. The concept of the recital was Saft wanting to present his ideas about America through music, mostly pop songs from Bob Dylan, Stevie Wonder, Joni Mitchell and others—including a completely abstracted take on ZZ Top's "Sharp Dressed Man"—plus some modern standards and originals.

There's only Saft's musical voice and his contemplation of the material, not an iota of indulgence in imitative styles. This reveals Saft's pianism. He favors full, resonant chords and also has an easy way with stride and swing and phrases melodies like a singer; his playing of Mitchell's "Blue Motel Room"

has a gorgeous shape and array of dynamics.

The album is entrancing from start to finish, the kind of record that persuades you to stop what you're doing and listen, even long before the haunting serendipity of Saft's arrangement of Charles Ives' "The Housatonic at Stockbridge". The way he captures the music's unique mix of memories and textures, all the while carrying the vocal line in his right hand, is quite moving, matched only by the comforting ache of the penultimate "Blue In Green". *Solo A Genova* looks to be one of the leading releases of 2018.

For more information, visit rarenoiserecords.com. Saft is at *The Stone* at *The New School* Aug. 30th. See Calendar.



China Caribe
Dongfeng Liu (ZOHO)
 by Tom Greenland

Cultural collisions (unlike their automotive counterparts) are often constructive. Consider the collision of West African and Cuban musics, or the resultant AfroCuban styles with jazz, or, more to the point here, Latin jazz with Chinese traditions. Enter pianist Dongfeng Liu, who makes his debut recording with *China Caribe*, a meshing and mashing up of cultural strangers.

The album's core sound arises from Liu's quartet with electric fretless bassist John Benitez (whose presence is so strong he can almost be considered a co-leader), conguero/percussionist Roberto Quintero and trap drummer Francis Benitez, all fluent in what is broadly termed Latin jazz. It should be noted, however, that Liu's arranging and playing style is a few degrees cooler than caliente: where others would plunge forward, he prefers to explore open spaces and textures, unfolding his improvisations in a more episodic fashion. His compositions, while relying on fairly standard harmonic formulas, employ interesting rhythmic twists: "Mirror Image" has smoothly modulating subdivisions of three while "I Know You" and "Moopy" both alternate between five- and seven-beat sections.

Much of the album's originality derives from its inclusion of unusual timbres, sonic thumbprints not often associated with the Latin jazz mainstream. For example, "In the Clouds" begins with Benitez' slap-pop bass buoyed by the keening drone of a morin khuur (horsehead fiddle), followed by whistling melodies derived from throat-sung overtones, the latter two performed by the Haggai Band, a Mongolian rock group; later, the song's main theme is heard on Min Xiao-Fen's ruan (four-stringed lute). The latter is also featured on another traditional Chinese lute, the pipa, on "Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon", an adapted folk melody, and "Arcadia", where she supplies the characteristic shakes, bends, rakes and fast scrambling figures idiomatic to the instrument. Feifei Yang's wispy trembling erhu (spike fiddle) handles the melody of "Fisherman's Song at Dusk", another programmatic folk song.

The inclusion of all of these distinctive timbres evokes an expansive global soundscape, somewhere between China and Cuba, the sounds, like smells, triggering specific memories, formerly incongruous, now strangely simpatico.

For more information, visit zohomusic.com. This project is at *ShapeShifter Lab* Aug. 17th. See Calendar.

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SAT 8/4	NICK HEMPTON ITAI KRISS & GATO GORDO	8:30PM 10:30PM
TUE 8/7	CUBA CALIENTE FT. GERARDO CONTINO & LOS HABANEROS	8:30PM
WED 8/8	PASQUALE GRASSO SOLO GUITAR DJANGO JAM	8:30PM 10:30PM
THR 8/9	DIDA PELLE & TAL RONEN JOHN THE MARTYR	8:30PM 10:30PM
FRI 8/10	KEN FOWSER CHINO PONS	8:30PM 10:30PM
SAT 8/11	DAVID GIBSON QUINTET FLEUR SEULE LATIN BIG BAND	8:30PM 10:30PM
TUE 8/14	ZACCAI CURTIS QUARTET	8:30PM
WED 8/15	MIKE SAILORS BIG BAND	10:30PM
THR 8/16	MARTINA DASILVA & STEVE FEIFKE MARK WHITFIELD	8:30PM 10:30PM
FRI 8/17	KEN FOWSER MICHAEL ARENELLA DREAMLAND ORCHESTRA	8:30PM 10:30PM
SAT 8/18	AKIKO TSURUGA ORGAN TRIO "KING" SOLOMON HICKS	8:30PM 10:30PM
TUE 8/21	CUBA CALIENTE FT. GERARDO CONTINO & LOS HABANEROS	8:30PM 10:30PM
WED 8/22	PASQUALE GRASSO SOLO GUITAR DJANGO JAM	8:30PM 10:30PM
THR 8/23	SHARP RADWAY & CYNTHIA SORIANO CHRIS TURNER	8:30PM 10:30PM
FRI 8/24	KEN FOWSER JERRY WELDON QUINTET	8:30PM 10:30PM
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