

LINE-UP: **Jason Robinson** (tenor and soprano saxes, flute), **Marty Ehrlich** (alto sax, bass clarinet), **Rudresh Mahanthappa** (alto sax), **Liberty Ellman** (guitar), **Drew Gress** (bass), **George Schuller** (drums)

“Tenor saxophonist Jason Robinson marries intellect to sweat, brains to bawdiness, narrative to sidetrack, straight line to detour, familiarity to surprise—the dualities peppering this long, exciting disk go on.

The tunes shift meter, texture, and voice. Some feature Robinson solo; some pit him against peers/collaborators/alto saxophonists Rudresh Mahanthappa and Marty Ehrlich.... Largely based in Greek and Roman mythology, with nods to Mexican lore, the nine tracks here roil, burn, involve. This is an album that continues to reveal. ...

Robinson is a middleman between the so-called cool of the West Coast jazz scene he came up in and the allegedly hotter East Coast style. How he bridges these—in fact, blows their distinctions to smithereens— works fine ...

... To appreciate its ambition, daring and execution, listen to Robinson’s ambitious, boundary-busting album. Then listen again. Modern, oracular, and communal, it stretches the limits of improvisation.”
– Carlo Wolff, *JazzTimes*, March 2011, www.jazztimes.com

“... Three new CDs by Robinson – a wide-ranging collection of ensemble pieces, a subtle and thoughtful duet with pianist Anthony Davis, and a solo electro-acoustic album – paint an impressive picture... Robinson brings a penetrating intellect and a warm expansive sound to each... He has well developed ideas specific to each setting and it’s the clear thinking behind them as much as the genuine feeling he conveys that mark him as an exceptional new voice. ...

On *The Two Faces of Janus*, Robinson uses reed players Marty Ehrlich, Rudresh Mahanthappa, guitarist Liberty Ellman, bassist Drew Gress, and drummer George Schuller in different combinations ... As a composer, Robinson... uses his learning... as a foundation for his own original creativity. The legacy of bebop lingers in the long, twisting melody of “Return to Pacasmayo” and you can sense the presence of Ellington in the sensuous voicings of “Tides of Consciousness Fading,” but ultimately what you hear is Robinson. His compositions are well constructed, with every note accounted for and every phrase in place, which gives them a lyrical economy and clarity that admirably focuses and sets up the soloists. ... As a soloist Robinson has a warm, friendly tone, assertive, but not aggressive, and a modest way of delivering really swinging and often brilliant ideas, sort of like a modern day Hank Mobley. ...”
– Ed Hazell, *Point of Departure*, #31, www.pointofdeparture.org

“... “The Two Faces of Janus” takes the listener on a very spirited journey through twisting corridors of composition, with virtuosic solos and colorful horn lines, all backed by a lively rhythm section.

My favorite track is... “Return to Pacasmayo,” featuring raw and edgy solos by Liberty Ellman and Jason Robinson. Another favorite is “Persephone’s Scream,” on which the saxophone playing of Mahanthappa and Robinson is nothing short of masterful. Strap yourself in and check out this great album.”
– Bryan McAllister, *Free Jazz*, February 9, 2011, freejazz-stef.blogspot.com

“... Having invoked the long-standing perceived polarity between West and East Coast Jazz, Robinson kicks against it. ... New York is the dominant influence.

... With this album... Robinson convenes a sympathetic band of fellow travellers to précis a lifetime’s work, but with his face set squarely to the future.

... With ensemble permutations from duo to sextet all deployed, the depth and variety of the music they set down is practically guaranteed. ... The London-born Ellman is a stand-out presence. His cool, steely, cerebral guitar sound carries richer, more evocative traces of his formative influences (Jim Hall seems a safe guess, as does Wes Montgomery)... bass clarinet offsets the occasionally steely collective tone with natural warmth. In the two tracks that feature all three horns an effective weave is achieved: Ehrlich low on bass clarinet, Robinson guiding the line, and Rudresh Mahanthappa soloing melodiously in the higher registers. Robinson’s own tone is simultaneously steely and mellifluous, even on tenor. Jason Robinson and Marty Ehrlich have played as a duo on and off for years, and it’s a role they reprise here... these tracks exhibit the best qualities of well-tempered improvisation. ...

