



Bio information: **THE CLAUDIA QUINTET with GARY VERSACE**  
Title: **ROYAL TOAST** (Cuneiform Rune 307)

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**FILE UNDER: JAZZ**

*"...one of the most characterful small jazz groups of recent times."* – **John Fordham, *The Guardian***

*"...Claudia Quintet has navigated the boundary lines between free jazz, contemporary composition, progressive rock and electronica so successfully that its output is virtually uncategorizable."* – **Troy Collins, *All About Jazz***,

*"The references span from surf rock to chamber jazz to hyperarticulate "acoustica" club beats, all rendered with exquisite precision and heedless abandon...there are too many moments of brilliance to list here..."* – **David R. Adler, *JazzTimes***

*"There's fire, wit, and more in this group.... Not quite jazz, not quite contemporary classical music, not quite artful noise, The Claudia Quintet has come up with a new mash-up aesthetic of their own."* – **Josef Woodard, *The Santa Barbara Independent***

*"...a very fresh Jazz band with unusual instrumentation played by some major talents..."* – **Phillip McNally, *Cadence***

*"...creates gorgeous blends of melody and texture that blur the lines between jazz and contemporary classical."* – **Peter Margasak, *Chicago Reader***

*"Claudia Quintet has managed to make each successive release somehow different than its predecessor while not losing sight of the markers that define this eclectic and stylistically defiant chamber ensemble."* – **John Kelman, *All About Jazz***

On their fifth CD, **Royal Toast**, **The Claudia Quintet** raise a glass in salute to their regal muse with a set of new music fit for a king – albeit one with more refined tastes and open mind than your average monarch.

If a round table seems a wholly appropriate setting for this egalitarian ensemble (with an extra place setting this time out), theirs is as much Algonquin as Camelot, renowned for their sophisticated wit as well as their sharply-honed musical jousting.

As composer/leader **John Hollenbeck** points out, the title might also sound a bit "silly" – but there's something in its odd incongruity that exemplifies the band's one-of-a-kind sound.

"I like toast," Hollenbeck explains with characteristically laconic humor, "and I noticed that if you put 'royal' in front of something, it seems elevated."

The Claudia Quintet has similarly been finding the majestic in the mundane (or vice versa) for more than a dozen years. Nowhere is that more evident than on **Royal Toast**, where Hollenbeck began by collecting song titles found in often unlikely sources, divorcing them from their original context, and devising music inspired by these evocative phrases.

Hollenbeck's compositions somehow conjure raucous beauty from dizzying complexity, enticing the emotions with lilting melodies or irresistible grooves while engaging the cerebral side in a surreptitious workout. The music marries jazz, new music, post-rock – but no laundry list of influences is quite sufficient to describe their iconoclastic sound. Suffice it to say, you can feel secure bringing your hipster nephew and your math professor along to a gig, and everyone will go home happy.

Of course, no one could pull off such a *trompe l'oreille* without a well-honed ensemble, and the Claudia Quintet has, through intensive collaboration since their 1997 debut, developed a language all their own. The music can best – perhaps only – be defined by the individuals who create it – Hollenbeck on drums, **Drew Gress** (**Tim Berne, Ravi Coltrane, Fred Hersch**) on bass, **Matt Moran** (**Slavic Soul Party, Mat Maneri, Ellery Eskelin**) on vibraphone, **Ted Reichman** (**Anthony Braxton, Marc Ribot, Paul Simon**) on accordion and **Chris Speed** (**Bloodcount, Yeah No, Human Feel**) on clarinet and tenor sax.

As attuned as the Quintet have become to each other, they're each remarkably attuned to themselves, as Hollenbeck discovered while recording the CD. Bridging several of the pieces on the album are short improvised interludes in which each member plays a short improvised duet with himself – unbeknownst to them until the tracks were in the can. While they sound as if each side of the mirror is reacting to the other, they were actually played separately and married after the fact.

"I didn't know if it was going to work, so I didn't tell anybody I was doing it," Hollenbeck admits. "And I couldn't believe it because each one just worked fabulously. It was totally unbelievable how they breathed in the same places – Drew even has a rest in the same spot. I think the result is better, actually, than if I had asked them to react to their solos. That might have been a little artificial."

The quintet is here supplemented by pianist **Gary Versace**, a longtime collaborator of Hollenbeck's (including the composer's **Grammy**-nominated **Large Ensemble** and in the **Refuge Trio** along with vocalist **Theo Bleckmann**).

