



Bio information: **THE CLAUDIA QUINTET**

Title: **SEPTEMBER** (Cuneiform Rune 377) Format: CD / DIGITAL

Cuneiform promotion dept: (301) 589-8894 / fax (301) 589-1819

email: joyce [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (Press & world radio); radio [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (North American & world radio)

www.cuneiformrecords.com

FILE UNDER: JAZZ / POST-JAZZ

Led by Acclaimed Drummer-Composer John Hollenbeck, The Group Offers Brilliant New Pieces Written During & Inspired By The Month of September

Drummer-percussionist and three-time Grammy nominee **John Hollenbeck**, one of the most distinctive and respected composers in jazz and new music, has created an estimable body of work since the late '90s with his **Claudia Quintet**. Hailed by Nate Chinen of the *New York Times* for their "clockwork intricacy and crisp premeditation ... [striking an] accord between the factions of progressive jazz, classical Minimalism and low-glare experimental rock," the Claudia Quintet tackles Hollenbeck's highly demanding works with a wry improvising spirit and a backbone of surging, mesmerizing rhythm.

Following up earlier celebrated albums including *What Is The Beautiful?*, *Royal Toast*, *FOR*, *Semi-Formal*, and *I, Claudia* – all on **Cuneiform Records** – and a self-titled debut on **Blueshift CRI**, the Claudia Quintet returns with *September*, its newest Cuneiform release. In the lineup are two newer players: accordionist **Red Wierenga**, like Hollenbeck an alum of the Eastman School of Music; and (on four tracks) bassist **Chris Tordini**, a frequent sub for Claudia's original bassist **Drew Gress**. Hugely in-demand as a sideman and an inspired bandleader in his own right, Gress appears on six of the 10 tracks that make up *September*.

Clarinetist/tenor saxophonist **Chris Speed** and vibraphonist **Matt Moran**, both Claudia members from the start, play with stirring virtuosity and give Hollenbeck's writing a sonorous warmth, balancing its more technical and rocking side. Unorthodox textures, fragmented beats and "bright tones filled with folky allusions and plaintive undercurrents" (Siddhartha Mitter, *Boston Globe*) continue to define the Claudia Quintet's unclassifiable output.

The new album, *September*, pays homage to a time of year when Hollenbeck seeks the isolation and creative focus of artist residencies. In the last dozen years – often in September – he's spent invaluable time at retreats in places as far afield as Italy, New Mexico and upstate New York. Writes Hollenbeck in the liner notes: "September is a wonderful month and, for me, the equivalent of Thursday, my favorite day of the week which I celebrated in song on the first Claudia Quintet CD!"

Each piece on *September* has a date followed by a title, and the oldest of them, "**12th: Coping Song**," harks back to the nightmarish events of **9/11/2001**. The experience "has stuck with me," writes Hollenbeck, "so much so that I realized I cannot think or see or write down a date in September without those memories coming back to me." It took years but Hollenbeck finally got the idea "to write music that was somehow tied to other days in September in the hope of trying to rework and transform the traumatic residue through composition. I am especially interested in how, through the simple non-violent act of composition, one can help oneself become a better person, deepen one's connection to humanity, and create work that can soothe and heal."

September marks another departure in that Hollenbeck chose "to create music for the Claudia Quintet that could be communicated and performed without the use of written music." The fact that Hollenbeck taught these labyrinthine pieces to the band largely by ear makes the polish and cohesion all the more astonishing.

About the spirited opener "**20th: Soterius Lakshmi**" – a reference to WNYC morning reporter **Soterius Johnson** and NPR midday reporter **Lakshmi Singh** – Hollenbeck says: "It started out as a rhythm piece, and it sounded to me a little like 1010 WINS (AM New York news radio) or other news themes." Following that, "**9th: Wayne Phases**" is named for **Wayne Shorter**, and inspired initially by "those beautiful short phrases that Wayne plays on **Joni Mitchell** albums and others, then some of his later abstract tunes," Hollenbeck explains. "It started out as 'Wayne Phrases,' and then thinking of 'wane' it became 'Wane Phases,' and then it evolved recently to "Wayne Phases." In the end I don't want the music to sound anything like Wayne [Shorter]."

One particular surprise on *September* is "**29th: 1936 'Me Warn You**," with music written to follow the voice patterns of **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** as he delivers a historic speech on partisan trickery in Washington. "The FDR speech was passed on to me in September," says Hollenbeck, "and I immediately loved the message and then the melody. I transcribed it and only later even thought about writing a piece for it. In the end it's sometimes a setting of the speech and sometimes it uses the speech as part of the band." Hollenbeck employs the human voice a few tracks later as well, in very different form, on "**17th: Loop Piece**." Hollenbeck's political and aesthetic aim on "**Me Warn You**" harks back to one of his most compelling early works, the title track on his 2000 debut album: "**The Drum Major Instinct**," a piece inspired by and incorporating **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**'s speech, and intended to be performed in complete darkness.

