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Bio information: **PIXEL**

Title: **WE ARE ALL SMALL PIXELS** (Cuneiform Rune 372) Format: CD / LP / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / POP / INDIE ROCK

We Are All Small Pixels – yes, that describes us all in this post-atomic digital age – but some bands pack a big sonic wallop. In the case of Norway’s prodigious indie jazz combo **Pixel**, the little elements cohere into a singularly arresting sound, combining the improvisational imperative and acoustic instrumentation of a free bop quartet with the impassioned vocals and incisive lyrics of indie rock.

Following up on its acclaimed 2012 debut *Reminder* (Cuneiform), which established the quartet as a bold new voice on the international jazz scene, the young Oslo-based band delivers a stellar second album that makes a mighty big musical statement. Led by double bassist, vocalist, and songwriter **Ellen Andrea Wang**, the combo further refines its fervently creative vision with *We Are All Small Pixels*, a genre-smashing manifesto that translates ancient spiritual insight into the digital age.

For Wang, the fundamental building block of billions of photos and graphics that are the communications currency of her insistently connected generation represents “being a small but important part of the big *picture*. Whether human beings in the universe, or a simple chord in a big symphony, every *pixel* is unique and important.” In Pixel’s music, every perfectly placed note and wantonly propulsive beat paints a vivid 21st century picture, a seductive sound that embraces jazz’s harmonic sophistication, minimalism’s incantatory power, rock’s primal thrust, and pop’s lyrical concision.

Featuring Wang on bass and lead vocals, drummer **Jon Audun Baar**, trumpeter **Jonas Kilmork Vemøy** and saxophonist **Harald Lassen** (with everyone contributing backup vocals), Pixels features the instrumentation inextricably linked to **Ornette Coleman**’s epochal “free jazz” quartet of the late 1950s and early ‘60s. The band takes advantage of the harmonic space created by the absence of a chordal instrument, but Pixel favors tightly orchestrated tunes and intricately constructed arrangements. Which isn’t to say that quartet is in any way predictable. With sudden metrical shifts, starkly contrasting textures and Wang’s vocals delivered in unison with the horns, the resulting sound is transfixing and unlike anything else on the scene.

The album opens with the inviting, almost calypsonian bounce of “**Be Mine**,” a surging tune showcasing Wang’s crystalline vocals and a melody so brightly enticing it could easily find a home on an adventurous rock radio station. She follows that forthright lover’s plea with the jagged “**Space**,” an equally emphatic call for solitude, revealing in song the delicious push-me pull-me tensions, the contrasting and contradictory forces that animate so much of Pixel’s music.

Part of what makes Pixel’s music so effective is that even when a tune is dissonant or abrasive it never wears out its welcome, with the majority of the album’s 11 tracks clocking in under four minutes. The album’s centerpiece and longest track is the instrumental “**Night Dreamer**,” an episodic journey that moves from the pummeling opening section to Vemøy’s beatific trumpet to a triumphant closing fanfare powered by more muscular Baar drum work. As if emerging from unquiet slumbers, the following piece “**Easter Song**” is the album’s shortest track, at barely over a minute, with a luminous wordless vocal that emerges from an undulating tenor sax line generated by Lassen’s circular breathing.

With an insistently buzzy tenor line setting up Wang’s ethereal vocals, “**Dreaming**” is a gorgeous song defined by its contrasting textures. Wang turns fierce and feisty on “**Daylight**,” with the horns emphasizing her need and urgency. The album closes with the mysterious “**Time**,” a strikingly lovely song with a gently lamenting vocal refrain. Whether she’s wailing, belting or murmuring, Wang is an uncommonly expressive singer who knows how to mix it up with the horns.

On a scene rife with exceptional young female players, Wang stands out as a particularly accomplished artist. As a composer, player, and perhaps most importantly as a bandleader who has melded like-minded players into a capaciously inventive ensemble, she stands at the forefront of a rising generation that’s remaking jazz in their own image. Her notoriety is quickly spreading via captivating performances and appreciative critics, resulting in a stream of impressive awards in Norway and on the international stage. In October 2012, the magazine *Japan Jazz* named Wang their “**New Star of the Month**”. The **2012 Oslo Jazz Festival** presented her with that year’s prestigious and lucrative *Statkraft Young Star* award, and the next year, she won the **2013 TONO prize**, category «**Årets Utfordrer**» [Innovator], for the song “**Call Me**” from her *Reminder* debut album.

