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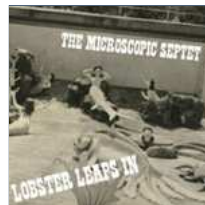
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Lobster Leaps In  
 The Microscopic Septet | Cuneiform Records (2008)

By [Troy Collins](#)

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"New York's Most Famous Unknown Band" is back after years of inactivity, with a new album every bit as rollicking and ebullient as those made in its prime. Although the band's genesis can be traced back to 1980, the Microscopic Septet was poised for the big time in the early nineties, but their big break never came. The band finally disbanded in 1992, four years after recording their fourth and final album, *Beauty Based on Science* (Stash, 1988), with a cache of unrecorded tunes still in their playbook. In 2006, Cuneiform Records reissued their complete output on two double disc sets, *History of the Micros, Vol. 1—Seven Men in Neckties* and *History of the Micros, Vol. 2—Surrealistic Swing*, which inspired a limited reunion tour that sowed the seeds for this session.



With a back catalog of 180 unrecorded tunes and renewed interest in their oeuvre, co-band leader and soprano saxophonist Phillip Johnston decided it was time for the Micros to record some of these undocumented gems, which rank up there with the band's classic material. Drawing inspiration from the Swing Era, they also incorporate myriad styles and genres into their mercurial structures, including calypso, free jazz, polka, R&B, rumba, tango, and countless others.

The reunited septet is remarkably tight considering their lengthy hiatus. Regular performers at the old Knitting Factory, two decades have passed since their last recording session together, yet they have lost none of their enthusiasm or wily sense of humor. Pianist Joel Forrester, bassist David Hofstra, drummer Richard Dworkin, and the expressive saxophone front-line of Phillip Johnston, Don Davis, Mike Hashim, and Dave Sewelson (soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone, respectively) have all maintained active careers as leaders and sidemen, which lends this session a carefree sensibility.

The tunes unfold like a retrospective of sorts, with a zany blend of styles and genres, all rolled up in a bustling undercurrent of good humor. Wayne Horvitz's "Night Train Express" gets the party started with a jumping chorus of swaggering blues riffing and crackling snare accents, while the title track is a spry noir-inflected swinger filled with descending angles and coiling rhythmic turns. Sporadic caterwauling from the horns speckles "Money Money

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Money" and "The Big Squeeze" with the dissonant skronk of free jazz without ever going completely out. "Life's Other Mystery" struts with R&B bluster and "Almost Right" burns with boppish urgency while "Disconcerto For Donnie" and "Got Lucky" dabble in exotic elements—lilting Caribbean rhythms on the former, dizzying tango on the later.

Packed with soaring melodies, jubilant riffs, joyous shout choruses, infectious rhythms and incisive solos, *Lobster Leaps In* is the most fun one can have listening to contemporary jazz. Considering their recent spate of activity, this is probably not the last we've heard from the Microscopic Septet, and that dear reader, is a good thing.

[The Microscopic Septet at All About Jazz.](#)  
Visit [The Microscopic Septet](#) on the web.

Track listing: Night Train Express; Disconcerto For Donnie; Lobster Leaps In; Got Lucky; Lies; Life's Other Mystery; Almost Right; Money, Money, Money; Lt. Cassawary; Twilight Time Zone; The Big Squeeze.

Personnel: Phillip Johnston: soprano saxophone; Don Davis: alto saxophone; Mike Hashim: tenor saxophone; Dave Sewelson: baritone saxophone; Joel Forrester: piano; David Hofstra: bass; Richard Dworkin: drums.

Style: [Modern Jazz](#)  
Published: November 06, 2008

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Troy has also written for *Cadence*, *Bagatellen*, *One Final Note* and *Junkmedia*. [More about Troy...](#)

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