[press release continued on verso]

The group enters a quieter, contemplative space on pieces like “**22nd: Love Is Its Own Eternity**,” which Hollenbeck explains as “the end of a long **Krishnamurti** statement that I found written in a phone booth at the **Blue Mountain Center**. The tune came from this vibe.” In contrast, with “**24th: Interval Dig**” we hear the Claudia Quintet firing on every possible cylinder, giving ample room for Wierenga, Moran and Gress to work out as soloists. “The piece was originally called ‘Interval DiG,’” Hollenbeck says. “Using a combo of capital and lowercase letters is something Drew does a lot, and this piece is a feature for him. It’s a written-out feature that is meant to sound like an improvised feature.”

John Hollenbeck maintains many other projects in addition to the Claudia Quintet, including the innovative **John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble** that has garnered **Grammy** nominations for its albums *eternal interlude* (2009, **Sunnyside Records**) and *A Blessing* (2005, **OmniTone**). Hollenbeck also received a Grammy nomination as a composer for the piece “**Falling Men**,” which appeared on 2010’s *Shut Up and Dance*, a two-disc collaboration with the Paris-based **Orchestre National de Jazz** released on **BEEJAZZ**. Hollenbeck took part as a drummer on two other Grammy-nominated albums as well: his mentor **Bob Brookmeyer**’s *Spirit Music* (2006) and pianist/composer **Jim McNeely**’s *Group Therapy* (2001). Hollenbeck’s 2009 release *Rainbow Jimmies* (GPE) a marvelous and varied collection of chamber music, features **Matt Moran** and the entire Claudia Quintet as well, plus guests.

For more information on The Claudia Quintet, see:

www.johnhollenbeck.com - www.claudiaquintet.com - www.cuneiformrecords.com

BIOGRAPHY

Brief John Hollenbeck Bio

A native of Binghamton in central New York State, Hollenbeck has served since 2005 as a professor of jazz drums and improvisation at **Jazz Institute Berlin** in Germany. He received degrees in percussion and jazz composition from the **Eastman School of Music** before moving to New York in the early 1990s. There he quickly struck up relationships with some of the leading lights of jazz (**Fred Hersch**, **Tony Malaby**, **Kenny Wheeler**) and new music (singer **Theo Bleckmann**, composer/choreographer **Meredith Monk**, for whose works “**Magic Frequencies**,” “**Mercy**,” and “**The Impermanence Project**” he composed and performed percussion scores). His numerous awards and recognitions include a 2007 **Guggenheim Fellowship**, the 2010 **ASCAP Jazz Vanguard Award**, winning the top spot as **Rising Star Arranger** (2012, 2013) and **Rising Star Big Band** (2011) in the **Down Beat Magazine International Critics Poll** and a 2012 **Doris Duke Performing Artist Award**.

PROMOTIONAL PHOTO

The digital [High-Resolution] version of this image is available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com



WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT PREVIOUS CLAUDIA QUINTET RELEASES ON CUNEIFORM:

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET +1 FT. KURT ELLING AND THEO BLECKMANN *WHAT IS THE BEAUTIFUL?* CUNEIFORM 2011

“[4½ stars] John Hollenbeck continues to astound as a composer, prone to value accessibility as much he does adventure, on the fascinating *What Is The Beautiful?* ... Hollenbeck recruited Elling to read some of Patchen’s work before he composed the music. ... The overall effect is mesmerizing. ...” – John Murph, *Downbeat*, December 2011

“Hollenbeck’s work generally gives listeners something concrete — an effect or an event or a process in the music — without becoming condescending or obvious. ... Sometimes that simply means that musicians mimic the words’ rhythm and melody... or their meaning, as in “*Limpidity of Silence*,” which is basically a classical-music piece that indeed involves a lot of limpidity and silence. ... But sometimes it means much more. With the singer Kurt Elling reading some texts, and Theo Bleckmann singing others, Mr. Hollenbeck respects how the poems begin, modulate and end. ... he has let the poems write the music for him.... The title track, with the poem excellently read over the music by Mr. Elling, is a good example, probably the best. ... At the end of every stanza comes the word “pause,” followed by “and begin again,” which of course likewise happens in the music. ... There’s steady rhythm and a few levels of harmonic motion from the different instruments, some repeated and steady, some wayward. ... And the piece as a whole has its own cumulative momentum... For seven minutes, everything logically and constantly grows, until the chilling and unresolved end. It’s a piece with a lot of improvisation, one that takes a lot of cues from its literary source, but at the same time it’s a marvel of composition.”
– Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*, October 10, 2011