Now 26, **Ellen Andrea Wang** founded **Pixel** in early 2010, which proved to be her breakout year. Featured on the album *Norwegian Song 3*, the project showcased her bass prowess in the company of storied Nordic masters such as **Dag Arnesen**, **Pål Thowsen**, and **Palle Mikkelborg**. Mentored by bassist **Bjørn Kjellemyr** at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, Wang has been in wide demand among her peers, appearing on more than a dozen albums with top-flight artists including **Jon Balke**, **Jan Gunnar Hoff**, **Jon Ebersson Group** and **Ketil Bjørnstad**.

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Before he took up the saxophone at 13, **Harald Lassen** studied the piano and sang gospel in church. A respected bandleader in his own right since 2008, he's collaborated with American heavyweights like **Andrew D'Angelo** and **Ralph Alessi**. But Lassen, 26, has recently cemented his status as an essential new voice through his work with his own band **Play Tell**, which features internationally renowned bassist **Mats Eilertsen** and legendary drummer **Jon Christensen** (who powered **Keith Jarrett's** great 1970s European quartet). Last year he received the prestigious **JazzIntro Award** and was named the **Young Jazz Musician of the Year** with his quintet **Mopti** (which recently released a debut album on **Jazzland Recordings**). Beside Mopti and Pixel, Lassen appears on four other albums released in 2013, including sessions by **Duplex**, and **Dr. Kay And His Inter Stellar Tone Scientists**.

Jonas Kilmork Vemøy, 27, graduated from the Norwegian Academy of Music in 2011. One of the most expressive trumpeters on the Scandinavian scene, he's been sought out by a wide array of acts, including prog rock band **Blokk 5**, the Balkan brass-inflected **The Captain and Me**, and the pop/rock band **Lama**, created by former **Jaga Jazzist** keyboardist **Nils Martin Larsen**. In addition to Pixel's second album, he plays on new albums by pop artist and songwriter **Kristin Minde**, and jazz pianist **Jens Andreas Kleiven**.

Like Vemøy, **Jon Audun Baar**, 26, is a conservatory-trained musician who studied at the Norwegian Academy of Music with teachers like **Jon Christensen** and **Rune Martinsen**. A prolific sideman, he's performed at major festivals with numerous bands and artists over the past four years. Outside of Pixel, Baar has been most visible in an acclaimed trio with the well-traveled guitar master **Jon Ebersson**, a pillar of the Scandinavian jazz scene since the early 1970s.

Together in Pixel, these 4 talented musicians form one of the fastest rising and most innovative ensembles in Scandinavia's flourishing jazz scene. Performing at Scandinavia's jazz festivals and clubs before ever-increasing numbers of fans, recording albums that garner international critical acclaim, winning numerous awards, the young Pixels are poised to take the international jazz stage by storm.

For more information on Pixel, see:

www.pixelband.no - www.facebook.com/pixelnorway - www.cuneiformrecords.com

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com



WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT

PIXEL

REMINDER

CUNEIFORM (2012)

"...Ellen Andrea Wang...and her fellow band members were all in their mid-20s when they recorded *Reminder*...their youthful exuberance tempered by technical ability and a keen awareness of their musical antecedents.

Pixel takes Gerry Mulligan and Ornette Coleman's iconic quartets...as its points of reference...luxuriating in the freedom to be had from the absence of a chordal instrument. "Waltz 1" is the most obvious link to these ensembles... "Hvor Ble Den Av?" is equally spacious and considered, but with a coolness closer to fellow Scandinavians such as trumpeter Verner Pohjola than to Mulligan's West Coast cool. ...Jonas Kilmork Vemøy...is able to conjure up a sweeping, cinematic landscape from just a few notes. ...

On "Home," the band retains a primarily jazz influence but with a more contemporary feel—there's something of the approach of label mates Led Bib... The band also takes inspiration from pop and rock, with catchy, immediate, melodies, strong lyrical narrative, and economy... If the beauty in Pixel's work comes from its jazz influences, then the energy and fun comes from its rock and pop sensibilities. The high point of *Reminder*, in terms of energy and groove, is "Call Me." ... *Reminder* is an impressive first outing. Pixel bring a unique creative mix to the scene: difficult music to categorize, easy music to enjoy."

