

PAIRED REVIEW: Josh Johnson + Morgan Guerin

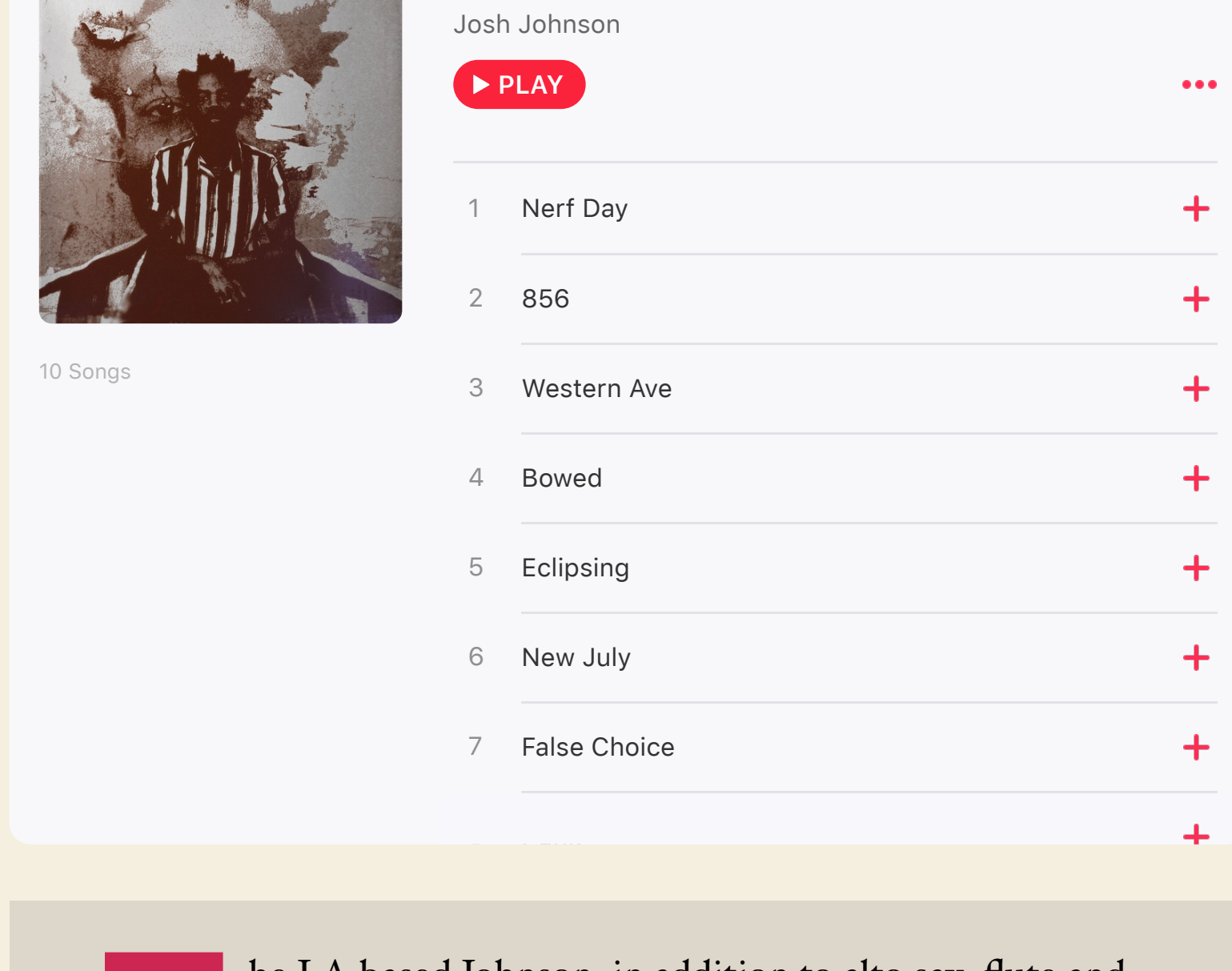
... they're both saxophonists whose multi-instrumental skills give their music textural variety and depth, something they've highlighted in their work as leaders