"Gary and I have very similar aesthetics," Hollenbeck says, "so what he plays is exactly what I would be doing if I could play piano really well. Gary has a very composerly approach, so he's very sensitive to the music and tries to make his part sound composed even when it's not."

The addition of Versace means that half of the band is now essentially playing percussive instruments, giving Hollenbeck more opportunity than ever to follow his polyrhythmic muse – which emerges most fully on the gleefully intricate title track. But the album begins not with force but with lush intoxication. "Crane Merit" sets an unexpectedly atmospheric mood, enveloping the listener with an idyllic warmth.

[Press courtesy of **Fully Altered Media**]

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Introduced by a Hollenbeck solo that gradually builds into funky propulsion, "Keramag" is the album's toe-tapping-est tune, densely wrought and utterly infectious. It and "Zurn" have the titles with the least concrete associations; the latter is a through-composed piece that generates considerable tension through an insistent drum/piano figure that is thoroughly dispelled by its ethereal finale.

"Sphinx," on the other hand, brings very distinct associations to mind, which Hollenbeck followed through Egypt to African rhythmic influences. The word "Standard" crops up twice, and in each case the composer took this as a cue to use jazz as a leaping-off point, penning an abstracted ballad with "Ideal Standard" and a fractured anthem on "American Standard."

The album closes with the elegiac "For Frederick Franck," an homage to the Dutch-born painter, sculptor and author who died in 2006 at the age of 97. Hollenbeck's personal connection to the artist comes via a sculpture park in upstate New York that Franck designed and where Hollenbeck proposed to his wife. But Franck's expansive philosophy is also representative of Hollenbeck's boundary-blurring approach to genre.

"The meaning of life is to see," Franck espoused in his work, and the Claudia Quintet approach music with eyes wide open.

For more information, visit **The Claudia Quintet** online at: [www.johnhollenbeck.com](http://www.johnhollenbeck.com) & [www.myspace.com/theclaudiaquintet](http://www.myspace.com/theclaudiaquintet)

## PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS



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## THE CLAUDIA QUINTET with GARY VERSACE: BAND MEMBER BIOS

### **JOHN HOLLENBECK**

[see also: [www.johnhollenbeck.com](http://www.johnhollenbeck.com)]

John Hollenbeck's journey has been one of the most remarkable in contemporary music. Building on a wealth of experience in jazz and world styles as well as a deep interest in contemporary composition and spiritual practice, he has forged a lyrical new musical language, as accessible and expressive as it is advanced. After receiving degrees in percussion (B.M.) and jazz composition (M.M.) from the Eastman School of Music, Hollenbeck moved to New York City in the early 1990's. He has worked with many of the world's leading musicians in jazz (Bob Brookmeyer, Fred Hersch, Tony Malaby, the Village Vanguard Orchestra, Kenny Wheeler), world music (Pablo Ziegler), and new music (Meredith Monk). In the fall of 2005, John accepted a professorship in Jazz Drums and Improvisation at the Jazz Institute Berlin (Germany) where he currently teaches.

Hollenbeck has received numerous awards and commissions which include a National Endowment grant to study composition with Bob Brookmeyer in 1994 and a Meet the Composer's Grant in 1995 and 2001. He won the Jazz Composers Alliance Composition Contest in 1995 and 2002 and was awarded the 2002 IAJE Gil Evans Fellowship and 2003 IAJE/ASCAP Commission. Hollenbeck received a grant from Arts International to travel with his Claudia Quintet for performances in Brazil in the spring of 2002. In 2001, 2003, and 2007 John held a month-long residency at the Blue Mountain Center in New York, and in the fall of 2005, was a Fellow of the Wurlitzer House Foundation in Taos, New Mexico. Hollenbeck was nominated by the Jazz Journalists Association for the following: Up and Coming Jazz Musician of the Year (2004, 2006); Jazz Composer of the Year (2006, 2007); Drummer of the Year and Large Ensemble of the Year (2007). John Hollenbeck was named as both the Rising Star Composer and the Rising Star Arranger of the Year in the 2008 & 2009 Down Beat Magazine's Critics Poll. Down Beat magazine has in previous years recognized him as a "Rising Star" in the Composer, Jazz Artist, Arranger, Big Band, and Jazz Group (Claudia Quintet) categories. John's first large ensemble recording, *A Blessing*, received a 2006 Grammy Nomination, and in 2007, John was awarded the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship.

