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1. MINOR LEAPS 5:31
2. UNTIL THE SUN SUBMITS 5:50
3. NEW FOR NOW 6:32
4. PACIFIC 6:47
5. MICROCOSM FOR TWO 6:36
6. HOBOKEN 7:04
7. PERU 5:04
8. UNEARTH 5:46

MUSICIANS

Jonathan Kreisberg • Guitars
Scott Wendholt • Trumpet
Aaron Goldberg • Piano, Fender Rhodes Electric Piano
Matt Penman • Bass
Anthony Pinciotti • Drums

ENHANCED CD FEATURES

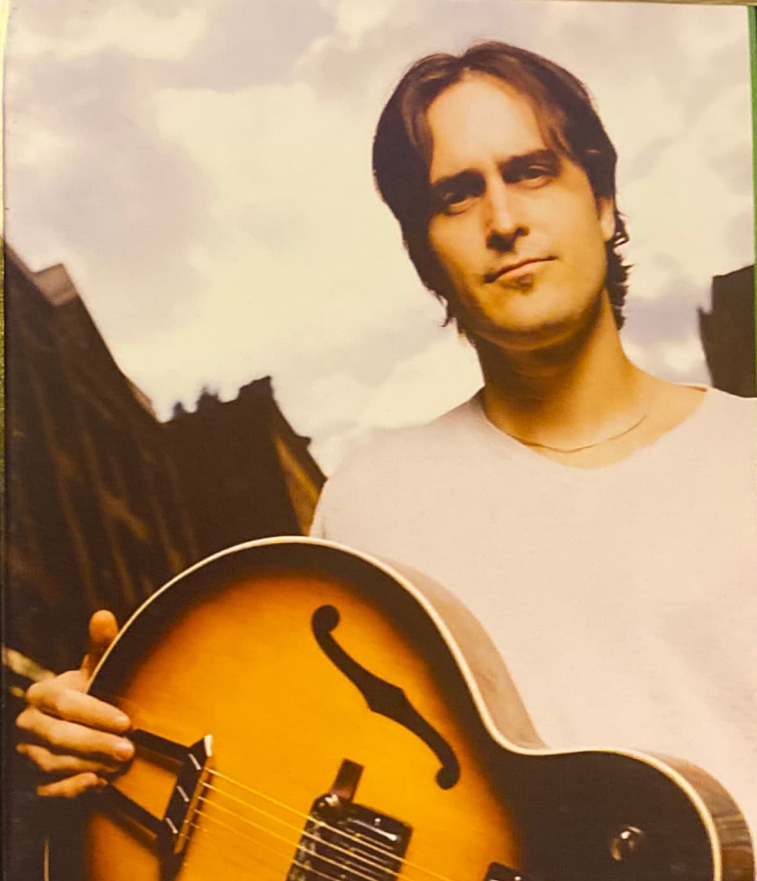
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Jonathan Kreisberg **UNEARTH**

MB09812CD



Jonathan Kreisberg
UNEARTH

jonathan kreisberg UNEARTH

Maybe it's something in the water. Spend almost any night in New York City and you'll hear some of the world's best young jazz musicians, diverse in style and aesthetic outlook but united in their passion, and often in their near-scandalous technical proficiency. Go to Fat Cat, Smalls or Cornelia Street Café and you can sometimes hear the very quintet featured on this recording, led by Jonathan Kreisberg, who is among the most promising of a new class of jazz guitarists.

Fluidity is one thing. But expressiveness, compositional depth, the ability to connect with an audience—these factors distinguish the great from the good, and to my ears, they're all present in Jonathan Kreisberg. The evidence includes not just this album, but also Kreisberg's self-released debut, *Trioing*, and his two outings for Criss Cross to date, *Nine Stories Wide* and *New For Now*. Kreisberg doesn't just reveal an intimidating grasp of the post-bop vernacular; he comments on, expands and colors it. His lightning runs and advanced wide-interval concepts aren't there to impress and entertain (although they do that, too). Rather, they serve to test the outer limits of modern jazz's infinitely pliable code. That Kreisberg can reach these summits with such melodic focus is an even rarer gift.

Kreisberg's previous recordings feature him with various trios. With *Unearth*, we get a different view of his musicianship. "A clean tone is much more important to me when I'm playing trio," he says. "The clarity of the chords allows me to act more like a piano. In the quintet, the harmony is already there, so I can experiment with more sounds [such as distortion] and not worry about the clarity of the voicings. There are also certain limitations to the guitar, so the quintet allows me to flush out arrangements and hear multiple voices, more parts. And the feeling with a quintet is a little more extroverted. I've always felt the quintet could play really big halls, where a trio would feel more nude."

Unearth is also Kreisberg's first wholly original program, and it gains in sonic freshness from the union of guitar, trumpet and Fender Rhodes electric piano. Piloted by Aaron Goldberg (who was Wynton Marsalis's pick to replace Eric Lewis in the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra), the unwieldy Rhodes performs to its full potential. "The only way I can describe Aaron is 'solid,'" says Kreisberg. "He takes risks but his feel is always rock-solid. He's also a masterful colorist, making the soloists and band simply sound better." Trumpeter Scott Wendholt, currently a leading light of the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, "has a warm melodic sense that seems a little uncommon among his contemporaries," Kreisberg notes. "I've always loved the trumpet, and there are already so many records with

guitar and tenor sax. I wanted a different sound."

Then there's the rhythm team. Kreisberg calls bassist Matt Penman "my right-hand man. He's got great drive, great musicianship. I'm attracted to bass players who have a deeper understanding of harmony." Drummer Anthony Pinciotti is Kreisberg's oldest friend on the session. "He played on my senior recital at the University of Miami," Kreisberg recalls. "He's a natural, organic type of player. I love his sound concept."