“American poet Kenneth Patchen (1911-1972) has been a favorite of musicians for over half a century... This everyman writer, considered to be the “father of the Beats,” ...the Quintet + 1 settles into its now familiar mix of chamber jazz-meets-pop-and-minimalism... When he turns his attention to Patchen, Hollenbeck’s focus is directed to the theatrical and the ethereal. Elling fills the differing thespian roles well... From everyman, Hollenbeck turns to the heavens, utilizing Bleckmann’s operatic voice... Hollenbeck’s Claudia Quintet seems predisposed to the grace and fluidity of Patchen’s poetry. Certainly, if the great man were alive today he would want to perform with this band.” – Mark Corotto, *All About Jazz*, December 10, 2011

“The Claudia Quintet... is a disciplined, pitch-perfect ensemble. It can master with grace styles ranging from classic and classical to hip, retro-West coast reenactments, sometimes veering towards a chilly academicism. The blissfully naïve and optimistic poetry of Kenneth Patchen has an Americanized surrealist quality, so the limits and openings of music and poem... work together in a mutually corrective and complementing way.”

– Gordon Marshall, *All About Jazz*, July 21, 2012

“... It has taken decades for percussionist John Hollenbeck to create something as exquisite as *What Is The Beautiful* for his Claudia Quintet +1. Here, Patchen is sung or recited by vocalists Kurt Elling, in his inimitable baritone, and Theo Bleckmann, who brings to life the dreamy earthen landscapes

the poet fashioned like complex tapestries... the two vocalists conjure the spirit of the poet as they re-imagine the beautiful dreamscapes in their own singular manners. The lyricism of the poetry is sublimely captured by John Hollenbeck in his music. Long, dallying notes meander as they are squeezed out of the bellows of the accordion, plucked from the bass, smelted by the hammering on the anvil of the drums, and, of course, caressed out of the ebony and ivory of the piano keyboard. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts... amazing..."

– Raul D’Gama Rose, *All About Jazz*, March 17, 2012

“... Theo Bleckmann... His ethereal phrasing and diaphanous tone infuses a song-like air to one half of the album... One of today's most celebrated male vocalists, Elling's rich tenor and dramatic cadences bring a cinematic flair to Patchen's surreal and emotionally profound narratives. ... The core ensemble's remarkable timbral versatility is emphasized on three instrumental numbers... "Flock" is the most spectacular... that recalls the ground-breaking work of... George Antheil and Harry Partch. ...that Bleckmann and Elling so convincingly assimilate themselves into the veteran unit's sound world is most impressive... The Claudia Quintet integrates Patchen's iconic verse into their oeuvre with an organic grace that brings his words to life. A unique merger of evocative poetry and avant-garde jazz, *What Is the Beautiful?* is a sophisticated work of art whose emotional resonance is as profound as the intricate formal elements that support it.”

– Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, October 5, 2011

“...*What Is the Beautiful?*... is a mixture of poetry and jazz which veers from sublime accessibility to keening experimentalism and includes music with... intimate intensity... Some compositions mimic Patchen's innate rhythmic sensibility, such as...“Showtime/23rd Street Runs into Heaven” and the somber love ode “Do Me that Love.” These cuts...render Patchen's words into flowing arcs of music and lyrical temperament. ... The truly outstanding tunes are bold statements which transform Patchen's lines as they converge with Hollenbeck's compositional ideas. ...Elling populates Patchen's poems as an actor would a stage role. ... Bleckmann is impeccably cast as the singer for the impressionistic material...”

– Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, December 14, 2011

“...the group's most compelling album to date. ...crooner Kurt Elling...steals the show, inhabiting tracks with a rich, spoken baritone and an actor's sense of character and timing that bring Patchen's words vibrantly to life. ...there's a neat conjunction between Elling's interest in vocalese and Patchen's experiments with speech-poetry. ... It all comes together on the title-track: an intensely compassionate piece of writing, bursting with apocalyptic love for humanity... it's genuinely moving – and easily elevates the album to the status of vital, living art.”

– Daniel Spicer, *BBC*, November 9, 2011

“...Hollenbeck... released a remarkable album (with...*What Is the Beautiful?*...). ... Hollenbeck steers “What is the Beautiful” into less familiar territory, drawing on all his influences to produce a score that accentuates and reveals hidden meanings in Patchen's words, particularly on the apocalyptic title track.”

– Devin Leonard, *Capital*, December 26, 2011

“...new life and vitality to Patchen's imagistic poetry. ...” – Tim Cumming, *Independent*, February 11, 2012

“... this subtle and often mesmeric collection is one of the best examples I have heard of setting poetry to music. A fine tribute to a special poet.”