By Editor January 6, 2021 Sticky post

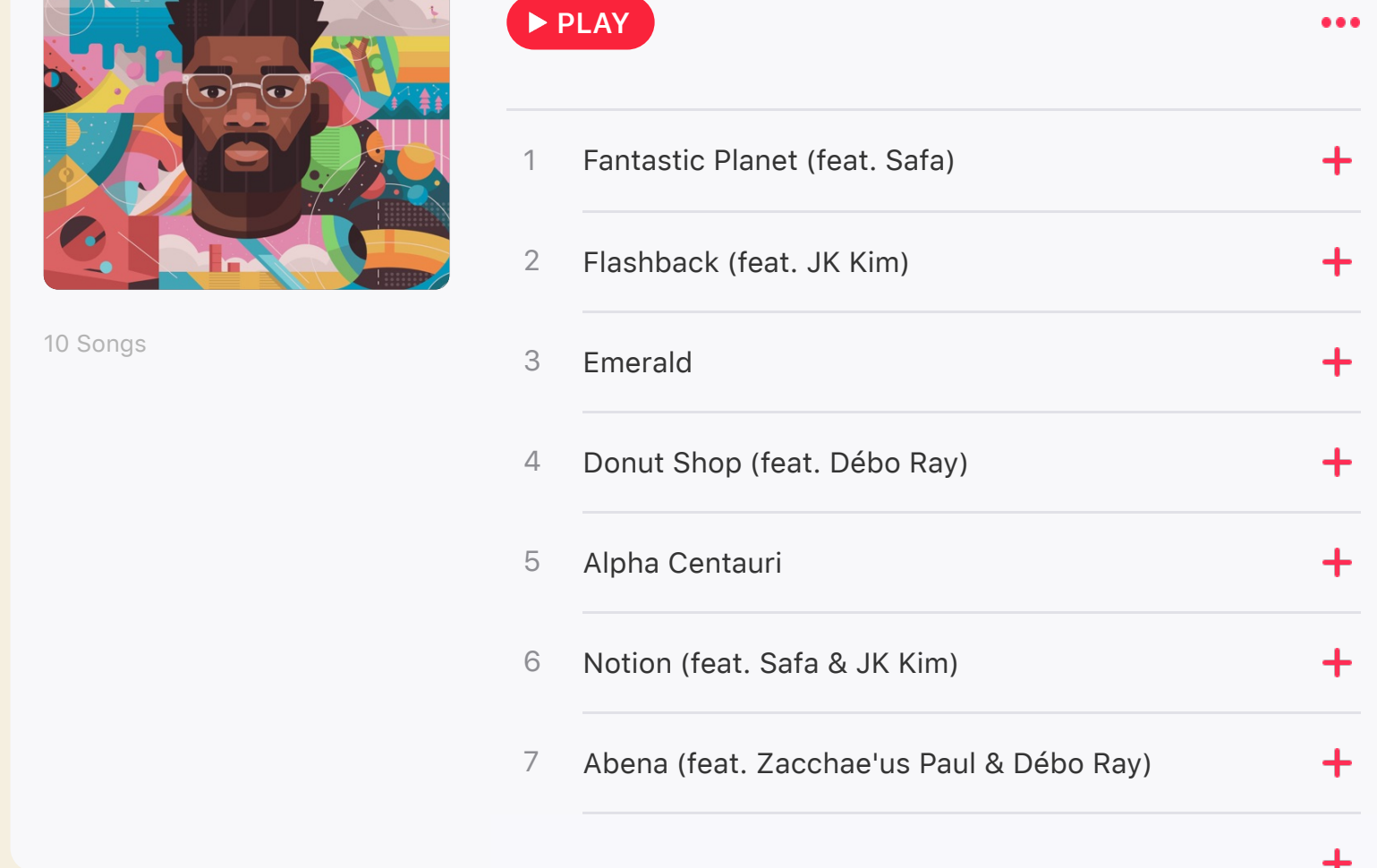


Josh Johnson, *Freedom Exercise* (Northern Spy)
Morgan Guerin, *The Saga III* (Self-Released)

Josh Johnson and Morgan Guerin share much in common: they're both saxophonists whose multi-instrumental skills give their music textural variety and depth, something they've highlighted in their work as leaders.



The LA-based Johnson, in addition to alto sax, flute and bass clarinet, plays an array of synths, keyboards, mellotron, sampler and more on his 2020 debut *Freedom Exercise*. He's joined by Gregory Uhlmann on guitar, Anna Butters on electric bass and Aaron Steele on drums and percussion for a spirited all-original set that blurs boundaries between jazz quartet and electronic aesthetics.