- **Bruce Lindsay**, *All About Jazz*, June 11, 2012, www.allaboutjazz.com

"... While they operate squarely in the jazz idiom, the lack piano or any other chordal instrument in the lineup often gives their sound a chamber quality, with the interplay between saxes and trumpet providing melodic coloration over the busier rhythm section. ...the arrangements on some of these ten cuts tend toward the aggressive, and sometimes even approaches rock energy. The vocal passages...add light, strength, variety and color... One listen to a cut like "Wake Up,"...will have the listener reaching for the repeat button in short order. There are pastoral instrumental cuts also, where...gentle improvisation gives every player room to stretch out and be heard... **Pixel offers an outstanding recipe that's unique, completely listenable, and compelling.**"

- Peter Thelen, *Exposé*, Issue 40, www.expose.org

"...a lot of jazz music tends to sound too stagnant and similar... Fortunately...every so often a band comes along that manages to...exceed my expectations... Pixel...pack a lot of fire, variation, and quirkiness into their debut album, *Reminder* ...the way poppy vocals are intertwined with invigorating, lush music (a rare combination, for sure) that makes *Reminder* stand out from the pack. ... Wang sings...and her method for having the melody match the notes of the horns is quite clever. One of the highlights of the album is "Wake Up," an intense and catchy jazz rock track filled with stunning harmonies... Wang's beautiful voice closely resembles that Dutch singer, Anneke van Giersbergen... each note and instrument really feels perfectly placed, as if they share one mind with the vocals, and this constant shift in dynamics is exceptional. ...

Reminder is a unique record, which is just about the greatest attribute a musical piece can possess considering how manufactured and generic so much music is these days. **Jazz enthusiasts... Pixel is definitely a band to keep an eye on as they continue to grow and impress.** [4 stars]"

- Jordan Blum, *Sea of Tranquility*, August 9th 2012, www.seaoftranquility.org

"... 'Reminder' is an audacious and remarkable debut album... There is certainly enough to satisfy lovers of jazz fusion and progressivism and after a 'prelude' in which Ellen Andrea Wang duets with herself on double bass and wordless vocals, Pixel...hit their stride with two strong pieces... Where the irresistible 'Call Me' is pure attitude, 'She Knows' is pure class like some rediscovered Miles Davis classic. ... 'I Hang' with its breathtaking bass line, impactful trumpet lead and clarity of vision and purpose...as few equals..."

...The most remarkable thing of all may be the economy of the music... It is hard to believe that all compositions are in the 3 to 4 minute range... a fantastic record. ..."

- Phil Jackson, *Acid Dragon*, September 9, 2012, aciddragon.eu

"...this Norwegian quartet's debut album is great fun. ...Ellen Andrea Wang anchors this collection of tidy instrumentals and catchy vocal numbers with strong, inventive bass lines. ...the songs with vocals...really make the album for me, especially the sassy "Call Me" and "Wake Up,"... I imagine Pixel make a lot of new friends every time they play in front of an unsuspecting jazz fest crowd. This isn't music for a stuffy club; it's more suited to an outdoor stage on a brilliant summer day. ..."

- The Mule, *Difficult Music*, March 27, 2013

"... It amazes me just how many different influences...you can hear in less than 43-minutes worth of music; from the rousing yet still melancholy bass lines shining through on *Essets*, much akin to that found in the music of Cuong Vu, to the triadic female vocal harmony overdubs that make *Wake Up* an anthem The Corrs could just as easily have championed. Taking a more aggressive edge, *Call Me*, by far the most distinctive and immediately memorable tune...screams delightful rage in a vein similar to New York punksters, Yeah Yeah Yeahs. ... A highly accomplished bass/wordless female vocal prelude by band-leader Ellen Andrea Wang (yes, she could be Norway's answer to Esperanza Spalding) sets up the first real showpiece, *Home* with great poise and the heart-felt sentiment that this record never seems to lose. Full of anthemic hooks, feisty grooves and a sound way beyond that of the chord-less quartet...this record grips the listener's ear from opening cadenza to the closing whispers... However, it's what's in the middle of this expertly balanced musical sandwich that will really turn you on."

