

The Cube (with Tom Harrell) Dado Moroni (Abeat)
The Crystal Paperweight Ann Malcolm (Abeat)
Live at Sweet Rhythm
Richard Sussman Quintet (Origin)
 by Tom Greenland

With over 25 critically acclaimed albums in his 40-plus-year career, trumpeter Tom Harrell is also a gifted sideman, augmenting projects with his outstanding compositions and boisterously beautiful improvisations.

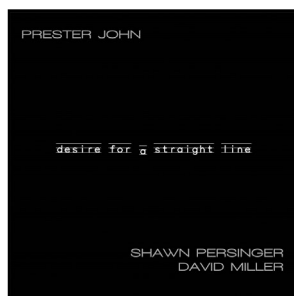
On *The Cube* he joins a fine team of Italian musicians led by pianist Dado Moroni, contributing two tunes and a series of subtly dazzling solos. Harrell's songs, here and on the discs reviewed below, sound both unpredictable and inevitable, marrying catchy (if not quite whistle-able) melodies to effortlessly complex harmonies. His improvising too is song-like, elaborating extended statements based on and unified by key ideas to create off-the-cuff 'compositions'. Excellent examples occur on his originals ("Tom's Soul", "Streets") and the title track. The liner notes indicate Harrell doubles on trumpet and flugelhorn on all but two tracks, but his ice-cool tone on each instrument makes it difficult to distinguish between them. Moroni & Co. (Andrea

Dulbecco: vibes, marimba; Riccardo Fioravanti: bass; Enzo Zirilli and Stefano Bagnoli: drums/percussion) are a cohesive combo, spurred by a two-drum lineup, the leader's delicate touch and Dulbecco's bell-like mallets, bringing enthusiasm and humor to their music-making.

Harrell makes an even bigger contribution to singer/lyricist/saxophonist Ann Malcolm's *The Crystal Paperweight*, providing more than half of the tunes and all of the arrangements. Malcolm's lyrics for Harrell's "Childhood", "Give", "The Red Cat", "Before Down" and the title track nimbly 'hug' the melodic contours but don't quite achieve the poetic prosody of, say, Jon Hendricks' best work. Harrell scripts effective supporting roles for the classical strings, placing them in opposition to or in sympathy with the other instruments, adding alto flute on two tracks. On his arrangement of Bill Evans' "My Bells", the measured melody resembles a medieval chant punctuated with Baroque counterpoint whereas the disco beat of Michael Jackson's "Remember the Time" is sparsely orchestrated with constantly shifting background figures. Malcolm is a competent, unpretentious artist who delivers her lyrics (and sax solos) with tasteful understatement.

In seeming contrast to his mellow tone, Harrell possesses formidable chops, combining rigorous intellect with effervescent energy. This more extroverted facet of his personality is in evidence on Richard Sussman Quintet's *Live at Sweet Rhythm*, a two-night reunion of the original cast of *Free Fall*, the pianist's little-known 1978 release, which has proved an enduring favorite among musicians. With only few albums to his name, Sussman is nevertheless a first-rate composer, a primary reason for the original album's success. Another reason is aptly redemonstrated on the new release (recorded in 2003): a stellar lineup of first-magnitude players led by Harrell and Boston-based tenor titan Jerry Bergonzi, neither of whom had lost their sparkle in the intervening 25 years. Witness Harrell's focused fast-and-high playing over "Waiting", his sleight-of-hand phrasing over "What's New" and his stuttered fluency on "Free Fall" or Bergonzi's rich but raw tenor on "Mary's Song", where short, sharp-edged licks fan into long-burning flames. Sussman shines brightest on "Free Fall", offering a multi-tiered solo bolstered by the tensile-strength timekeeping of bassist Mike Richmond and drummer Jeff Williams.

For more information, visit abeatrecords.com and origin-records.com. Harrell is at Village Vanguard Nov. 23rd-28th. See Calendar.



Desire for a Straight Line
 Prester John (Innova)
 by Terrell Holmes

Guitarist Shawn Persinger and mandolinist David Miller, who perform together under the name Prester John, have an eclectic sound, playing music filled with eloquence, invention and a touch of mischief. Like a bottle of wine with a vibrant bouquet, their album *Desire for a Straight Line* contains an intriguing blend of elements from folk, rock, classical and jazz.

Throughout guitar and mandolin are in perfect balance, with both players displaying impressive chops in either leading or supporting roles, whatever the genre. The duo jumps out of the box with "Tall Tale

Pathology", one of their typical folk-rock hybrids containing nimble call and response and high-energy soloing. The dramatic "The Library Thief" pulsates with tension as Persinger and Miller's voices blend, separate, whisper and shout. The duo races through the excellent Middle Eastern-themed "Plain of Jars", Persinger playing with splendid depth of tone, Miller's mandolin matching his bold colors and textures. The wondrously creative "Song for Henry Threadgill to Sing" displays their humorous bent within a free jazz context. Their interplay crackles with tonality on "Making Circles"; Persinger and Miller have more wonderful dialogue as they trade off of each other in the best jazz tradition. "Wender's", like "Plain of Jars", has a Middle Eastern pedigree, Miller's intense plucking giving this song a dimension of urgency. "Piano and Violin Duet No. 1" and "Marionette Waltz in Four" are delightful tongue-in-cheek takes on classical themes. "Duckling" is a strutting counterpoint to the brooding "Saints", which actually sounds closer to a waltz than the aforementioned "Marionette". While all of the tunes are involving, the album's signature song might be "The Favored Colour of Light", a stirring, rock-inflected epic in the making.

Prester John's distinct yet similar voices create a stimulating intertextuality. There isn't an uninteresting moment on *Desire for a Straight Line*; even the handful of snapshot interludes is compelling. Persinger and Miller have created music that's entertaining, unique and always involving and it's a pleasure listening to these fabulously inventive musicians travel to so many wonderful places.

For information, visit innova.mu. This duo is at Cornelia Street Café Nov. 22nd and Café Orwell Nov. 26th. See Calendar.

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