Mr. Guerin, a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Atlanta now based in New York, brings a likeminded sensibility to *The Saga III*, the third in a series of albums he began in 2016. Much like Mr. Johnson, he plays saxophones, flute and bass clarinet, but also keyboards, Moog and Arp synths as well as electric bass, guitar and drums (his first instrument). Unlike Mr. Johnson's full-band effort, Mr. Guerin's is more of a one-man affair, although a host of talented guests (drummer JK Kim, guitarist Matthew Stevens, vocalist Débo Ray and more) make significant contributions.

"... they're both saxophonists whose multi-instrumental skills give their music textural variety and depth, something they've highlighted in their work as leaders."

— Jazz Artistry Now

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Guerin come to their respective projects with a range of high-level experience: Mr. Johnson with the likes of Marquis Hill, Jeff Parker's New Breed, Makaya McCraven and more, Mr. Guerin with Terri Lyne Carrington, Esperanza Spalding, Kassa Overall and Tyshawn Sorey. Their music carries the influences of modern jazz and the avant-garde, hip-hop, neo-soul and electronic music, all coexisting in soundscapes of their own imagining.



Freedom Exercise | Josh Johnson

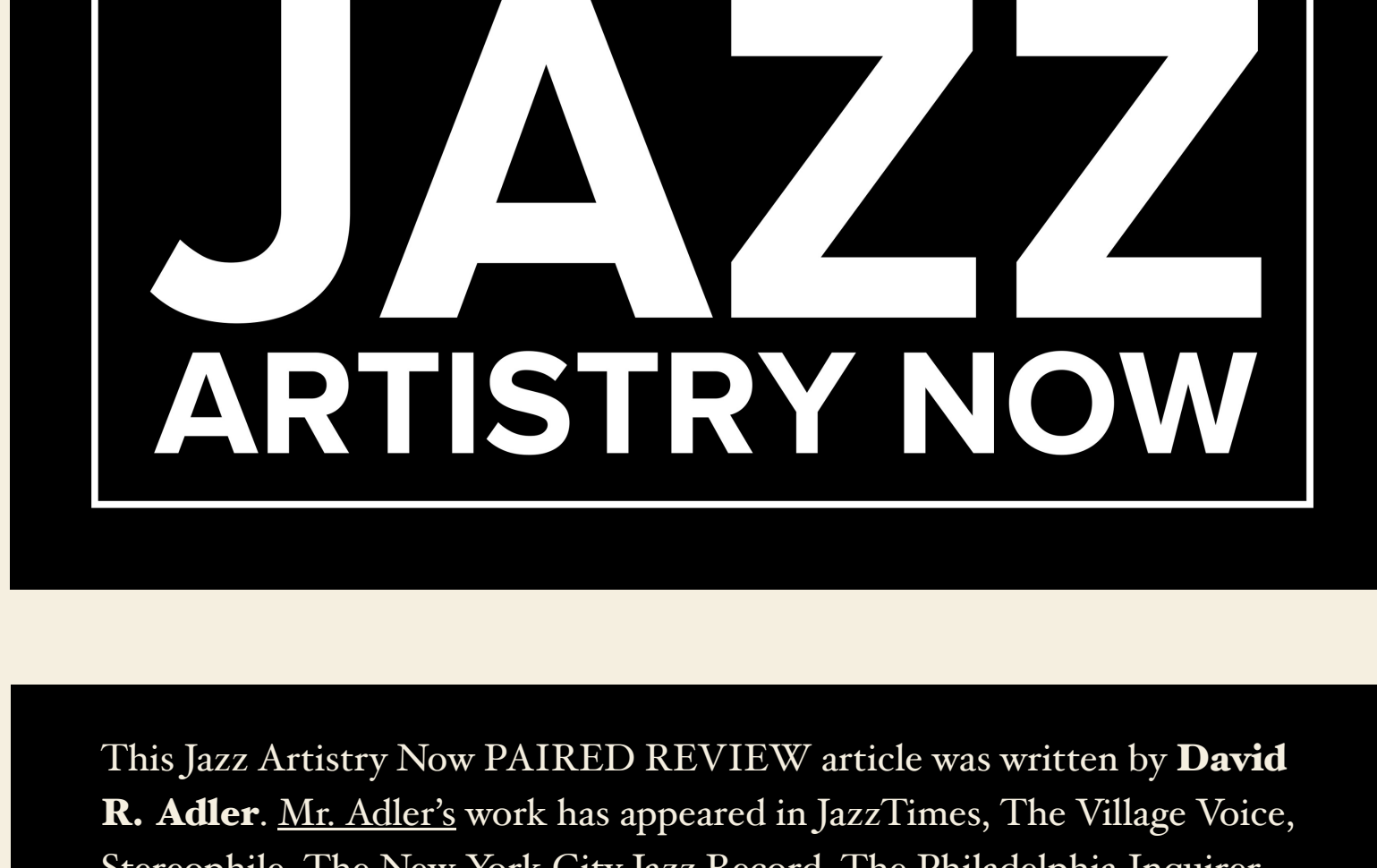
Mr. Johnson's album has a raw, rock-ish edge thanks in part to Uhlmann's crunchy sound, and distinct hints of Afrobeat from the powerful rhythm section on tunes like "Western Ave." There's also an interesting structure to *Freedom Exercise* as a whole: the even-numbered tracks are somewhat abstract, free-floating or static-groove inventions with an experimental flavor, shorter in length than the more fleshed-out compositions.