– Simon Adams, *Jazz Journal*, March 13, 2012

“...the record is a meeting between the knotty compositions of drummer John Hollenbeck and the poetry of the late Kenneth Patchen... Though Hollenbeck's arrangements are as evocative as ever in crafting a lush maze of percussion, accordion and woodwinds, Patchen's words remain on equal footing with the help of Theo Bleckmann and Kurt Elling. ... Elling nearly steals the record with his trademark baritone. Burrowing into Patchen's words with sly gravity and wit...”

– Chris Barton, *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2011

“John Hollenbeck never fails to amaze...he's an artist to keep your eyes and ears on. ...”

– Tom Greenland, *The New York City Jazz Record*, November 28, 2011

“*What Is the Beautiful?* Is an astonishing new record that sets the poetry of Kenneth Patchen to music. ... these tunes take a dozen radically different approaches, requiring the musicians to create many different moods and grooves. ...”

– Will Layman, *PopMatters*, November 22, 2011

“...John Hollenbeck continues to mature as composer, arranger, and musician. ... “What Is The Beautiful”... is one of those recordings that each time I play it, something new is revealed either in the words or music that frames the poems.”

– Richard B. Kamins, *Step Tempest*, December 24, 2011

“...*What Is the Beautiful?*... its spellbinding, nerve-rattling grandeur.” – Michael J. West, *Washington City Paper*, October 7, 2011

“...the album abounds with pleasures approached from multiple angles. ...” – Josef Woodard, *Jazziz*, Winter 2011/2012

“... The Claudia Quintet disc is... an important addition to the jazz art song, and completely satisfying. All the poetry comes from one source, Kenneth Patchen... He was smart, irreverent, romantic, hip, and from the opening sound of the record...you know this is going to be something special. ... John Hollenbeck has things to say about the poetry in the best way a composer can, by making the text clear, by meaning every note he sets under the words and by pushing the emphasis on certain phrases and passages. ...these are art songs... they mean some-thing to Hollenbeck. ...The music does not disguise, nor avoid, the poetry, but reveals it. ... This is modern jazz of the high-est order, music that enter-tains and informs in equal, generous amounts. A gentle, thoughtful record, with great weight behind it. ...” – George Grella, *The Big City*, December 23, 2011

“Best jazz albums of 2011... “What Is the Beautiful?” The Claudia Quintet, featuring Kurt Elling and Theo Bleckmann (Cuneiform)”

– George Varga, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, December 20, 2011

“The Top 50 Releases of 2011... 21. The Claudia Quintet +1 Featuring Kurt Elling and Theo Bleckmann” – *JazzTimes*

“2011 Jazz Critics' Poll Results... 20. The Claudia Quintet, featuring Kurt Elling & Theo Bleckmann, *What Is the Beautiful?* (Cuneiform) 59 (12)”

– Francis Davis and Tom Hull, *Rhapsody*, January 10, 2012

“Best Vocal Album... 5. The Claudia Quintet, featuring Kurt Elling & Theo Bleckmann, *What Is the Beautiful?* (Cuneiform) 7”

– Francis Davis and Tom Hull, *Rhapsody*, January 10, 2012

“Recommended New Releases... The Claudia Quintet + 1 – *What Is the Beautiful?*...” – David Adler, *New York @ Night*, November 14, 2011

“Small groups... The Claudia Quintet + 1 – *What Is The Beautiful* – Cuneiform” – Jim Wilke, *Jazz After Hours*

"Vocalists? You couldn't do much better than this year's GRAMMY nominees in the jazz vocal category. ... The fifth nominee is ex-Chicagoan Kurt Elling... Elling maintained his more adventurous bonafides on *What Is The Beautiful?*...from...John Hollenbeck's engrossing *Claudia Quintet*."

– Neil Tesser, *Examiner*, December 30, 2011

"Top Songs... *Claudia Quintet +1 Featuring Kurt Elling "What Is the Beautiful"...*" – Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*, December 15, 2011

"Mark Corroto's Best Releases of 2011... The *Claudia Quintet What Is The Beautiful?*..." – Mark Corroto, *All About Jazz*, December 19, 2011

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET with GARY VERSACE ROYAL TOAST CUNEIFORM 2010

"On *Royal Toast*, the Quintet...augmented to a sextet...moves easily between improvisation and intricately arranged composition.

The band's unorthodox instrumentation-- bass, drums, reeds, accordion, and vibraphone-- gives it a distinct sonic signature. Ted Reichman's accordion is used in every conceivable way, playing leads, soloing, harmonizing with the clarinet, and in some of the album's...most rewarding passages, hypnotically vamping in a static dance with Matt Moran's vibraphone. Though they can clang along with the best of them, they do quiet and meditative well. ... It's fitting they'd land on the Cuneiform label."

