


# PENTASONIC OPUS 5

SEAMUS BLAKE  
ALEX SIPIAGIN  
DAVID KIKOSKI  
BORIS KOZLOV  
DONALD EDWARDS

 Criss Cross Jazz 1351



Criss 1351 CD

## PENTASONIC OPUS 5

1. **THE SABOTEUR**  
(D. Edwards) 6.28
2. **VIDELLES DREAMS**  
(A. Sipiagin) 7.46
3. **SIGN OF LIFE**  
(S. Blake) 8.12
4. **DUCKTONES**  
(D. Edwards) 8.14
5. **LITTLE DANCER**  
(A. Sipiagin) 8.48
6. **THREE DAYS OF MAYBE**  
(B. Kozlov) 5.47
7. **DANNY**  
(S. Blake) 9.05
8. **RED CLAY**  
(F. Hubbard) 7.29
9. **CHARLIE'S WIG**  
(C. Parker) 3.25

TOTAL TIME: 55.34

**SEAMUS BLAKE** tenor & soprano sax  
**ALEX SIPIAGIN** trumpet, fluegelhorn  
**DAVID KIKOSKI** piano, Fender Rhodes  
**BORIS KOZLOV** bass  
**DONALD EDWARDS** drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens  
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano  
Mixing: Michael Marciano  
Mastering: Michael Marciano  
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Photography: Govert Driessen  
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Criss Cross Jazz, Postbox 1214  
7500 BE Enschede, Holland  
info@crisscrossjazz.com  
www.crisscrossjazz.com

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## Pentasonic

Strictly speaking, the term **Pentasonic** doesn't exist, and yet it evokes something essential about the fiery jazz modernism of **Opus 5**, the leaderless quintet making its sophomore appearance here. To drummer **Donald Edwards**, a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, "pentasonic" simply means "the sound of five guys," and that definition works well. It's the collaborative vision of Edwards, trumpeter **Alex Sipiagin** and bassist **Boris Kozlov** (both Russian-born), tenor saxophonist **Seamus Blake** (born in England, raised in Vancouver) and pianist **David Kikoski** (of New Jersey). Call it a "supergroup" if you wish, for these are major artists with impressive track records as leaders and sidemen. Many of their respective projects have found a home on **Criss Cross**, so it was only fitting for the label to release the co-led band's debut, **Introducing Opus 5** (Criss 1339), in September 2011.

Following up with Pentasonic, Opus 5 again puts original music by the band's members in the forefront. Two compelling cover arrangements bring unexpected angles to session. Moody and ethereal, rhythmically skewed and unpredictable, always burning — this is music that lives up to the name of everyone involved.

"Cooperative bands are harder to organize but the musical payoff can be tremendous," says Blake. "With many composers contributing, the scope can be broader." Edwards, reflecting on his own compositional

voice, offers: "I played classical marimba for 13 years, and that enabled me to understand harmony as a drummer, and to be able to write for varied instruments. I also played in the gospel church for years. There are different sides to me, and to everyone in this band, and I think that comes through on the record."

Sipiagin notes that while Opus 5's members all happen to be veterans of the *Mingus Big Band*, "that isn't the main reason for the group forming. We've all played together in various settings — for example, Seamus, Dave and Boris have played on at least six or seven of my solo recordings. Also, we were all a part of Dave's quintet recording *The Five* (DIW, 2002). We understand and trust each other musically." Kikoski, for his part, calls Opus 5 a "perfect band": "The arrangements are getting deeper, the compositions are getting deeper, as each one of us grows individually. It's like a marriage — hopefully the longer it lasts, the deeper the connection becomes."

"As far as the origins of the band," Kozlov jokes, "they lie in the airport bar when Seamus and Alex had a few drinks and decided to create this collective." The bassist adds that he and Edwards "have played with probably 20 different bands as a rhythm section," including the unit led by trombonist Conrad Herwig on **A Jones for Bones Tones** (Criss 1297). According to Edwards, who came up with the name Opus 5, "the beautiful thing is that everyone is culturally from somewhere totally different, yet we play well together and maintain



an unselfish spirit. Playing with these guys feels like walking."

Musing on the strengths of his colleagues, Blake breaks it down: "Alex: beautiful sound and incredible power. His composing to me has an intensity found in Woody Shaw and Dave Holland. Tricky, complex, dark, engaging and exciting. Donald: a master of the drums, with a huge range in style. I feel the gumbo in his beat. Bounce, agility and finesse. Boris: the anchor. As dependable a person as he is a musician. A virtuoso yet an empathetic listener. You can hear the warmth of his soul in his bass. David: incredible virtuoso again. A deep understanding of other genres and an ability to fuse that with jazz. He is one of the most exciting pianists I know, with the energy of an active volcano. It's hard to keep up with the sheer magnitude of his playing."