The Saga III | Morgan Guerin

Instrumental solos are more prominent on Mr. Johnson's recording record than on Mr. Guerin's, making *Freedom Exercise* a compelling showcase for Mr. Johnson's sinuous and harmonically advanced alto playing. *The Saga III* has a more ethereal, dream-like atmosphere where sound, groove and otherworldly mystery are the main thing, with saxophone one element among many.

But together, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Guerin display similar tendencies as they engage with the zeitgeist on their own bold terms.



This Jazz Artistry Now PAIRED REVIEW article was written by **David R. Adler**. Mr. Adler's work has appeared in *Jazz Times*, *The Village Voice*, *Stereophile*, *The New York City Jazz Record*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Philadelphia Weekly*, *Down Beat*, *Time Out New York*, *City Arts*, *Jazziz*, *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *Slate*, *The Forward*, *The Sondheim Review*, *Fairmont Magazine* (Canada), *La Tempestad* (Mexico), *GEO* (Germany), *New Music Box*, *All Music Guide*, *Global Rhythm*, *Signal to Noise*, *Coda*, *Jewish Currents* and more. He is happy to be a contributor to *Jazz Artistry Now*.



Mr. Adler

Aaron Steele on drums and percussion, Anna Butters on electric bass and Aaron Steele on drums and percussion, avant-garde, bass clarinet, Baton Rouge, Best of Jazz, drummer JK Kim, electronic music, Esperanza Spalding, flute, *Freedom Exercise* (Northern Spy), Gregory Uhlmann on guitar, guitarist Matthew Stevens, hip-hop, Jazz Artistry Now, Jeff Parker's New Breed, Josh Johnson, Kassa Overall, Los Angeles, Makaya McCraven, Marquis Hill, modern jazz, Moog and Arp synths, Morgan Guerin, neo-soul, New York City, Review, saxophones, Terri Lyne Carrington, *The Saga III* (Self-Released), Tyshawn Sorey, vocalist Débo Ray