– Joe Tangari, *Pitchfork*, August 19, 2010

"...Instrumentally, and in the album's far-flung rhythmic and harmonic textures, *Royal Toast* is a world of ideas, sometimes diverging from sharp, angular rhythms to haunting ambient harmonies. ...

Sonically, Hollenbeck (who also serves as producer), along with engineers Andy Taub and Ben Liscio, has created an airy, open soundstage that complements these rich harmonic textures while bringing the soloists into sharp focus."

– Greg Cahill, *The Absolute Sound*, September 2010

"...the *Claudia Quintet* comes from a jazz foundation, and it's played by musicians fluent in jazz. But there's a lot of other stuff mixed in... There are cries of free improvisation and interlocking layers of minimalism, and there's the complexity and clean precision of math-/post-/prog-rock. ...

This music definitely grooves, unconventionally but head-forward and throbbing... But it also develops over time as its beats shift shape ...And it isn't afraid to slow down in search of the probingly beautiful... this is music that resists idiom." – Patrick Jarenwattananon, *NPR Music*, www.npr.org

"... With John Hollenbeck...everything he puts his name to claims a worthwhile place... What's especially interesting about this recording is how easily Versace is assimilated. ...It's a record that is perhaps best absorbed slowly and by stages, but it is essential listening and consolidates the Quintet's high standing on the current scene. ..."

– Brian Morton, *Point of Departure*, #29, www.pointofdeparture.org

"... If John Hollenbeck is approximately the hottest drummer/composer in New York jazz circles, then the *Claudia Quintet* is the hottest of his many projects as well as one of the city's most passionately complex live bands. ... the neon-knotted compositions on *Royal Toast* (Cuneiform) torque and twist... A mighty fine album by any standard-but don't miss *Claudia* in the flesh."

– Richard Gehr, *Relix*, June 2010

"...starkly beautiful... You could say that *Royal Toast* relishes reconciling opposites -- wood and metal, cerebral melodies and forthright grooves, stuttering rhythms and simple ... it's mind-expanding... it will reward your attention many times over." – Peter Hum, *Ottawa Citizen*, May 21 2010

"The *Claudia Quintet*...turns out music of clockwork intricacy and crisp premeditation. ... Mr. Hollenbeck composes with an ear for passing tensions, some breezier than others. His band mates, all thoughtful improvisers, fill in the gaps... Structure and liberty are both so integrated into the band playbook that they don't assume any kind of opposition. That's more commonplace than it used to be too, though this group still makes it feel special."

– Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, May 16, 2010

"...Touching on enough influences to resemble an expertly curated corner record shop — a thicket of Steve Reich-informed vibraphone here, a dash of knotty chamber jazz there — the *Claudia Quintet* is one of the more adventurous jazz ensembles working today. ...unexpected pleasures lie below the surface. ... Rich with ambition and empathetic interplay that never allows one player to rise above any other for long, the *Claudia Quintet* doesn't entirely sound like anybody else. Which is exactly what makes them worth seeking out."

– Chris Barton, *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 2010

"This fifth release by my current favourite group finds them joined by pianist Gary Versace... His addition means that half the band is now playing percussive instruments, giving Hollenbeck more compositional opportunity to indulge his polyrhythmic passions. ...*Claudia*'s music is edgy, angular and often intricate, the different instruments layering across each other in almost contrapuntal fashion. ... This latest installment does them proud."

– Simon Adams, *Jazz Journal*, July 2010

"... *Royal Toast* adds pianist Gary Versace, introducing even more contrapuntal potential without over-thickening the stew, and releasing the remarkable Hollenbeck to play a freer textural role. ...the overlays of vibes motifs, sax riffing, flowing accordion improv and thunderous drumming makes Armitage Shanks...a melodically mercurial triumph. Short, overdubbed dialogue solos by Speed, bassist Drew Gress and vibist Matt Moran add diverting interludes, and there's plenty of dreamy humming-glass sounds and luxurious accordion sighs to balance all this fine album's industrious busyness. [4 out of 5 stars]"

– John Fordham, *The Guardian*, September 16, 2010

"The best chamber jazz band in the world do it again with another challenging and successful set of dense ensemble work that succeeds on every level. Whether fiercely polyrhythmic or totally strung out and devoid of momentum, the *Claudias* swing with an identifiably jazz feel, but are at ease with a dizzying array of genres and techniques. What's always so scary about this band is the songwriting...there's a distinct sound to each song to give it identity. ..."

– David Dacks, *Exclaim*, August 2010, exclaim.ca

"In the sometimes murky world of experimental jazz, New York's *Claudia Quintet* stands out with a playful spirit and utterly distinctive sound that gets hips swaying and heads nodding in even the most austere music-nerd performance spaces. A not-found-elsewhere front line of accordion..."

