



Bio information: **THE MICROSCOPIC SEPTET**

Title: **FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE MICROS PLAY MONK** (Cuneiform Rune 310)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / THELONIOUS MONK / THE MICROSCOPIC SEPTET

"If the Micros have a spiritual beacon, it's Thelonious Monk. Like the maverick bebop pianist, they persevere... Their expanding core audience thrives on the group's impeccable arrangements, terse, angular solos, and devil-may-care attitude. But Monk and the Micros have something else in common as well.

Johnston tells a story: "Someone once walked up to Monk and said, "You know, Monk, people are laughing at your music.' Monk replied, 'Let 'em laugh. People need to laugh a little more."

– **Richard Gehr, *Newsday*, New York 1989**

"There is immense power and careful logic in the music of Thelonious Sphere Monk. But you might have such a good time listening to it that you might not even notice. ...His tunes... warmed the heart with their odd angles and bright colors. ...he knew exactly how to make you feel good... The groove was paramount: When you're swinging, swing some more," he'd say..."

– **Vijay Iyer, "Ode to a Sphere," *JazzTimes*, 2010**

"When I replace Letterman... The band I'm considering...is the Microscopic Septet, a New York saxophone-quartet-plus-rhythm whose riffs do what riffs are supposed to do: set your pulse racing and lodge in your skull for days on end. ... their humor is difficult to resist. This is a band that knows how to have fun while going deep..."

– **Francis Davis, "Band of Outsiders," *Outcats*, 1990**

The late jazz composer and pianist **Thelonious Sphere Monk** (1917-82) is one of the top creative deities in the pantheon of American Jazz Greats. He is one of jazz's greatest composers; *Penguin Guide to Jazz* notes that Monk's "output ranks with that of **Morton** and **Ellington**." Monk's tunes, once considered radical and appreciated by only a small cognoscenti, are now beloved standards, and may well be the most frequently covered jazz tunes on recordings. His creative brilliance continues to resonate over time; a surge of interest in the composer this year has already led some to begin calling 2010 "the Year of the Monk."

The music of **Thelonious Monk**, as it escaped the windows of a Downtown New York apartment, was the catalyst that sparked the creation of one of New York's most legendary and important jazz groups, the **Microscopic Septet**. Since it was founded in 1980, under the co-leadership and co-compositional duties of soprano saxophonist and composer **Phillip Johnston** and pianist and composer **Joel Forrester**, "the Micros" have been responsible for creating some of the most captivating and memorable original tunes and performing some of the most entertaining shows in the past 30 years of American jazz. In 1974, the Monk tune: "**Well You Needn't**" first brought the future Micros co-leaders together by chance. Johnston was living in the Bowery at the time, and Forrester, hearing music, barged into his apartment, unannounced: "I was playing a **Thelonious Monk** tune, and a guy I had never seen before came walking through my door, which wasn't locked- those were the hippie days..." The encounter sparked a friendship and working relationship, in which Monk's music reverberated on multiple levels across the years. Another chance encounter – at chicken and ribs place **West Boondock**, following his performance of Monk's "**Pannonica**" on the restaurant's piano – forged Forrester's friendship with the **Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter**. And through the Baroness, Forrester would ultimately meet and periodically play piano for Monk.

Since Johnston and Forrester's first meeting nearly four decades ago, Monk's music has remained an inspiration and guiding light throughout the lengthy course of their music careers. In addition to creating and playing their own music, Johnston and Forrester always played Monk's music: as a duo, in Forrester's quartets and large groups, and, from that band's very beginning in 1980, with the **Microscopic Septet**. Micros gigs always included their arrangements of Monk tunes, but due to the Micros' limited number of releases (5 albums) and their copious original songbook (more than 180 tunes), they only previously recorded Forrester's arrangement of Monk's '**Crepuscle For Nellie**.'

The new Microscopic Septet CD released on **Cuneiform**, *Friday The 13th: The Micros Play Monk* rectifies this omission. Featuring original arrangements of 12 Monk tunes, half from "back in the day" and half newly-written for this recording, the Microscopic Septet make clear their line of descent from Monk. The humor and angularity of Monk's compositions mesh easily and joyfully with the elaboration and juxtaposition of the Micros-style arranging. Definitely not a dry deconstruction, this is a true celebration of Monk by a group that can arguably be called his most sensitive and sensational heirs.

