



Bio information: **JOEL HARRISON, LORENZO FELICIATI, CUONG VU, ROY POWELL, DAN WEISS**
Title: **HOLY ABYSS** (Cuneiform Rune 334)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ

“When you stare into the abyss the abyss stares back at you.” – Friedrich Nietzsche

Full of foreboding and existential terror, the abyss resides in the darkest corners of the human imagination. *Holy Abyss*, a collaborative project between New York guitarist **Joel Harrison** and Italian bassist **Lorenzo Feliciati**, is an antidote to angst. Flowing from a deep communion between the artists, the album turns dread on its head, offering a series of expansive soundscapes full of lustrous harmonies, searching melodies and knowing interplay.

Featuring trumpeter **Cuong Vu**, drummer **Dan Weiss** and **Roy Powell** on piano and Hammond B3 organ, the quintet reflects jazz’s increasingly international reach. Harrison and Weiss, musical comrades for many years, are New Yorkers, while longtime collaborators Feliciati and Powell hail from Rome and Oslo via the UK, respectively. Vu, who has toured and recorded with Feliciati and Powell, was born in Vietnam and is now based in Seattle, near where he grew up. The musicians are united by a passion for modern jazz unbounded by stylistic conventions. Open to sounds from around the world, they have all created music infused with electronics, odd meters, and uncommon timbres and tonal palettes.

Holy Abyss opens with Harrison’s anguished ballad “Requiem for an Unknown Soldier,” which establishes the album’s elemental sensibility with its ethereal trumpet fanfare and slow burning guitar solo. Harrison also contributes the tunefully picaresque “North Wind” and beautifully bent “Saturday Night in Pendleton,” a piece inspired by a memorable gig his band **Free Country** played in Pendleton, Oregon. “It was one of the strangest places I’ve been in my life, and this piece illuminates that surreal evening, the twisted cowboys, the stark, gorgeous desert, the ancient Native American woman who karate-chopped Dan Weiss in a bar,” Harrison says.

Vu contributes two emotionally roiling tunes, the brooding, elliptical “Faith” and the bittersweet “Old and New,” a sinuous 5/4 anthem that hints at his long tenure in the **Pat Metheny Group**. Feliciati adds the ferociously galloping “Solos”, and two pieces, “Small Table Rules” and “That Evening,” that serve as forums for combustible collective improvisation, a specialty of this highly-attuned quintet.

Although this is the first time Vu and Harrison have recorded together, they share a similarly expansive aesthetic. Both favor piercing, gorgeous tones mixed with raw, nasty electronics. Combined with Powell’s piano and Hammond B-3, the sound is simultaneously jubilant and hallucinogenic, crackling with energy, and then gently subdued. Weiss, one of New York’s most sought after drummers, delivers his signature mix of driving grooves punctuated by pithy, unpredictable asides, while Feliciati’s insinuating lines and textures ensure the music never proceeds in predictable directions.

Lorenzo Feliciati is rapidly gaining recognition as one of Europe’s most dependably creative bassists. “I find that Feliciati’s style on the bass reminds me more of players like **Victor Bailey**, **Percy Jones**, **Jaco**, **Gary Willis** and perhaps **Jeff Berlin**,” writes MJ Brady in *Prognosis.com*. “Progressive rock, fusion, world fusion are heard on a CD from perhaps Italy’s best kept secret on the bass guitar.” A prolific studio musician who’s played on hundreds of pop and rock projects, he’s released a series of stimulating albums featuring his original compositions, such as 2008’s trio session *Wasabi* (Picanto) with pianist **Alessandro Gwis** and drummer **Emanuele Smimmo** and 2010’s *Closer* (ViaVeneto Jazz) with guest Cuong Vu. He’s probably best known as the leader of **Naked Truth**. Featuring Vu (recently replaced by **Graham Haynes**), Roy Powell on piano and Hammond B3 and drummer **Pat Mastelotto**, the band’s debut album *Shizaru* (Rarenoise) earned glowing reviews. Rarenoise is slated to release Feliciati’s third CD under his own name, *Frequent Flyer*, this winter, with an impressive roster of guests, including Vu, Powell, Mastelotto and **Bob Mintzer**.