– Siddhartha Mitter, *The Boston Globe*, May 17, 2010, www.boston.com

"The buzz around this New York ensemble has grown to a roar over the last few years, which is a delicious irony given that *The Claudia Quintet* is often at its most affecting when playing sotto voce, as if content to whisper rather than bellow... Ted Reichman's accordion, Chris Speed's clarinet, Matt Moran's vibraphone, Drew Gress' double bass, John Hollenbeck's drums and (guest) Gary Versace's piano often blend into an ensemble sound that has the vaporous drift and haze that one might associate with hushed ambient electronica or at least very produced or studio sculpted music.

... *Claudia*'s timbres, eerie and winsome in equal measure, prove its greatest strong point. The combination of clarinet, accordion and vibraphone fashions an electric whistle and whirl that squares the circle between 90s indie science frictioners Stereolab and 60s proto-proggers Soft Machine ...

Claudia is a jazz group questioning the divide between genres and points in time.” – Kevin Le Gendre, *BBC Music*, 2010-09-07, www.bbc.co.uk

“... The resulting music is...bold, groundbreaking, and spread across numerous colorful sonic palettes. ... Versace's role is that of shading or propping up these melodies, and one should listen closely to his contributions... It's another extraordinary musical experience from the Claudia Quintet, who deserve all the high marks they receive as an innovative, thought-provoking, singularly unique contemporary ensemble. [4.5/5 stars]”
– Michael G. Nastos, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

FOR

CUNEIFORM

2007

“...the title is a pun. Such personal playfulness keeps with a chamber band that has tickled the ears of adventurous listeners...with its deft blend of improvised jazz solos, run-on, minimalist figures that gradually shift shape and color, and unusual instrumentation. ...
More than many hybrid jazz forms on offer these days, *For*'s rhythmic propulsion, bursts of blues feeling and first-rate soloing should make it attractive to swing purists who may think it's not 'for' them. [4 Stars]”
– Paul de Barros, “Reviews,” *Downbeat*, Vol. 74 No. 10, October 2007

“Since their founding in the late 1990s, The Claudia Quintet has walked a unique path in contemporary jazz. ... An astonishing band with a huge range of emotional depth and range and with appeal far beyond strictly 'jazz' listeners.”
– *The Vortex*, www.vortexjazz.co.uk

“... The opening track, shifting through free-jazz, polyphonic clamour and a klezmerish bounce, set against a hip-hop beat, is typical. Mat Moran's vibes are sometimes gently blended with clarinet and accordion, while lyrical pealing-bells cascades contrast with edgy free-swing. It's all far from just another exercise in eclecticism, and ushers in one of the most characterful small jazz groups of recent times. [4 stars]”
– John Fordham, *The Guardian*, Aug. 10, 2007

“...the Claudia Quintet has navigated the boundary lines between free jazz, contemporary composition, progressive rock and electronica so successfully that its output is virtually uncategorizable. ... A fertile blend of infectious grooves, euphonious melodies, rich harmonies, adventurous improvisation and cinematic ambience, *For* is another winning chapter in the saga of the peerless Claudia Quintet.”
– Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, July 01, 2007

“...the group combines the shimmering clarity of the George Shearing Quintet with the ADHD adventurousness of John Zorn, the structured dorkiness of a string quartet with the shrieking madness of Albert Ayler. The Claudia Quintet...is one of the most exciting groups in contemporary jazz.... Each of the discs comes at you with the force of a manifesto: this band knows exactly what it is about, and the compositions charge forward with inevitability. ... the band now sounds so thoroughly integrated and seamless that you'd think it was a tenor-trumpet quintet or a 16-piece big band. ...The Claudia Quintet, inimitable, deserves to inspire. ... Rating:[7] – Will Layman, *PopMatters*, October 1, 2007, www.popmatters.com

“...this group's material is built upon paradox; ...under the appearance of sheer “linear” themes or minimalist repetitions there's a puzzling world of details and structures that, taken as a whole, furnish the compositions with the richness that's typical of a great “progressive” band mixing contemporary jazz, Reich, Piazzolla and Bulgarian folk played with the same attitude of a technically hyper-advanced bionic busker. ... astounding musicianship...”
– Massimo Ricci, *Touching Extremes*, October 2007

“... The band combines the Carpenters' (that's right the whacky 1970s pop unit) hit 'Rainy Days’ with Stan Kenton's arrangement of “The Peanut Vendor.” Now, you're wondering, does Hollenbeck have big ears or is he the Raymond Scott of this new millennium? The answer is yes and, hopefully, yes.”
– Mark Corroto, *All About Jazz*, September 21, 2007

“John Hollenbeck's New York based ensemble...continues to trace an original route through contemporary jazz...Influences ranging from minimalism to post-rock are filtered through a cutting edge jazz sensibility, and tonalities are predominantly bright...”
– Andy Hamilton, *The Wire*, Issue 288, Feb. 2008

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

SEMI-FORMAL

CUNEIFORM

2005

“...*Semi-Formal* continues to explore the meeting point of through-composition, exploratory improvisation, and textural soundscapes... Impossible to categorize stylistically, the album's boundaries are further broken by shifting musical responsibilities. ...Clearly the quintet views itself as a mini-orchestra, rather than an ensemble based on traditional roles.