Featuring gorgeous art work by *New Yorker* artist **Barry Blitt** – the man responsible for the infamous and controversial "Michelle and Barack 'fist-bump'" cover and other contentious-yet-humorous artwork, and liner notes by jazz critic and long-time Micros fan **Peter Keepnews**, *Friday the 13th* is surprising yet inevitable: a long overdue party with the master, at which *The Micros Play Monk*.

Friday the 13th arrives amidst a perfect storm of works in multiple media devoted to or about Monk. Dubbed by *Jazz Times* as 'Year of the Monk', 2010 has thus far witnessed a biographical book on Monk by **Robin D. G. Kelley**, a documentary film on Monk's patron and friend, the **Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter**, called *The Jazz Baroness*, and several CDs of Monk tunes by various musicians. Transcending mere tribute, the Microscopic Septet's *Friday the 13th* distills Monk's heady and humorous essence, revives his iconoclastic spirit, and revels in, and with, the creative compositions of Monk.

"You need a finely developed sense of "something you never heard before" to tackle Monk's music and emerge sounding like more than an imitator or an acolyte. That's a pretty heavy challenge. The Micros meet it triumphantly..."

The Micros...have Micro-ized Monk's music while leaving its fundamental Monkishness intact."

–Peter Keepnews, liner notes to *Friday the 13th*

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The Microscopic Septet are one of New York City's most iconic jazz groups, responsible for creating some of the most memorable, sophisticated and accessible tunes in contemporary jazz. They are one of the most important and unique jazz bands to come out of NY's Downtown scene. Since their founding in 1980, the Micros have entertained audiences with their unusual combination of swing, energy, and humor, what *Downbeat Magazine* recently described as “**seminal, brilliant post-modern jazz.**”

Consisting of a saxophone quartet plus a rhythm section, the band is co-led by soprano saxophonist **Phillip Johnston** and pianist **Joel Forrester**, who also compose most of the Micros' music. Johnston's and Forrester's collaboration is magic; the *Philadelphia Inquirer* called them “the boldest and most gifted pair of composers to have joined forces in one group since **Roscoe Mitchell** and **Joseph Jarman** of the **Art Ensemble of Chicago**”. While all band members are excellent players, the Micros' “stars” have always been Johnstons and Forrester's tunes. The music that they created for the Microscopic Septet encapsulated the sound of jazz in 20th century America: *all* of it, from Ellington to Ayler, bebop to Zorn, Dixieland to experimental, captured in a microcosm. Their tunes distilled the essence of jazz as a popular music into a sound that swung, a music that was intelligent, sometimes smart-aleck, and always fun. Optimistic and upbeat, full of innocent confidence, the Microscopic Septet captured not only the sound of jazz, but also the sound – or soundtrack – of 20th Century America. No wonder, then that when **National Public Radio (NPR)** needed a new theme song for one of its most popular shows, “**Fresh Air, with Terry Gross**”, broadcast to every home in America, it asked this band to compose the tune and has used it ever since.

From 1980-92 the **Micros** played constantly around New York and toured the US, Canada, and Europe, earning reputations as one of contemporary American jazz's most entertaining as well as musically compelling live acts. They also released four albums that received widespread critical acclaim. In 1992, the band dismantled, but the catchy, film noir theme they created for **NPR's** kept their music a live presence, airing daily on stations across the USA (it may be the most-broadcast jazz tune in the world). In 2006, the **Cuneiform** label released a four-CD retrospective of all of the Micros' 80s Lps, plus bonus material. Called *History of the Micros* and released in two parts – *Seven Men in Neckties* and *Surrealistic Swing* – the retrospective featured artwork by **Pulitzer Prize** winning cartoonist **Art Spiegelman** and received an avalanche of positive press. When the Micros re-convened to do concerts to promote the Cuneiform retrospective, their shows led them to become finalists for the 2007 **Nightlife Awards**. Energized by the press, packed performances, and the retrospective's inclusion in numerous “Best of Year” lists, the Micros delved into their copious song book and began recording previously unrecorded tunes.