- JJ Wheeler, *The Jazz Breakfast*, August 30, 2012, thejazzbreakfast.com

"...Pixel... they fire their weapons with the vigor of indie rock and improvisational freedom of modern jazz. ... Pixel...is the creation of Ellen Andrea Wang, who plays bass, composes the music, and on roughly half the tracks, sings. She's backed by some of Norway's finest up and coming musicians... *Reminder*... if you thought you had Scandinavian jazz pegged, this record blows away all notions about how it's supposed to sound like, except the part about it being creative and original. "Call Me" is the standout track of several standout tracks, because it's where both the vocal and instrumental sides of the band intersect perfectly. Wang is quite the supple bass player... And then, Wang launches into her vocal/trumpet unison... Brash meets brass, indeed."

- S. Victor Aaron, "One Track Mind," *Something Else!*, August 10, 2012, www.somethingelsereviews.com

"In the final...salutes to the top releases of 2012, the fusion jazz records are surveyed. ...Pixel...are jazz in a broad sense but otherwise indescribable. ... This Norwegian troupe with the non-chordal trumpet/sax/standup bass/drums configuration play the vigor of indie rock and improvisational freedom of modern jazz. A most impressive debut..."

- S. Victor Aaron, "Top Albums for 2012, Part 4 of 4: Fusion Jazz," *Something Else!*, December 10, 2012, www.somethingelsereviews.com

"Curious to hear what ultra-cool Norwegians are listening to these days...? Our guess is that...cool music fans there are probably heavily immersed in the magical world of **Pixel**... a strange brand of music that combines elements from jazz, experimental, modern classical, and progressive rock. ...these folks create music that is surprisingly accessible and warm. So many interesting perspectives presented here... TOP PICK."

- *Babysue*, September 2012, www.lmnop.com

"'Call Me'...? There was a little of the Alanis Morissettes about the shouty stand out song from **Pixel**...the latest Norwegian band to make an impact on the London scene. ..."

- *Dreamjazz*, June 17, 2012

"...the best releases that have come to my attention so far this year. ... Pixel - *Reminder*"

- Mike Borella, *Avant Music News*, June 26, 2012, www.avantmusicnews.com

"...my choice highlights from 2012... Pixel *Reminder*... The CD with the biggest 'bite,' in my opinion. Punk-Jazz without being annoying, repetitive or cliched."

- JJ Wheeler, "JJ Wheeler's Festive Five," *The Jazz Breakfast*, December 28, 2012, www.thejazzbreakfast.com

"Favorite jazz of 2012 ... Pixel: *Reminder* (Cuneiform)" - Chris Monsen, *Perfect Sounds*, December 21, 2012

LIVE REVIEWS

"...Another bassist who excelled at the [Match & Fuse] fest was **Ellen Andrea Wang**, who fronted the promising Norwegian band **Pixel**... The group's chromatic runs on the snarling tune "Call Me" gave **Wang** an opportunity to pull off one of the most memorable moments of the weekend. ..."

- *Stephen Graham*, *Downbeat*, June 25, 2012, www.downbeat.com

"... The group's debut album...appears on the Cuneiform record label... Cuneiform's faith in the band represents ample evidence of their potential. ... Pixel's...line up is similar to that of the UK's...Get The Blessing and there are discernible similarities in the group's music, punchy, hard hitting horn solos and the extensive use of rock rhythms. However Wang's Bjork like voice and words set Pixel apart evidencing a greater debt to the world of indie rock. ... Wang drives the group with her surprisingly muscular playing as drummer Baar whips up a storm. Both Lassen and Vemoy are powerful soloists but at other moments they pack a weighty combined punch. In the moments when they're not playing the horn men pick up a tambourine and shake it, very much a rock trait... Pixel aren't all sound and fury, there are moments of subtlety as well... ...Pixel clearly have their eye on...crossover success. Sharp, punchy and well drilled they have considerable potential..."

- Ian Mann, *The Jazz Mann*, November 29, 2012, www.thejazzmann.com

"As a part of London jazz festival... Pixel...created dramatic, emotionally charged scenes..."

- *I Spy London*, www.ispylondon.org

FURTHER READING

INTERVIEW: Ascen Martin, "Ellen Andrea Wang," *Singular Art Magazine*, The East Issue