Exceptionally creative and versatile, John continues to create a passionate new musical language based on world rhythms, lyricism, and spirituality: he composed *The Shape of Spirit*, a piece for wind ensemble issued on the Mons label in 1998, and in 1999 composed *Processional and Desiderata* for wind ensemble and orator. This composition, written for and featuring the voice and trombone of Bob Brookmeyer, was released on Challenge Records in 2001. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, commissioned by the Bamberg Choir in Germany was released in 2001 on the Edel Classics label along with works by J.S. Bach, Igor Stravinsky & Paul Hindemith. In 2002, John's IAJE Gil Evans Fellowship Commission piece, *A Blessing*, featuring vocalist Theo Bleckmann, was performed to critical acclaim at the IAJE Conference; and in 2003 his IAJE/ASCAP Commission, *Folkmoot*, was premiered in Toronto, Canada. John composed and performed the percussion score to the following Meredith Monk works: *Magic Frequencies*; *Mercy* (ECM 2002); and *The Impermanence Project* (ECM 2008). Hollenbeck's chamber piece, *Demütig Bitten*, was commissioned by the Windsbacher Knabenchor (Germany) and released in 2004 on the Rondeau label along with works by Giovanni Gabrieli, Josquin des Prez and J.S. Bach. John's most recent works include commissions by the Bang on a Can and the People's Commissioning Fund; the Ethos Percussion Group funded by the Jerome Foundation; Youngstown State University; Gotham Wind Symphony; and the Painted Bride Art Center of Philadelphia.

Hollenbeck's recording career as a leader began in the winter of 2001 with the audacious simultaneous release of three critically acclaimed CDs on CRI/Blueshift: "no images," an ambitious composer's statement that Gary Giddins included in his Village Voice 2001 top ten list, "Quartet Lucy," and "The Claudia Quintet." His second Claudia Quintet recording, "I, Claudia", appeared on Cuneiform in 2004, followed by "Semi-Formal" in 2005. Also in 2005, Hollenbeck debuted his Large Ensemble's, "A Blessing" (OmniTone), which was nominated for a Grammy in 2006. His next large ensemble recording, "Joys and Desires" featuring Jazz Big Band Graz and Theo Bleckmann, was released by Intuition in 2006 to critical acclaim. The Claudia Quintet received 4 star reviews from DownBeat Magazine and The Guardian (UK) for its fourth recording, "For" (Cuneiform, 2007), and was named the Rising Star Jazz Group by DownBeat's 2008 Critics Poll. The collective Refuge Trio, with Theo Bleckmann and Gary Versace, released their debut recording on the Winter and Winter label in the fall of 2008. In 2009, John self-released a CD of chamber music, "Rainbow Jimmies", comprised of recent commissioned pieces which feature: The Claudia Quintet, Mark Stewart, Todd Reynolds, Ethos Percussion Group, Youngstown State Percussion Ensemble and Saxophone Quartet. In addition,

the John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble released its second recording, "eternal interlude" on August 18<sup>th</sup> to critical acclaim, including a Grammy Nomination.

#### **DREW GRESS**

[see also: [www.drewgress.com](http://www.drewgress.com)]

Bassist/composer Drew Gress performs extensively with artists on the cutting edge of contemporary improvised music. His latest project-The Irrational Numbers (Premonition), features Drew's original compositions for quintet. Earlier releases include the critically-acclaimed 7 Black Butterflies (2005), Spin & Drift (2001), and Heyday (1997). Future projects include a new quintet project, a solo bass recording, and an electronics project... soon to be unveiled. Drew can also be heard within the ensembles of John Abercrombie, Ralph Alessi, Tim Berne, Don Byron, Uri Caine, Bill Carrothers, Ravi Coltrane, Marc Copland, Mark Feldman, Fred Hersch, John Hollenbeck, Tony Malaby, and John Surman. (In an altogether previous musical life, he grounded the performances of Buddy Hackett, Phyllis Diller, Zoot Sims, Cab Calloway, and Pia Zadora). Drew has toured North and South America, Europe, and Asia, and has served as Artist-in-Residence at St. Petersburg Conservatory in Russia, and the Paris Conservatoire. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer, and Chamber Music America, and currently resides in New York.