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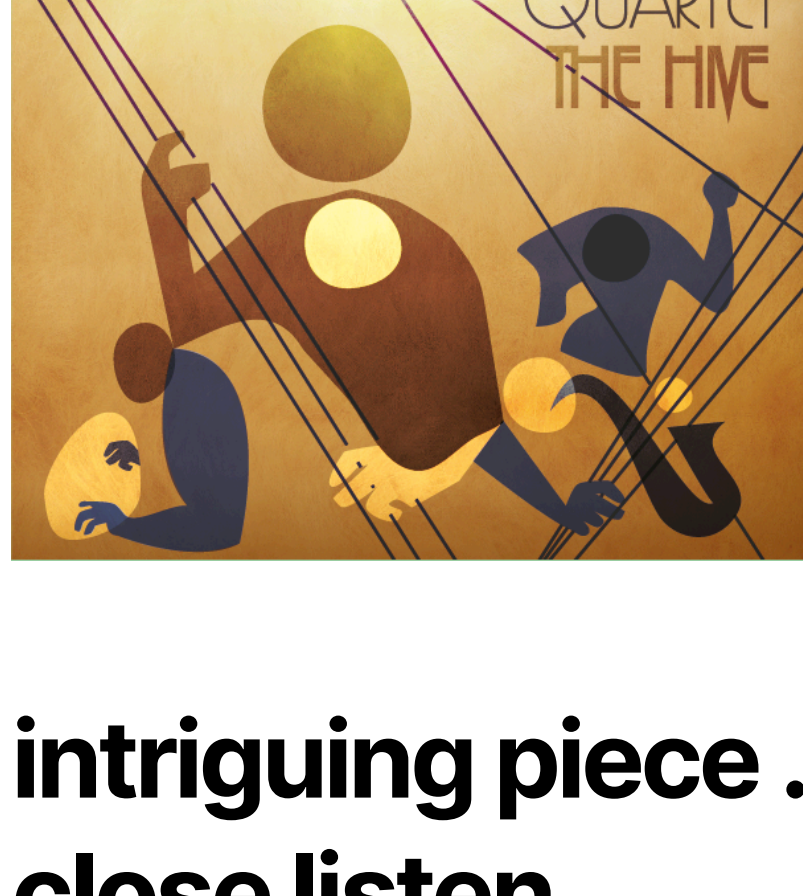
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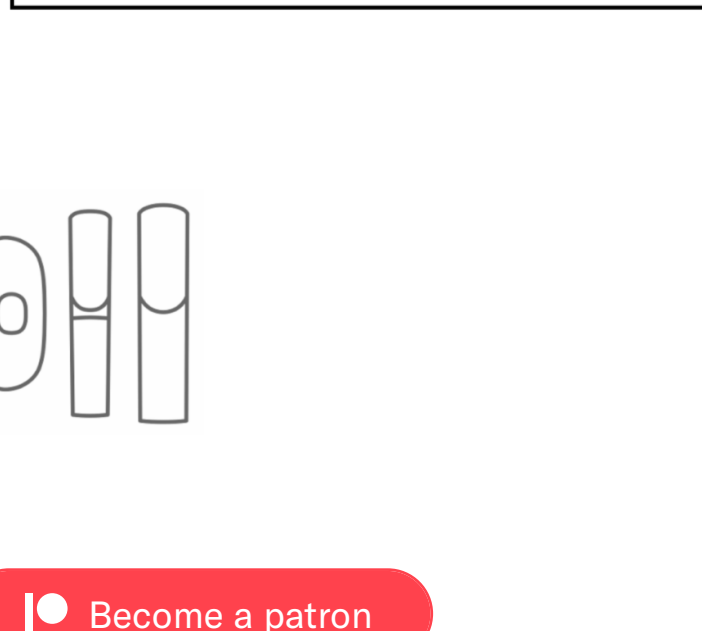
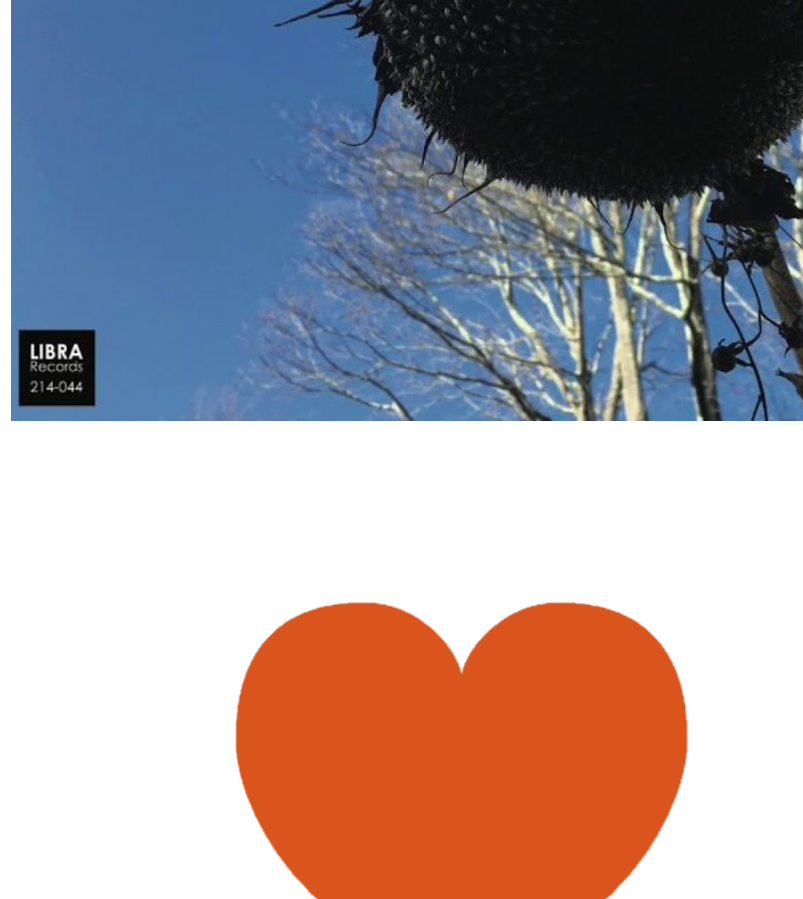
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