In 2008, Cuneiform released The Microscopic Septet's *Lobster Leaps In*, the group's first new recording since 1996, to raves from audiences and critics alike. *Jazziz Magazine* said that *Lobster* brought a “renewed sense of fun to the often humourless jazz milieu,” and the *Village Voice* called the Micros “the finest retro-futurists around.” In celebration, the Micros performed in concert at NYC's Le Poisson Rouge, with the group **One Ring Zero**. Their return to stage and studio was welcomed by fans and critics alike. In *Downbeat Magazine's* words:

“Cuneiform's two-volume, four-disc retrospective of the Micro's too-meager output was perhaps the most welcome resurrection of the last few years, only eclipsed now by the return of the flesh-and-blood band itself. ...and if the musical climate seems more hospitable these days, the somewhat grayer-haired Micros aren't about to let that get in the way of them playing the scrappy underdogs, blithely amusing themselves with a respectful tongue out at their peers....The Micros skip merrily through the century, finding an avant-garde side street branching off from a trad-jazz Main Street.... As always with the Micros, it's gloriously, delightfully and inappropriately right. Welcome back.” – DownBeat, 2008

Friday the Thirteenth: The Micros Play Monk is The Microscopic Septet's sixth album, its fourth release on Cuneiform, and the band's first-ever album devoted to music by another composer. Following the CD's release, the Micros will be performing in NYC and elsewhere on the US East Coast in December 2010.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE MICROSCOPIC SEPTET, SEE:
www.microscopicseptet.com www.myspace.com/themicroscopicseptet**

Joel Forrester talks about Monk a recent interview:

“A Piano, A Baroness And Thelonious Monk” by Ozier Muhammad, *The New York Times, Lens Blog*, May 26, 2010
<http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/26/showcase-166/>

“[We]...play music that swings, that has beautiful harmonies and melodies, and everything else is really second to that. The ideas that have always run through jazz—of swinging, of telling a story, of being real – to me that's at the essence of everything we try to do. ...we have great respect for the tradition but also do our own thing within that tradition.” – Phillip Johnston in WKCR interview

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS



Digital [High-Resolution / Color] versions of these images and MORE are available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com in the “Press” section.

MICROSCOPIC SEPTET BAND MEMBER BIOS:

PHILLIP JOHNSTON (soprano saxophone, compositions) [www.phillipjohnston.com - www.myspace.com/phillipjohnston88]

Phillip Johnston has written for film, theatre and modern dance, working with a diverse pantheon of writers and directors, including **Paul Mazursky, Henry Bean, Art Spiegelman, Doris Dörrie, Suzan-Lori Parks, John Bell, Hilary Bell, Karole Armitage, and Richard Foreman**. His original scores for silent films, have premiered at **The New York Film Festival**, and toured to Lubljana's **Slovenska kinoteka, The Sydney Film Festival, The Melbourne Festival of the Arts, The Roma Jazz & Image Festival** and many others. During the 1980s, Johnston performed with **The Microscopic Septet** and **The Public Servants**; in the 1990s, with **Big Trouble & The Transparent Quartet**. As a collaborator/sideman, he has performed with such diverse artists as **Guy Klucevsek, Mikel Rouse, John Zorn, Earl King, Elliott Sharp, and Wayne Horvitz**. In 2005, he moved with his family to Sydney, Australia, and there he leads a number of ensembles, including **SNAP**, a duo with **Chris Abrahams, and Phillip Johnston & the Coolerators**. He still returns to the US & Europe regularly, performing with **The Micros, The Spokes and Fast 'N' Bulbous: the music of Captain Beefheart**, which he co-leads with **Gary Lucas**. His most recent CDs are **Page of Madness** (Asynchronous), a silent film score, **Boggy Creek Bop** (Rufus), an Australian saxophone quartet, and **Waxed Oop** (Cuneiform), with **Fast 'N' Bulbous**.

JOEL FORRESTER (piano, compositions) [www.joelforrester.com]

Joel Forrester has authored nearly 1500 musical works. These include the 8-hour piano solo "**Industrial Arts**", the off-Broadway show **Fascist Living**, and the theme to **National Public Radio's "Fresh Air with Terry Gross"**. As a young man, he composed music for the early films of **Andy Warhol**. He studied composition with and received the personal encouragement of **Thelonious Monk**. Currently, he maintains a quintet in NYC (**Joel Forrester and The Truth**) and a quartet in Paris (featuring **Steve Potts**). His former band **PEOPLE LIKE US** has a recent release on the Ride Cymbal label, entitled **Ever Wonder Why**. Forrester is an acclaimed improvising accompanist to silent film ("Simply stated, the best in the world!"---*Paris Free Voice*) with regular performances at the Louvre, the Centre Pompidou, and the Forum des Images. Over the last four months, he's done concerts with film at the University of Chicago, the town hall at Thonon-les-Bains on Lake Geneva, and the Stuart Opera House in Nelsonville, OH.