Among the **post-Frisell** generation of guitarists, **Joel Harrison** stands out as the most daring and resourceful. As *All About Jazz* notes, “Harrison’s ability to integrate renders irrelevant the identification of his sources in compositions that range from edgy angularity to sheer beauty...He dispenses with boundaries and creates his own mélange that’s as timeless as it is thoroughly modern.” A 2010 **Guggenheim** Fellow, Harrison has developed a singular voice through immersion in jazz, modern classical, American roots music and far-flung traditions ranging from West Africa to South Asia. His rejection of stylistic boundaries has led him to freely wander wherever inspiration is found, from inner city blues bars to the major concert halls. Since his heralded 1995 debut CD, Harrison has released a dozen albums as a leader, wildly imaginative sessions that feature fellow sonic explorers such as reed expert **Paul McCandless**, saxophonists **David Liebman** and **David Binney**, trumpeter **Ralph Alessi**, pianist **Uri Caine**, drummer **Scott Amendola**, and fellow guitar iconoclasts **Nels Cline**, **Nguyễn Lê** and **Liberty Ellman**.

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Harrison's most recent album, 2010's *The Music of Paul Motian* (Sunnyside), introduces his String Choir with violinists **Christian Howes** and **Sam Bardfeld**, violists **Mat Maneri** and **Peter Urgin** and cellist **Dana Leong**. An esteemed composer, Harrison has received commissions and fellowships from **Meet the Composer**, the Flagler Cary Trust, New York State Council on the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, and **Chamber Music America**. In the words of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* "Add Joel Harrison to **Metheny** and **Frisell** as guitarist/composers who have created a new blueprint for jazz."

Though a dozen years younger than Harrison, **Cuong Vu** has blazed a similarly bold trail. Born in Saigon, he fled Vietnam with his family at the age of five at the fall of South Vietnam and settled in a Seattle suburb. With a full scholarship to New England Conservatory, he studied with masters such as **George Garzone**, **John McNeil**, **Dave Holland** and visionary reedman/composer **Joe Maneri** who encouraged him to investigate the trumpet's unexplored sonic possibilities. After graduating NEC with honors, Vu quickly established himself as one of the most innovative and versatile young trumpeters on the New York jazz scene with his first co-led group, **Ragged Jack** (with **Jamie Saft**, **Andrew D'Angelo** and **Jim Black**) and his sideman work with many of the Downtown artists associated with the **Knitting Factory** and **Tonic**. Although often labeled as an avant-garde player, he draws on a vast array of influences beyond jazz, including rock, electronica, groove and ambient musics. Vu has worked with visionaries including **Laurie Anderson**, **David Bowie**, **Dave Douglas**, **Myra Melford**, **Gerry Hemingway**, and **Mitchell Froom**, though he's best known for his long tenure as trumpeter and vocalist in the **Pat Metheny Group** (with whom he's won two **Grammy Awards**). Vu has also led various groups, most notably his **CV Trio** with bassist **Stomu Takeishi** and drummer **Ted Poor**, and **Vu-Tet** (featuring **Chris Speed**), ensembles for which he's composed music hailed by jazz critics for its ingenuity and originality.

Roy Powell studied piano and avant-garde composition at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England before defecting to jazz. A highly versatile musician who has released several acclaimed albums as a leader, Powell has recorded and performed with many significant musicians in both mainstream and avant garde jazz, including **Art Farmer**, **Eddie Daniels**, **Bobby Shew**, **Anthony Braxton**, **Vince Mendoza**, **Mike Gibbs**, **Iain Ballamy**, **Martin France**, **Ahmad Mansour**, **Frode Berg**, **Arild Andersen**, **Terje Rypdal**, **Roy Hargrove**, **Graham Haynes**, and **Dave Liebman**. Now living in Oslo, Norway where he leads a trio with **Jacob Young** and **Jarle Vespestad**, Powell has become an invaluable creative catalyst on the Scandinavian jazz scene.

Dan Weiss has honed a singular approach to the trap set through his immersion in classical Indian music. One of the most original drummers of his generation, he's a devout student of the tabla, and all-around musical omnivore. He regularly performs with many of the jazz's most exciting improvisers, such as **Miguel Zenón**, **David Binney**, **Chris Potter**, **Thomas Morgan**, and **Kenny Werner**, and has become an in-demand tabla accompanist as well. He has released several titles under his own name including two solo drum CDs in which he plays dauntingly intricate tabla compositions on the drum kit. With its spacious textures, volatile free improvisation, and extended, episodic compositions, *Holy Abyss* is an ideal forum for Weiss's rhythmic innovations.

For more information, see:

Joel Harrison: www.joelharrison.com - **Lorenzo Feliciati:** www.lorenzofeliciati.com

Roy Powell: www.roypowell.net - **Cuong Vu:** www.cuongvu.com - **Dan Weiss:** www.danweiss.net

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