On the previous Opus 5 disc Edwards offered a beautiful slow waltz, *Asami's Playland*, but this time he contributes two of the more aggressive numbers. The set begins with ***The Saboteur***, which Edwards recalls writing "while I was experimenting with the *abequa* Latin rhythm. I was practicing and I discovered there were multiple sides to it, so I wanted to write a tune based on the rhythm in order to make musical sense of it. It's basically in five, but it's camouflaged. I noticed in the studio that everybody had his own way of counting it, and I like that idea. But realizing that the listener might not grasp where the beat is right away, I thought I'd start off with a simple

jubilant melody that they could latch on to."

Edwards steps forward later in the program with the funk-infused and highly complex ***Ducktones***, which gets a certain dreamlike quality from Kikoski's Fender Rhodes. (Acoustic piano leads off the solo rotation, however.) "On both my tunes," Edwards clarifies, "each soloist is featured on a different section in the music — kind of like a documentary film that features a different narrator in each scene, but talking about the same subject."

The first of two Sipiagin entries, ***Videlles Dreams***, is a companion to *Videlles*, which the trumpeter recorded on his 2011 release **Destinations Unknown** (Criss 1336). "I wrote this while traveling on the road with Boris and Donald throughout Europe," says Sipiagin, "totally keeping in mind their sounds." Kozlov begins with a weighty unaccompanied improvisation, arriving at the tune's central ostinato theme as he sets up a darting contrapuntal entrance from the horns. Blake leads off the solos, yet the piece unfolds as a fine feature for the whole band. The second Sipiagin piece, ***Little Dancer***, is mellower, darker, another vehicle for Kikoski's slinky and hypnotic Rhodes. "It's my oldest composition," Alex notes, "and it's gone through a lot of different versions. It's been arranged for big band, quartet, octet, with vocals and so forth, but this time I created a new arrangement for Opus 5."

Seamus Blake's ***Sign of Life*** has a sci-fi inspiration, as the composer explains: "A small spaceship lands on a planet in a galaxy next door. The door opens. The first few steps in an unknown world. Caution mixed with amazement and wonder." Blake plays soprano, voicing a layered legato melody with Sipiagin before taking the first solo over an undulating 10-beat feel. "We all somehow brought in songs that are in five, or have aspects of five in them," Edwards says. "That wasn't conscious, but we realized it when we got to rehearsal, and we just kept playing around with that all day."

***Danny***, Blake's second offering, is a slow waltz with surprising twists in the latter half of the form. As the piece grows more intense, the band navigates a series of dramatic pauses and bluesy hits punctuated by Edwards' drums — the furthest thing from a conventional ballad device. "It's a song for my father," Blake reveals. "It has a gospel flavor — I wanted to capture the feeling of what a father feels for a son who has grown up and left home."

Kozlov weighs in with the hard-swinging original ***Three Days of Maybe*** and an arresting 5/4 arrangement of the Freddie Hubbard classic ***Red Clay***. The former begins with an abrupt horn shout, eases into walking swing time and suddenly transitions to a much slower tempo. The paces picks up again, however, until a subtle cue before Blake's solo sends the tune into furious overdrive, only to slow down again in time for the ending. "I wanted to play something in three

different tempos," Kozlov says, "with everybody playing on all of the tempos. The title refers to waiting for something — you don't know what comes and when it comes, and in what shape or form it comes, so you wait. It's about expectations." Does ***Three Days of Maybe*** also refer to the three different tempos? Kozlov suppresses a laugh. "Maybe."

The ***Red Clay*** arrangement was unveiled on a Japanese tour with Edwards and Blake in November 2010. Kozlov conceived it on electric bass, the instrument Ron Carter played on Hubbard's original 1970 version (with Herbie Hancock on Rhodes). This is one of the best-known themes of the CTI era, steeped in funk and groove, with electric and acoustic sonorities interwoven. It's an aesthetic that Opus 5 has made its own, albeit with striking departures: extended vamp sections (under Kikoski's Rhodes solo in particular), an outro coda marked by intricate figures and feel changes. Seamus and Donald remembered the arrangement fondly and suggested it would be an ideal fit for ***Pentasonic***.

On the other hand, Opus 5 can reach back to the bebop era and close the album with ***Charlie's Wig***, based on the chord changes to *When I Grow Too Old to Dream*. Charlie Parker recorded this obscurity in December 1947 with himself, Miles Davis and J.J. Johnson in the front line. Kikoski, who brought in this arrangement, originally intended it for Haynes's 2001 album *Birds of a Feather*. "Roy didn't want to



mess with it in the studio," the pianist recalls. "It's interesting because it has a three-bar intro, kind of a weird form." Turning the unison horn melody on its head, Kikoski voices it instead for piano and arco bass. It's a vibrant take, proof of Opus 5's ability to play straight down the middle and still unleash its creative energies. As Edwards puts it: "Jazz is a big umbrella, and we wanted to showcase the now."

David R. Adler

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