#### **MATT MORAN**

[see also: [www.mattmoran.com](http://www.mattmoran.com)]

Vibraphonist Matt Moran has an innovative approach to the instrument, creating new sounds and techniques, expanding the vibraphone's sonic palette. He has performed and recorded with a diverse range of artists including Joe Maneri, Theo Bleckmann, Mat Maneri, Nate Wooley, Ellery Eskelin, William Parker, Saban Bajramovic, Merita Halili, Sufjan Stevens, Combustible Edison, and Lionel Hampton. Also a percussionist, he leads the brass band Slavic Soul Party!, playing new music inspired by Balkan and American brass traditions. He has released seven albums, including Sideshow (songs of Charles Ives) on the CRI label, and Slavic Soul Party! albums on the Knitting Factory and Barbès Records labels. His name appears regularly in the Downbeat Critic's Poll for vibraphone.

#### **TED REICHMAN**

[see also: [www.tedreichman.com](http://www.tedreichman.com)]

Born in Aroostook County, Maine, Reichman's musical explorations started on an upright piano on a bean farm. At Wesleyan University, he studied with Alvin Lucier and Anthony Braxton, who hired Reichman to play accordion when he was nineteen. Reichman went on to record eight albums with Braxton, including "Duo (Leipzig) 1992" and the early documents of Ghost Trance Music. After moving to New York, Reichman became involved in free improvisation (with Marc Ribot, Anthony Coleman, Eugene Chadbourne), Jewish music (David Krakauer, Roberto Rodriguez), alternative country (Sue Garner, Laura Cantrell), and rock and roll (Paul Simon, Sam Phillips, Shivaree). In the process he founded a concert series at alt.coffee and became the original curator of Tonic. Reichman's work as a composer includes the critically acclaimed albums Emigré (Tzadik 2003), "My Ears are Bent" (Skirl 2006) and the original scores to the films "Rick," "René and I," "States of Unbelonging," and "The Memory Thief."

#### **CHRIS SPEED**

[see also: [www.chrisspeed.com](http://www.chrisspeed.com)]

One of the leading saxophonists and clarinetists of his generation, Chris Speed has appeared on over ninety records and has been voted rising star clarinetist for by Down Beat three years in a row. The legions of artists he has worked with include Jim Black, Tim Berne (Bloodcount), Uri Caine, Ben Perowsky, and John Zorn. Speed is a member of Alas No Axis, The Clarinets, and the recently reunited Human Feel (with Jim Black, Andrew D'Angelo, and Kurt Rosenwinkel). In 2006, Speed founded Skirl Records, a new record label focusing on Brooklyn music.

#### **GARY VERSACE**

[see also: [www.garyversace.com](http://www.garyversace.com)]

Since basing himself in New York City in June of 2002, jazz organist, pianist, and accordionist Gary Versace has quickly become one of the busiest and most versatile musicians on the scene, often featured in bands led by musicians such as John Scofield, John Abercrombie, Maria Schneider (including the Grammy-winning recordings "Concert in the Garden" and "Sky Blue"), Matt Wilson, Lee Konitz, Eliot Zigmund, Scott Wendholt, Joe Magnarelli, Danny Gottlieb, Seamus Blake, John Hollenbeck (including the Grammy-nominated large ensemble recording, "A Blessing."), Andy LaVerne, Adam Nussbaum, Brad Shepik, Ingrid Jensen, Tim Ries and many others. Versace was voted a "rising star" on the Hammond organ in the last three Downbeat critics polls, and was the subject of a feature article in the July 2004 issue of Keyboard magazine. Over the past five years, Versace has appeared as a leader for the Criss Cross and SteepleChase labels, and as a sideman on over 50 recordings with artists on various labels including Palmetto, ACT, Omnitone, Songlines, Pirouet, High Note, Justin Time, ArtistShare, Fresh Sound, Kind of Blue, and many others.

#### **\*\*\*2010 NEWS\*\*\***

John Hollenbeck is nominated for two categories in the **2010 Jazz Journalists Association Jazz Awards:**

**3. Composer of the Year**

AND

**14. Arranger of the Year**

Winners will be announced June 14, 2010

[www.jjazwards.org](http://www.jjazwards.org)

For more information on The Claudia Quintet, please see:

Website: [www.johnhollenbeck.com](http://www.johnhollenbeck.com) MySpace: [www.myspace.com/theclaudiaquintet](http://www.myspace.com/theclaudiaquintet)