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John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet
Composer's genre-blind music gently breaks new ground

By Mel Minter

Drummer/composer John Hollenbeck admits to being a "mixtape guy." As a kid, he'd raid his brother's record collection to create tapes featuring a wide range of music—from symphonic works to jazz to R&B and back again.



John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet

"That was just a natural way that I enjoyed hearing music," he says. "I guess in a way you could say that I would get bored easily with one kind of thing."

A Guggenheim Fellowship recipient, Hollenbeck has translated that appetite for mixing genres into a highly personal approach to composition that appropriates whatever it needs whenever it needs it—from rigorous, notated classical structures that draw on influences as diverse as Aaron Copland and Steve Reich to freewheeling jazz improvisation to the melodic hooks and funky-up rhythms of popular music.

Texturally rich, rhythmically compelling and continually shape-shifting, Hollenbeck's inviting music has found a perfect interpreter over the last 10 years in the Claudia Quintet—with Hollenbeck on percussion, Drew Gress on bass, Matt Moran on vibraphone, Ted Reichman on accordion and Chris Speed on clarinet/tenor sax.



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Versatile Instrumentation

As unusual as it is, the quintet's instrumentation gives it a long reach across genres, as documented on its latest release, *For* (Cuneiform Records). The clarinet, for example, can invoke swing or the tribal dance of

klezmer. The accordion can stand in for an organ (as it does on "August 5th, 2006," titled after the composer's wedding day), and it can instantly summon an Old World feel. The vibraphone not only functions as a melodically adept percussive instrument, but when it is bowed, as on "This Too Shall Pass," it lends an otherworldly vibe to the proceedings.

At times, the quintet sounds not so much like five players as it does a single, multifaceted player—the result of Hollenbeck's skillful management of the various timbres. "The reed from the accordion and the clarinet reed are blending right together sometimes. And then in ways that I maybe don't understand acoustically, the accordion and the vibraphone can really get together, and then somehow the vibraphone and clarinet—just that combination. I try to take advantage of that compositionally all the time, as much as I can, to create one sound that is kind of a hybrid of what those instruments can do separately."

New and Accessible

By design, Hollenbeck's compositions follow no paradigm. "I'm always gravitating to something that is new, something that I've never heard before," he says.

He also varies his compositional approach. "I'm very conscious of the process of composition [and try] to never use the same process. ... That gives me a very good chance of coming up with something that's new and unique for each piece. ... I try to, at some point, let the piece tell me how it wants to be worked on."

Whatever the method, Hollenbeck always includes the listener. Even though highly complex and often challenging to play, his music consistently invites the ear—whether it's with a catchy melody, an irresistible rhythm or a mesmerizing minimalist pattern.

"I am thinking about access points and how different people access music [in different ways]," he says. "I'm very conscious of writing music that exists on different levels and can be accessed on different levels. Hopefully, what this does is encourage repeated listenings."

Fair warning: You may be compelled to listen repeatedly.

John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet appears at the Outpost Performance Space on Thursday, Nov. 6, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets \$17/\$12 members and students, available in advance at the Outpost (210 Yale SE, 268-0044).

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Music to Your Ears

By Laura Marrich
Brian May Is an Astrophysicist

It shocks the rock and scientific communities to no end, but it's true. Besides originating the butter-smooth guitar licks that were as central to Queen's success as Freddie Mercury's vocal cords and unitards, Brian May is an astrophysicist. He had graduated with a bachelor of science (with honors) in physics at Imperial College London and was halfway through a PhD program (area of concentration: the velocity of space dust) when Queen blasted into a solar system all its own. May put down his thesis in favor of a guitar and didn't return to science for another three decades. He finally picked up that doctorate in May 2008. Wikipedia says an asteroid was promptly named after him: 52665 Brianmay.

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The Bellemah Bus

Next stop: CD release party

By Jessica Cassyle Carr

A year ago this month, Billy Belmont—namesake and auteur of defunct rock band The Belmont—and Dan Dinning formed the lounge, acoustic, indie operation known as Bellemah. Like barnacles on a ship (or perhaps goatheads on a shoe), the band amassed seven members, then lost four, due mostly to time



Eric Williams

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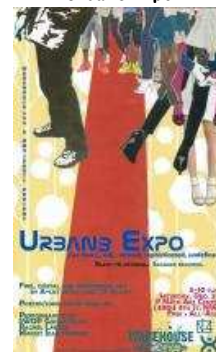
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Boston Phoenix

Clint Eastwood Finds Salvation in 'Gran Torino'

Above all, Gran Torino feels like a summation of everything he represents as a filmmaker and a movie star, and perhaps also a farewell....
L.A. Weekly

Critic-o-Meter: Grading, or Degrading?

On Friday, theater critic-mavens Isaac Butler and Rob Weinert-Kendt officially launched their ambitious labor of love, Critic-o-Meter, a blog ratings system inspired directly by Rotten...
L.A. Weekly

constraints. Now only Billy, Dan and Noelan Ramirez remain. Some days ago over coffee, Billy, Dan and I sat down for a chat. We laughed. We cried. We talked about Tom Waits. Below is a sample of our time together.

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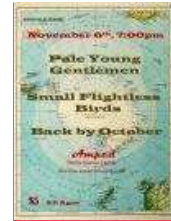
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Flyer on the Wall

Ice Cold

Pale Young Gentlemen (Madison, Wis.), Small Flightless Birds and Back by October are cooler than cool this Thursday, Nov. 6, at Amped Performance Center (4200 Lomas NE). The 7 p.m. show is \$5 and all-ages. (LM)

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Also by Mel Minter



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Guitarist Stephane Wrembel takes Gypsy jazz on a wild and wonderful ride at the third annual New Mexico Django Fest

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Chiara Civello

Italian songbird opens the Outpost's 20th season

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Vocalist brings soulful stylings to the Outpost

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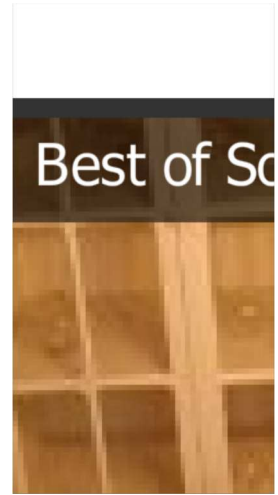
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