DON DAVIS (alto saxophone)

Don Davis has performed and/or recorded with **The Waitresses, Toots and the Maytals, LL Cool J, Swollen Monkeys, NY Gong, Material, Carla Bley, Karl Berger, Marc Black, Michael Mantler, Dr. Nerve, Danzig, Peter Apfelbaum, Rusted Root, Rooster, Larry Simon and Groove Bacteria**. Currently teaching in New Hampshire and performs with "**Davis and Deleault**", **Poet F D Reeve, the New Hampshire Jazz Orchestra, and the Don Davis trio** among others.

MIKE HASHIM (tenor saxophone)

Has performed with **Cab Calloway, Doc Cheatham, Muddy Waters, Nancy Wilson, Dizzy Gillespie, Jo Jones, Sonny Greer, Roy Eldridge, Skitch Henderson** and the **NY Pops, Ruby Braff, Madeline Kahn, Bob Wilber, Joe Williams, Panama Francis, Gatemouth Brown, Sammy Price, The Duke Ellington Band and Benny Carter**. His own recordings feature, among others, **Jimmy Rowles, Claudio Roditi, Mike LeDonne and Kenny Washington**, and include special projects devoted to the works of **Fats Waller, Billy Strayhorn & Kurt Weill**.

He currently leads the 15-piece **Billy Strayhorn Orchestra**, performs in duo with **Judy Carmichael**, and tours the world regularly both as a leader and as a sideman. As such he has performed in the US, Europe, Asia and South America. His most recent record as a leader is **Green-Up Time**, featuring the **Axis String Quartet**, on Hep Records.

DAVE SEWELSON (baritone saxophone) [www.sewelsonics.com - www.myspace.com/davesewelson]

Sewelson has played and/or recorded with the **25 O'Clock Band, Jemeel Moondoc's Jus Grew Orchestra, Noise R Us, Mofungo, Freedomland, The Fazely Brothers, The President, Konk and Illuminati**. He was a founding member of the Microscopic Septet and played with **Wayne Horvitz, Bill Horvitz, Robin Holcomb, Saheb Sarbib, John Zorn, Roy Campbell, Elliot Sharp, Dee Pop, Frank Lowe, Pat Place, Billy Bang, Walter Perkins, Bobby Radcliff, Clayton Thomas, Kyosuke Otsuka, Norah Jones, and so many more**. Sewelson is currently involved in several projects, among them **William Parker's Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra and Fast 'N' Bulbous**. He leads **The Daves, Sewelsonics, The BQE**, and is a member of **Two Sisters Inc** (two baris, one mind...and a bass)

DAVE HOFSTRA (bass/tuba)

Has played, toured, and recorded extensively in jazz, rock, blues, klezmer, and New Music. He has performed with **Marc Ribot, Marshall Crenshaw, Bobby Previte, Lou Grassi, Bobby Radcliff, Grady Gaines, John Zorn, Wayne Horvitz, Robin Holcomb, Debbie Davies, Elliot Sharp, David Rosenbloom, Tom Cora, Guy Klucevsek, Bill Frisell, Toshi Reagon, Jaki Byard, Joel Forrester, William Parker, Nora York, Luka Bloom**; with Philip Johnston's **Big Trouble, Microscopic Septet, and Transparent Quartet**; **Rachelle Garniez's Fortunate Few & Twilight Time**; **The Contortions; Th Raybeats; The Waitresses; The Metropolitan Klezmer Orchestra, and The Klezematics**.

RICHARD DWORKIN (drums)

He has played with **Alex Chilton, Fast 'N' Bulbous, Richard Hell, James White, Bobby Radcliff, Billy Bang, Wayne Kramer (MC5), John Zorn, Edwin Hawkins, Casselberry & DuPree, Carol Doda, and the ROVA Saxophone Quartet**.