...It's wholly appropriate that this release appear on Cuneiform, a progressive and impossible to pigeonhole label. ...Contemporary classical, jazz, minimal, progressive... genre matters not. The Claudia Quintet is, quite simply, a category all its own – a group of players with the kind of infinite reach to give Hollenbeck's captivating compositions an approach like no other.”
– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, 10/6/05, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...Drummer/leader John Hollenbeck's compositions for The Claudia Quintet evoke occasional...memories of Steve Reich's pattern music, where initial repetition soon evolves into subtle variation... You could just as well invoke the beautiful precision of M.C. Escher's drawings, for the mathematics involved are that smooth. As neatly machined as this music can be, however, the group's music welcomes friction, combustion and surprise. ...”
– Randal McIlroy, *Coda*, Issue 325, Jan/Feb 2006

“... It's music that, in keeping with Cuneiform's devotion to...uncategorisable forms, breaks down boundaries. Lots of clever stuff and a leaven of humour...make it an appealing set...genuinely though-provoking. ...”
– Brian Morton, “Jazz & Improv,” *Wire*, Issue 263, Jan. 2006

“... As much a soundtrack for a nonexistent movie as it is a jazz set, the music on *Semi-Formal* is quite cinematic, moody, and thoroughly intriguing. ...this is very much a 13-song suite, with one selection leading logically if unpredictably to another. ...”
– Scott Yanow, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

“...Mixing minimalist avant-rock, fiery improvisation and razor sharp writing, these boys manage to reference everything from the metric trickery of Dave Holland (“Drewslate”) to the glowing ambience of The Necks (“Kord”), but they don't really sound like anyone but themselves.
... Though Hollenbeck's music is undoubtedly clever stuff...it's played with enough heart to make it lovable rather than just admirable. Brilliant.”
– Peter Marsh, *BBC Online*, www.bbc.co.uk

“...An inventive amalgamation of Downtown compositional intricacies, post-minimalist classical technique, and a contemporary post-rock instrumental vibe, along with a healthy dose of non-Western concepts, the Claudia Quintet is truly an unclassifiable ensemble. ...With their

distinctive merger of old world timbres and futuristic concepts, the Claudia Quintet truly sounds like no other working ensemble today.”

– Troy Collins, *One Final Note*

“...drummer John Hollenbeck earns his tag as a leader by composing the music, but when it comes to performing it the credit couldn't be more equally distributed. This is a true ensemble from top to bottom, a sonic equivalent to a hand-woven tapestry, where the quirky personalities of the individuals surface as dynamic imperfections and variations in the patterns. ... The quintet's instrumental palette has never before been this expansive, with all of the players doubling and tripling on different instruments, and the scattered solos emerge in a satisfyingly organic fashion, spouting from a passage in such a way that it might just sound like part of the writing. Impressive. 3 1/2 STARS.”

– Peter Margasak, *Down Beat*, Vol. 73, No. 1, January 2006

“... Hollenbeck's gift for imaginative, finely woven orchestration couldn't be clearer, whether he's working with five pieces or 16. ...*Semi-Formal* follows logically from Claudia's previous outings in its harmonic depth, formal unpredictability, sonic clarity and overall approachability. The references span from surf rock to chamber jazz to hyperarticulate “acoustica” club beats, all rendered with exquisite precision and heedless abandon... Compositionally, there are too many moments of brilliance to list here...”

– David R. Adler, *JazzTimes*

“...The clockwork precision of ‘Drewslate’ weds the self-conscious trickiness of Tortoise with Steve Reich's investigations into repetitive Serialism, while ‘Limp Mint’ is a suitably wounded, abstract groove with an impossibly disorientating rhythm and woozy vibes – like a post-rock take on Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch*. ... 3 STARS”

– Daniel Spicer, *Jazzwise*, Issue 94, February 2006

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

I, CLAUDIA

CUNEIFORM

2004

“...these adventurous musicians are pushing the edge of what jazz is, remaking the “is” part with influences taken from Frank Zappa, Steve Gadd, Astor Piazzolla... Playful and exotic, moody and dark, *I, Claudia* will excite those ready for jazz beyond major label narrow-mindedness... *I, Claudia* is exhilarating...”

