

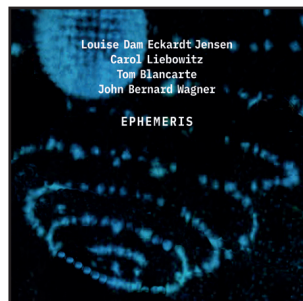
Perpetual Void
Marta Sánchez (Intakt)
by Matty Bannond

In the city that never sleeps, Marta Sánchez could not sleep—for two and a half years. Acute insomnia arrived in late 2020 when her mother died unexpectedly. Nighttime hours crawled past in grief’s twisting vacuum. The Brooklyn-based pianist from Madrid now captures the character of those desolate months in *Perpetual Void*, her fifth album as leader. Sánchez’ recordings as leader have most frequently featured a pair of saxophonists, but *Perpetual Void* is a piano trio with Chris Tordini (bass) and Savannah Harris (drums). Eleven original tracks showcase the compositional intricacy and emotional candor that mark her previous albums. But there’s more free playing here, with deeper interactions and higher tolerance for turmoil.

The album includes the topsy-turvy “29B”, with its right-hand runs leading listeners around a maze of Escher-like staircases. Subdued bass and percussion try to cool the fire, but Sánchez refuses to listen until a late drop-out where Tordini is permitted to speak uninterrupted. Reviews of Sánchez’ work often overlook the spirit of fun that shines through her playing. Look no further than “3:30 am”, with its restless foot-tapping rhythm, or the contrasting “The End of That Period” and its quieter and gentler flow, shadows burned away and corners of the mouth trending upwards. Harris’ overall rhythmic contributions are an asset to the album, and especially stand out on each of these tracks. Two short solo pieces (improvised after the group session) serve as ballad preludes and Sánchez displays an assertive approach to the keyboard that sounds closer to a firmly plucked harp than piano. Both feature cyclical passages that evoke a trapped feeling, but there’s a more pronounced sense of exhaustion and loneliness here.

Perpetual Void may deal with dark subject matter, but it also audibly offers pockets of brilliant light too. Without saxophones monopolizing center stage, listeners will get to better observe and appreciate Sánchez, unobscured. The pianist takes big risks while exerting rigorous control—and her expressive powers never sleep.

For more info visit intaktrec.ch. Sanchez’ album release concert is at The Jazz Gallery Apr. 27. See Calendar.



Ephemera
Ephemera (Marsken)
by Brad Cohan

For those wise to the often-intersecting musical paths of Danish-American saxophonist Louise Dam Eckhardt Jensen and Texas-born bassist Tom Blancarte (partners in life and creativity) know they’ve operated with a

noisy, free-for-all mindset. The two lead the bonkers no wave-meets-metal foursome Sweet Banditry, while as The Home of Easy Credit, the pair team up for electronics-manipulated space jazz. And that’s naming only two of their many adventurous projects. *Ephemera* can now be added to that list.

For those expecting the kind of skronky wallop the husband and wife are known for, say in Sweet Banditry, you may be in for a bit of a shock. The band’s eponymously titled album finds the Denmark-based Jensen and Blancarte joining forces with New York City-based Carol Liebowitz (piano, vocals) and John Bernard Wagner (drums), forming a cooperative free-improvisational quartet which leans more towards control over chaos. Upon its inception in 2010, the group first made their mark as an occasional live outfit locally in NYC. Fourteen long years in the making, their debut recording has finally arrived and it’s a blissed-out masterpiece of 21st century improvised music.

One can argue that in this day and age, improvised recordings are a dime a dozen. That may be true, but *Ephemera* is the real deal. The set’s five marathon-length pieces showcase four distinct voices centralizing each of their strengths and emerging as one single, laser-focused unit. Blancarte and Wagner provided the bass and drums on *Thousandfold* (2009) in the Adam Caine Trio, so a rhythmic kinship was already in place and that deep-seated rapport continues here—albeit with a more delicate restraint. The two combine as the pulsating heart who guide each dazzling and spirited improvisation. With relative ease, this quartet conjures a meditative and healing aura. Sure, there are plenty of moments that are busy but there’s something about Jensen’s warm tone and entrancing patterns on alto and soprano saxophones and flute, and Liebowitz’ lilting piano lines, that provide beauty and catharsis throughout the set. “Gnomon”, the stunning 17-minute-long opening track, is worth the price alone: frenetic yet breezy, it features Jensen and Liebowitz in call-and-response mode. One long passage finds Jensen blowing gorgeously thoughtful musings on alto and flute while Liebowitz reacts with dizzying and melodic phrases.

What is gleaned from the dynamic listening experience *Ephemera* provides is Jensen, Liebowitz, Blancarte and Wagner are musical kindred spirits complete with an overtly expressive language only they seemingly share.

For more info visit marsken.com. *Ephemera*’s album release concert is at Ibeam Brooklyn Apr. 6. See Calendar.



The Contrapuntist
Clovis Nicolas (Sunnyside)
by Anna Steegmann

If you love classical music and jazz, this Grammy-nominated album is for you. A jazz bassist from his early beginnings, Clovis Nicolas’ style is steeped in post-bop and modern jazz. At Juilliard, he studied bass with Ron Carter and classical composition and counterpoint with Kendall Briggs. He has since become a valued first-call musician in his native France as well as New York and has recorded with some of the best in the jazz world.

In *The Contrapuntist*, Nicolas has assembled a stellar group of collaborators in both genres for this, his fourth album. Adding a unique beauty and emotion to “Le Miroir” (five movements he wrote for string quartet), he invited the Ulysses String Quartet (who

play historical instruments from the 17th and 18th centuries): Christina Bouey (first violin), Rhiannon Banerdt (second violin), Colin Brookes (viola) and Grace Ho (cello). The movements begin and end with an andante (moderately slow), two scherzos (fast) and a slow adagio in the middle. The first movement borrows the chord progression favored by Dizzy Gillespie; Nicolas discovered that he wrote his strongest melodies in eighth notes, much like bebop tunes. The adagio stands out for its melancholy tone, beautiful melody and gorgeous ending. And the upbeat “Scherzo II” reveals many unexpected, delightful twists and turns.

Daniel Yvinec, the album’s producer, suggested adding jazz elements to the recording, and so Nicolas wrote new variations for a jazz quartet, inviting Jeremy Pelt (trumpet), Sullivan Fortner (piano) and Bill Stewart (drums). The jazz tracks mirror the structure of the multi-movement “Le Miroir”, as the bassist takes over some cello parts, establishes the heartbeat and rhythm and creates a warm, reverberating sound. Pelt improvises on the melody played by the first violin, inviting complexity. Fortner adds flow and spontaneity, while Stewart imparts a solid, often tender foundation. The energetic and playful “Parallels to Andante Moderato” allows for bouncing bass rhythms and sparkling piano runs, while the trumpeter provides a lovely melody and improvisation. “Shadow of Adagio” is the most compelling track: gorgeous and warm in tone, it contains a beautiful section for Fortner, responding to the bassist, before Pelt comes in and takes the lead.

The Contrapuntist’s classical and jazz versions are sure to equally captivate listeners.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. The Clovis Nicolas Quartet is at Smalls Apr. 9. See Calendar.

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