

GAUCHAIS REACTION

(The Art of Subconscious Mimicry) 12:14

THE TWELVE- FOOT MAN

Part 1 5:44

Part 2 9:12

THE EPITAPH

9:06



CNM038

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Jerry Sabatini, trumpet Eric Hofbauer, guitar Anthony Levy, bass & synth Dylan Jack, drums

THE TALE OF THE TWELVE-FOOT MAN

Dylan Jack Quartet

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THE MUSIC OF THE DYLAN JACK QUARTET is sufficiently robust and malleable that a change of instrumentation doesn't alter the group's core identity — in fact, it reveals new facets. Jack released *Diagrams*, the quartet's debut, in 2017, with Todd Brunel on clarinet, bass clarinet and soprano saxophone. On *The Tale of the Twelve-Foot Man*, the group returns with trumpeter Jerry Sabatini instead as the featured horn. Guitarist Eric Hofbauer and bassist Anthony Leva remain on board, joining the drummer-composer-leader in a set that is once again bristling with rhythmic intelligence and rich in dynamic contrast and ebb and flow.

"The music is not easy," Jack says, "but Jerry came in and gave it the respect it deserved. He has a great sound and is a master with mutes. I let him make his own decisions in terms of sounds — I wanted him to make the music as personal to him as he could. That's the great thing with this band: although it's under my name it's everyone's band. Everyone has a voice."

Among its many virtues, the Dylan Jack Quartet also has a way of saying a great deal within the limits of a fairly concise program. *Diagrams* included five compositions; *The Tale of the Twelve-Foot Man* offers three (or four, if you separate the two parts of the title piece). The opening "Gauchais Reaction," as Jack explains in his own notes, concerns the psychological phenomenon of subconscious mimicry, which in jazz and improvised music connotes band chemistry on the deepest level — four players speaking the same language without trying hard. The piece opens with drums, Jack musing abstractly

before the band enters and Leva establishes a powerful presence with his bow. The trumpet is muted, Hofbauer's guitar close-miked with a tactile intimacy. When Leva switches to pizzicato the piece begins to groove, at a floating yet perceptible tempo. Sabatini and Hofbauer alternate in the spotlight, with short composed breaks signaling unexpected transitions to duo, trio and full quartet interplay.

"The Twelve-Foot Man" might be termed conscience, or subjectivity, that looming and unshakable presence of the self: sometimes a hindrance, sometimes simply an existential fact. Parts I & II of this piece evoke the Man's presence in differing ways, but they share a reliance on darting and intricate unison melodies and driving rhythms, with a certain open-ended swing energy in the solos. The meters shift frequently here in a seamless way, with melodies and figures changing measure to measure from 12/16 to 9/16 to 7/16, or from 7/4 to 5/8 to 6/4. "My use of mixed meter is definitely inspired by phrasing," Jack explains. "At first I usually write phrases without bar lines and sometimes no strict rhythm or note values, just stemless noteheads. And a 'trademark' of mine is using bars of 3/4 or 2/4 at the end of phrases. Often a 4/4 bar to end a phrase leaves too much space to my liking. Like birds chirping or a train riding by, there is no strict meter to life, and I like to write with that level of freedom."

Part II of "The Twelve-Foot Man" begins with over two minutes of guitar-drum duet, recalling the sound of *Remains of Echoes*, Hofbauer and Jack's stirring 2019 duo effort for Creative Nation. "Eric and I have the same rhythmic vocabulary," Jack declares, and you can hear it, whether in the most precisely notated patterns or in the most abstract, out-of-tempo sonic musings. Hofbauer and Leva have a duo project as well, captured on the inspired electro-acoustic *Book of Fire*, the second installment in the guitarist's Wu

Xing or Five Agents series (following up *Book of Water*). Sabatini, who played on *Book of Water* as well as numerous releases by the Eric Hofbauer Quintet, comes to this album with overlapping associations as well, shoring up the feeling of a community of players on a shared mission.

On "The Epitaph" we reach the point where the Twelve-Foot Man dies or is somehow transcended. Jack's melodic source material for the A section is the Seikilos Epitaph, the oldest-known piece of notated music, an ancient Greek melody carved into a cylindrical stele in the first or second century AD. Leva performs the haunting melody on sintir, the bass lute used in the Gnawa culture of Morocco and Algeria. "The juxtaposition of Eric's string attack and Tony's sintir is wonderful," Jack says, and the same is certainly true of the rubato sintir/drum dialogue heard at the outset.

According to Jack, the words of the Seikilos Epitaph translate roughly as:

*While you live, shine
Have no grief at all
Life only exists for a short while
And time demands his due.*

"I heard that melody throughout my undergrad and graduate career in Western music history classes," Jack recalls, "and I've never been able to get it out of my head. I can listen to it on a loop for hours." But rather than do this, Jack departs at letter B into a new theme, inspired loosely by the first, stated by trumpet with wah-wah inflection that harks back to Ellington's Cotton Club period. "The melodic content is such a great jumping-off point for improvisation and interaction," Jack notes, and indeed this is what

occurs after the themes are stated and Leva switches from sintir back to the bass. No mixed meters or knotty unison lines here: this is open improvisation with minimal or no prescribed harmony, laying bare the quartet's dynamic control and unerring knack for pacing and breath.

Leva takes up sintir again in the final minute, playing the melody at letter A one last time and ending the piece wholly alone. "I wanted to summon a feeling that can dig deep into you," Jack says, "similar to how Albert Ayler can give you goosebumps and make you tear up at the same time." In that uncannily bluesy C minor resolution, Jack gets the result he was aiming for: simple, full of pathos, drawing on several traditions at once, yielding a singularly expressive sound that only these four players could have made.

—David R. Adler

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