– Ken Micallef, *Launch/Yahoo Music*, www.music.yahoo.com

“The Claudia Quintet creates a fresh, distinctive sound while it obliterates barriers between jazz, classical and progressive rock. ...This unusually configured quintet challenges listeners with layered arrangements that undergo almost continuous transformations. ... Though unpredictable, Hollenbeck's transitions sound unforced and natural. The versatility of the quintet accommodates Hollenbeck's shape-shifting pieces. ...**4 stars**”

– Jon Andrews, *DownBeat*, May 2004, v. 71, #5

“Drummer John Hollenbeck often has been quoted as saying his music “sounds like everything.” ...if “I, Claudia” is any indication, “everything” in Hollenbeck's book apparently encompasses chamber jazz sonorities, free haze interplay, electronica-like atmospheres, post-rock funk rhythms, Sanskrit chants, West African beats, Balkan dances, plus echoes of Steve Reich, Astor Piazzolla and Jimmy Giuffre. Mind you, that's the short list. ...in keeping with the spirit of its title, the music on “I, Claudia” comes across as witty and playful rather than cerebral and self-consciously cutting edge. ...the quintet is composed of seasoned jazz musicians who venture beyond genre borders with a light-hearted curiosity that keeps the music from devolving into avant-garde noisemaking.”

– Mike Joyce, *The Washington Post*, Feb 4, 2005

“...The Claudia Quintet has been compared favorably to Tortoise, and it's an apt analogy...but The Quintet brings a different mix to the table, with a stronger jazz presence, more musical intellect, and a bit less of the slacker/ stoner vibe embraced by the post-rock crowd. ...Hollenbeck's compositions are so deft and fluid that any movements towards the fringes are integrated into a broader musical palette that beguiles and seduces rather than throwing a thorny musical challenge at the listener. ... 4 stars”

– Bill Tilland, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

“The unusual front line combination gives the music a very light, airy quality which keeps their interlocking syncopations nice and clear. ...their music is drawn to chamber scale, but moves in expanding ellipses instead of locked circles and spirals. The moments when the Quintet's jazz impulses break through the careful mosaic are brilliant...a transcendent peak in an otherwise effectively restrained performance.”

– James Beaudreau, *Signal To Noise*, Spring 2004

“*I, Claudia* follows up the Claudia Quintet's self-titled debut release and repeats the magic of that 2001 session. ...Hollenbeck's compositions are beyond jazz, inching up on chamber music but informed by ethnic, rock, and modern composition as well. ...Hollenbeck's music is all about reflection: the simple note, breath and gesture. ... Hollenbeck lays such a casual groove he lets your mind fill the gaps with imagination. ... a band with the hippest groove in music today.”

– Mark Corroto, *All About Jazz*, Feb 2004, www.allaboutjazz.com

“The appeal of the Claudia Quintet's second CD comes in the sonorities conjured by drummer/composer John Hollenbeck: the deep woody tones of Chris Speed's clarinet against the wheezing delicacy of Ted Reichman's accordion and Matt Moran's vibes. ...Those cyclical rhythms contribute to the music's seductiveness, as they do in minimalists like Glass and Reich.”

– Jon Garelick, *The Boston Phoenix*, May 6, 2004

“...Claudia Quintet is both comfortable with fusion and allergic to orthodoxies. ... Hollenbeck's compositions are at their best moments...when he's trying out musical combinations that maybe haven't been tried before. ...let's call the group jazz...it's got the right instrumentation, after all. And jazz, more than most genres, needs a band like Claudia.”

– Brent Burton, “The Quiet Revolution: *I, Claudia*,” *Washington City Paper*, v. 24, No. 6, Feb 13-19, 2004

“Acoustonika. ...something dreamy or hypnotic keeps coming to the fore in Claudia Quintet performances. ...a group of players each very concerned with the expressive and tonal capacities of his specific instrument. ...

The strong rhythmic component of the music brings to mind the African drum ensemble, and the approach to melody is minimalist. ...It's all lapidary, stone after stone shaped or encountered in a circular movement.”

– Robert R. Calder, *Pop Matters*, May 7, 2004, www.popmatters.com

“The music itself still works the furrow between the “downtown” improvising, post-rock propulsion, and New Music minimalism (in the Glass/Reich sense). ...Quirky polymeters and syncopations abound, and though Hollenbeck likes to bring the funk, there's plenty to stimulate the ol' noggin here as well. ...There are all kinds of details...that reveal themselves on repeated listens.”

– Jason Bivins, *Dusted*, www.dustedmagazine.com, March 29, 2004