Unearth begins with a bang: the attention-grabbing "Minor Leaps," which renders John Coltrane's famous "Giant Steps" progression in minor cadences. A beautiful triadic release starts the song and breaks up the solo form. "This is a tune I'll play until they pry the guitar from my fingers in the old-age home," says Kreisberg. "Though it feels restrictive at first, the possibilities of linear ideas are endlessly inspiring."

The lyrical "Until the Sun Submits" is the oldest song on the CD. "I was lucky enough to visit Rio on a tour a while ago," Kreisberg says. "I saw so much beauty and elation in close quarters with hardship and sadness. It really explained the poignancy I'd heard in Brazilian music. Musically, the piece was inspired by João Gilberto, and it was originally for guitar and voice. I wanted to retain that same feel while going for something texturally different."

Kreisberg first recorded the quickly paced "New For Now" as the title track of his 2005 organ-trio release. Here, the quintet relishes the challenge of the tricky line, with across-the-bar syncopations occurring at strategic points in the 32-bar AAB form. "This is about being in the moment and wide awake to the challenges of improvisation—both in music and life," Kreisberg told journalist Russ Musto in the *New For Now* liner notes.

"Pacific" downshifts the tempo and provides a study in ensemble dynamics, with guitar and trumpet soaring in harmony toward a big crescendo. The opening motive is especially singable, and Kreisberg orchestrates it sparsely. "I wrote the initial melody on a plane above the Pacific Ocean," he recalls. "I had the idea to create a harmony and texture that would surge around the melody like a tempest. Anthony's rolling approach to the drums worked perfectly. When I hear it now, the foreshadowing of the tsunami disaster is kind of eerie."

"Microcosm for Two" finds Kreisberg summoning a gorgeous tone from a Collings acoustic guitar. "This tune was inspired by that funny yet perilous place two people in love can be disturbed enough to create together. I had been feeling a little stale on this and thought it might not make it on the record. So I decided to change it up and go with the acoustic guitar. Scott went with

the flugelhorn, and Aaron and I decided to improvise an intro. That was it, first take. It's interesting how little challenges can make a tune (or relationship) feel new again."

The mood of fragility lifts with "Hoboken," which Kreisberg calls "a freaked-out 16-bar blues." The dirty, snarling sound brings John Scofield to mind. "I'm guilty," Kreisberg laughs. "It's definitely a nod to Scofield, complete with harmonized flat 9ths and play-on-words title. When I first moved up to the New York area I played a weekly gig in Hoboken and had some slightly good/bad/funky experiences there. That's what inspired this tune."

"Peru" graces the Criss Cross recording as well, and it commemorates Kreisberg's first foreign gig as a leader. His tone here is particularly crisp and beautiful. The opening and closing chordal sequence is derived from the augmented scale—a good example of Kreisberg's ability to turn technical means into compelling musical ends. The cadences, he told Russ Musto, combine "the implications of 'classical' resolutions with a more modern jazz approach.... On an emotional level, it always feels very hopeful—like standing on the edge of new worlds. I hope to hang on to that feeling for a while."

Finally, "Unearth" is a web of esoteric lines and harmonies over an offbeat rhythm, all informed by a guiding tuneful-

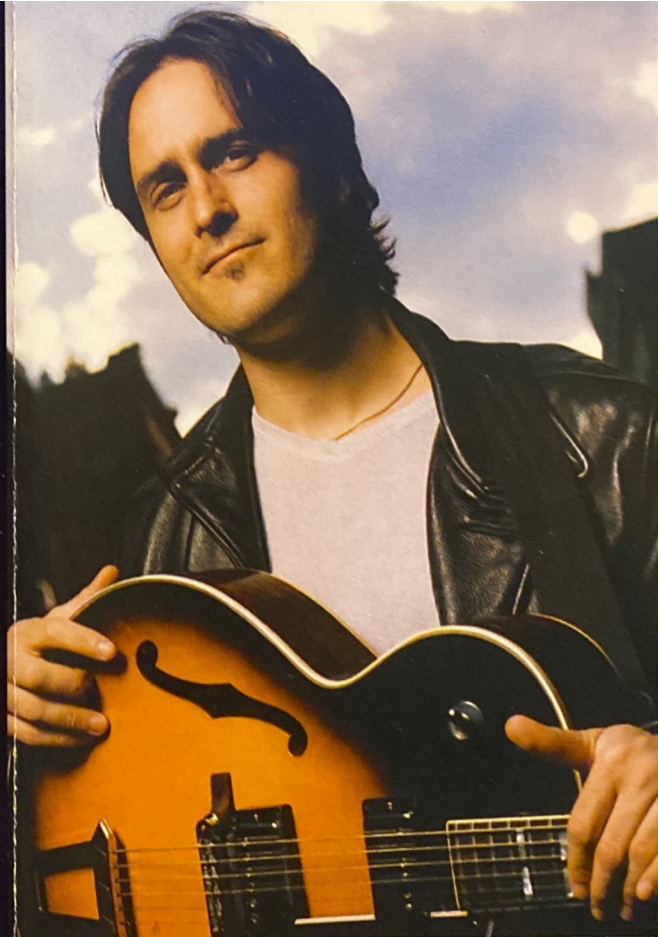
ness. "I've always found it easy to create something beautiful in a stock kind of way," Kreisberg observes, "and it's fairly easy to create darkness and dissonance, which is too easily greeted as innovation. But one of the greatest challenges lies in finding strange beauty. That's what I was aiming for, although I feel like I've just scratched the surface."

If this is just the surface, then Kreisberg's prospects in the coming years are exciting indeed.

—David Adler

David Adler writes for *Jazz Times* and other publications.

Cover photo by Jimmy Katz



jonathan kreisberg
UNEARTH