

Turtle Island Quartet

Island Prayers

AZICA

★★★★★

It's difficult not to think of the prolific, Grammy-winning Turtle Island Quartet as one of the few atop the music industry mountain with nothing to prove. Yet *Island Prayers* offers just the opposite: a scintillating revival of TIQ's original vision, performing artistic director/composer/founding violinist David Balakrishnan's works alongside those of jazz and American roots composers. On *Island Prayers* that includes Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, Rhiannon Giddens and Terence Blanchard.

Each piece bears intensity, delicacy and flexibility as needed, in order to reflect their unique stories and musical structures. The jovial bending of the melody in Blanchard's "Turtle Trajectory" underscores how well he knows what TIQ can do without missing a beat. The unified swells and recessions of chords in Balakrishnan's "Atonement" heighten the desire for reconnection. Tate's "Little Loksi" embraces TIQ's individual sonic strengths to impart the depths of panic and collective joy. *Island Prayers* thrills from every angle. It's as though the group realized their mountaintop isn't the end; that it goes higher, to even more musical interconnection. For this renewed journey, *Island Prayers* is a brilliant and inspired first step.

—Kira Grunenberg

Island Prayers: Island Prayers — I. Dialogue, II. Atonement, III. Redemption; Pompey Ran Away, Little Loksi; Turtle Trajectory, Darkness Dreaming, Groove in the Louvre. (55:49)

Personnel: Gabe Terracciano, violin; David Balakrishnan, violin, artistic director; Benjamin von Gutzeit, viola; Naseem Alatrash, cello.

Ordering info: turtleislandquartet.com



Matthew Stevens

Matthew Stevens

CANDID

★★★★★

A distinctive voice among guitarists of his generation, Toronto-born Matthew Stevens makes a strong and lasting impression on his seventh release. Stevens demonstrates a chameleonic approach to his instrument as he deftly shifts from clean-toned, rhythmically precise attack on the driving, Afrobeat-flavored "Take Heart," featuring vibraphonist Joel Ross, to slight effects on the dreamy, Weather Report-ish "Hazy," to his pure steel string acoustic guitar sound on "SLMS," a haunting number featuring Corey King's ethereal falsetto vocals. Stevens emulates a Metheny-esque, delay-soaked sound on "1000 Times," then dials up some distortion lines on the meditative "Born Of Silence" before affecting a folk troubadour posture on the intimate "Alberta." He closes with a hip, neo-soul stance on "The Air Is Thick."

Perhaps the most soulful and moving track here is a stunning recreation of Sonny Sharrock's mesmerizing "Who Does She Hope To Be?" from 1991's *Ask The Ages*. With fellow Sharrock fan Jeff Parker on board as second guitar, and underscored by Carrington's alluring brushwork, this one ranks as one of Stevens' most depthful statements to date.

—Bill Milkowski

Matthew Stevens: Take Heart; Hazy (intro); Hazy; SLMS; 1000 Times; Edgewood; Who Does She Hope To Be?; Born of Silence; Alberta; The Air Is Thick. (45:00)

Personnel: Matthew Stevens, guitar; Chris Fishman, keyboard; Josh Johnson, alto saxophone; Kyle Miles, bass; Eric Doob, drums, percussion; Joel Ross, vibraphone (1, 10), Paulo Stanaro, percussion (1); Terri Lyne Carrington, drums (5, 7); Corey King (4), Anna B Savage (9), vocals; Jeff Parker, guitar (6, 7); Dylan Day, slide guitar (2, 3, 6, 8); Rich Hinman, pedal steel guitar (2, 3).

Ordering info: candidrecords.com



Quinsin Nachoff

Patterns From Nature

WHIRLWIND

★★★★½

Quinsin Nachoff's *Patterns From Nature* is a mashup of "physics and film meets classical and jazz." The project was developed in conjunction with four filmmakers and physicist Stephen Morris, whose research involves pattern formation and where processes in nature and musical structure can meet. This blend of complex spaces feels overwhelming. However, there's a sweet spot that encourages repeated exploration of the album's creative and instrumental foundations.

Nachoff's focus on the idea of "architecture built for freedom" imparts a sense of direction to his 45-minute suite and the jagged harmonies of his 2017 saxophone concerto "Winding Tessellations." It's helpful to ground oneself in this "motto," as both works have stretches of amorphous musicality. On the title track, the scattered melodies feel manageable, even clever. Conversely, the disjointed instrumentals are much stronger on "Winding Tessellations," making it especially challenging to find a melodic anchor to grasp. *Patterns From Nature* does well to inspire reconsideration of sound, melody and the natural world but the music does call for some preemptive context to appreciate the work.

—Kira Grunenberg

Patterns From Nature: Patterns From Nature — I. Branches, II. Flow, III. Cracks, IV. Ripples; Winding Tessellations — I. Winding Paths, II. Convergence, III. Tessellations. (63:50)

Personnel: Quinsin Nachoff, tenor saxophone; J.C. Sanford, conductor; Roberta Michel, flute, piccolo, alto flute, bass flute; François Houle, clarinet; Sara Schoenbeck, bassoon; Tony Kadleck, trumpet; John Clark, French horn; Ryan Keberle, trombone; Aaron Edgcomb, percussion; Gene Hardy, musical saw; Matt Mitchell, piano; Carlo De Rosa, bass; Satoshi Takeishi, percussion; Molinari String Quartet: Olga Ranzenhofer, Antoine Bareil, violin; Frédéric Lambert, viola; Pierre-Alain Bouvrette, cello.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com



Peter Erskine

Peregrine

HARD WAG

★★★★½

One of the things non-musicians most often misunderstand about virtuosity is that it's not only about being able to play a million notes per second; it can also be about knowing how to land just a few perfectly placed notes to make a groove come alive.

That's precisely where *Peregrine* starts, thanks to the lean, lazy vamp that introduces Alan Pasqua's "Gumbo Time." As drummer Peter Erskine's choked hi-hat ticks quietly in the background, Pasqua's piano unfolds a lithe blues, recalling Keith Jarrett at his churchiest. Scott Colley's bass plays off the left hand, moving from busy accompaniment to actual solo, until Pasqua takes over, gradually reframing the tune from gospel to hard-bop to polytonal modernism and back, a progression so subtle and effortless you might not even notice it on first hearing. It's not so much "look at me!" as "IYKYK."

Because it all goes down so smoothly, it would be easy to mischaracterize the music on *Peregrine* as middlebrow and predictable. Listen closely, though, and it's a master class in improvisational efficiency. Not only does every note count, but so do the spaces around them, with Erskine lightly sketching the pulse while Pasqua and Colley find the most melodic path through each chord progression. If only every virtuoso showed off so subtly.

—J.D. Considine

Peregrine: Gumbo Time; Bop Be; On the Lake; God Only Knows; Poetry Man; Chillipso; Wichita Lineman; Leaving IA; Contemplation; David's Blues; Dear Chick. (61:00)

Personnel: Peter Erskine, drums; Alan Pasqua, piano, electric piano; Scott Colley, bass; Kate Lamont, vocals (5); Bob Sheppard, saxophone (5, 7); Brian Kilgore, percussion (5).

Ordering info: hardwagrecords.com

