



The Jamie Saft Quartet *Blue Dream*

RARENOISE 095

★★★★

Jamie Saft's discography reads like a self-consciously eclectic answer to "What kind of music do you like?" Heavy metal, opera, thrash, something called "doom jazz." That kind of versatility reflects his involvement in the intellectual, sometimes overly academic world of contemporaries like John Zorn and Bill Laswell. But on the keyboardist's latest record, *Blue Dream*, his

quartet plays the blues.

Performing within a genre that dearly values authenticity, his chameleonic catalog looks almost like a liability. However, it's clear from the outset of the RareNoise release: This confident, immensely creative group pays loving tribute to the genre and, at the same time, manages to contribute something new. It's a heady achievement.

The opening track, "Vessels," evokes spiritual jazz of the late '60s and sets the tone for *Blue Dream* nice and early. Drummer Nasheet Waits works out layered, swirling rhythms that build in intensity, as saxophonist Bill McHenry keeps pace, propelling the song toward its inevitable, wailing conclusion. Saft anchors the players with bluesy, harmonically dense block chords that fall heavily on the beat.

The captivating theme and impressive soloing of "Vessels" foreshadows the album's effective strategy, its title describing the inflexibility that makes it successful. Saft and his quartet don't just play the blues, they occupy them. While some compositions hew close to well-known songs from the '60s and '70s, they never sound contrived, *Blue Dream* drawing inspiration and originality from well-worn paths.

Bassist Bradley Christopher Jones opens "Words And Deeds" with a bass line that sounds almost identical to what's beneath the title track of Alice Coltrane's 1971 *Journey In Satchidananda*. The homage locates one of the album's most important reference points for the blues. On it, Saft patiently unfolds one of his best solos. The harmonies he plucks out of thin air are expressive, melancholy; McHenry jumps in later, screaming in tongues.

Elsewhere, the quartet covers Frank Sinatra's "Violets For Your Furs" and "There's A Lull In My Life," made famous by Ella Fitzgerald. They play both with heartfelt conviction, eschewing experimentation for fidelity to the spirit of those well-regarded standards.

While indebted to the blues, *Blue Dream* skirts being restrained by the music's history. Buoyed by Saft's ability to compose songs that sound like ageless standards, these restlessly creative players manage to build an exciting, original sound within the boundaries of a centenarian genre. —Andrew Jones

Blue Dream: Vessels; Equanimity; Sword's Water; Violets For Your Furs; Blue Dream; Infinite Compassion; Sweet Lorraine; Walls; Decamping; Words And Deeds; Mysterious Arrangements; There's A Lull In My Life. (55:25)

Personnel: Jamie Saft, piano; Bill McHenry, tenor saxophone; Bradley Christopher Jones, bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

Ordering info: rarenoiserecords.com

Voro Garcia Quintet *Live At Jamboree*

SEDAJAZZ 066

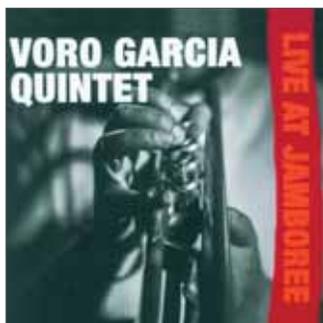
★★★★½

The best quintets can make a listener forget what they're hearing. And the magic of a well-wrought performance can offer a sound that's so symbiotic, it's almost impossible to differentiate one instrument from another. The Voro Garcia Quintet just about reaches these heights on *Live At Jamboree*.

The album counts a few notable reunions, too. It was recorded in Garcia's native Spain during the 2017 MasiMas Jazz Festival in Barcelona. At the performance, the trumpeter is joined by drummer Jorge Rossy, who contributed to Garcia's 2011 *Roommates*, and bassist Dee Jay Foster, who played on 2008's *Vorocity*. Tenor saxophonist Chris Cheek and guitarist Peter Bernstein round out the ensemble.

The execution of the bandleader's compositions is especially easy to appreciate, Garcia's inspiration almost tangible in song titles. "Salto A Vaccio" translates to "Jumping Into The Void," and the song incorporates a bluesy feel during solos, bringing an existential quality to the record. The album peaks on "Ibiza Griz," a beautiful and despondent offering. It's as if the quintet's sharing a hushed secret with the listener, one that we're lucky to hear.

—Alma Schofield



A Pride Of Lions *The Bridge Sessions*

ACROSS THE BRIDGES 08

★★★★½

Despite its prideful name, this stellar Gallic-American quintet—brainchild of writer, promoter and cross-cultural diplomat Alexander Pierrepont—consists of non-egocentric cats. So, this live improvised set from January 2016 at Le Petit Fauchaux in Tours, France, is collective sound art, sans showboating.

The interpolation of Chad Taylor's mbira, an instrument simple and powerful, subtly dominates "Track 02." After sinister arco communications between Guillaume Séguron and Joshua Abrams, Taylor's thumb piano enters, a lowing tenor like the foghorn of a forlorn ghost ship. On "Track 04," his performance elicits screeches from Joe McPhee's pocket trumpet, later heard squishing like a dry-erase marker or sucking as much air in as out. Daunik Lazro's tenor is full-throated and declamatory, erupting with split-tone altissimo squawks and snapping low notes before Abrams' guembri (a three-stringed North African lute) augurs a reflective clearing in the soundscape. Lazro is evidently an Albert Ayler devotee—a glimpse of Ayler's "Mothers" is acknowledged on "Track 05." His playing—sporadically aggressive, outrageous and poetic—conveys ritualistic fervor, and McPhee, 76 at the time of this recording, is more strategic than ever, never over-playing, just waiting for the simmer to boil.

—Michael Jackson



Live At Jamboree: A La Luz; Bones; Salto Al Vacio; Ibiza Griz; Hell Glammer; Samba Pa Tri; Stablements. (68:45)

Personnel: Voro Garcia, trumpet, flugelhorn; Chris Cheek, tenor saxophone; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Dee Jay Foster, bass; Jorge Rossy, drums.

Ordering info: sedajazz.es

The Bridge Sessions: Track 01; Track 02; Track 03; Track 04; Track 05. (48:57)

Personnel: Daunik Lazro, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone; Joe McPhee, tenor saxophone, pocket trumpet; Joshua Abrams, bass, guembri; Guillaume Séguron, bass; Chad Taylor, drums, mbira.

Ordering info: acrossthebridges.org