The full ensemble sound can’t help but be dominated by the front-line, its saxophonic mesh occasionally bringing to mind David Sanborn’s date with Tim Berne on the latter’s “Diminutive Mysteries” album... But a closer comparison is with Steve Coleman and Greg Osby’s partnership in Strata Institute... Robinson’s ensemble wouldn’t sound out of place in an M-Base context, though there’s a good deal more compassion in their essentially acoustic sound than in the... cool, plugged-in detachment of M-Base. The Gress/Schuller rhythm team... in their impeccable timing... imbue proceedings with a similar metrical funkiness. ...”
– Tim Owen, *The Jazz Mann*, June 11, 2011, www.thejazzmann.com

“... A practitioner of modern jazz, Robinson is clearly influenced by the traditional movements, including bop. He has assembled some of the finest New York based jazz musicians. The primary quartet consists of Liberty Ellman (guitar), Drew Gress (bass) and George Schuller (drums). Included... are stellar experimental reed players, Marty Ehrlich and Rudresh Mahanthappa. Based on polyphonic counterpoint, the compositions draw from past genres and modern constructs, hence the symbolic title. ... “Return To Pacasmayo” captures the modern approach to bop, as Robinson and Ehrlich execute sharp counterpoints against a hard driving rhythm section. The addition of Mahanthappa creates a three-pronged reed swirl ... The ensemble maintains a coherent structure, and, at the same time, develops uninhibited experimentation. ... Robinson is capable of merging both past and present jazz idioms, while creating a cultural bridge that spans both coasts.”

– Robbie Gerson, *Audiophile Audition*, November 10, 2010 www.audaud.com

“Tenor sax, soprano sax, alto flute, this time in front of a group -- Liberty Ellman splendid on guitar, Drew Gress on bass, and George Schuller on drums -- with two alto saxophone guests for intricate interplay: Rudresh Mahanthappa on 3 cuts, Marty Ehrlich on 5 ... Results are varied, some superb... B+(**)”

– Tom Hull, *Jazz Consumer Guide*, #25, December 21, 2010, www.tomhull.com

“Although he’s appeared on over 30 recordings... this is the first time I’ve heard saxophonist and composer Jason Robinson. ... this CD is a great introduction to his work. ... a widely mixed and stimulating programme ranging from duets to the full sextet...”

– Peter Bevan *Northern Echo*, December 16, 2012

“... A promising new arrival to the East Coast scene, Robinson’s academic background imbues his episodic writing with an organically cohesive

sensibility, while his years spent co-leading the longstanding bicoastal ensembles Cosmologic and the Cross Border Trio lend his focused improvisations a warm, economical lyricism.

The Two Faces of Janus, Robinson's Cuneiform Records debut as a leader, is an exceptional example of modern jazz that looks to the past and future for inspiration—lending credence to its symbolic title. Robinson calls upon the singular talents of some of New York's finest musicians to interpret his engaging compositions...including saxophonists Marty Ehrlich and Rudresh Mahanthappa, guitarist Liberty Ellman, bassist Drew Gress and drummer George Schuller—all renowned bandleaders in their own right.

Robinson seamlessly blends historical and stylistic precedents into a forward-thinking aesthetic built upon the unorthodox structural foundations of linear narrative development, polyphonic counterpoint and modulating rhythm cells. ... The sinuous be-bop-influenced lines of "Persephone's Scream" and the rich Ellingtonian voicings of "Tides of Consciousness Fading" invoke timeless jazz traditions, while Ellman's heavily amplified fretwork on the opener and the variable time signatures of "The Elders" push the proceedings headlong into the future. ...

Balancing the session's heavily arranged set-pieces with a handful of small scale works, Robinson engages in a pair of intimate contrapuntal duets with Ehrlich that essay subtle nuances in timbre and technique ...

...one of the year's most compelling modern jazz recordings."

– Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, October 25, 2010, www.allaboutjazz.com

"... It's not exactly "pure" Free Jazz, as typically understood, given the rhythmic pulse...but it certainly is too exploratory...to warrant a "Modern Mainstream" label... What it is, is a satisfying collection of non-standard compositions that give free rein to these seasoned and accomplished performers' imaginations once the heads are out of the way. It's a dynamite band spearheaded by Robinson's disciplined yet unfettered tenor sax underpinned by the exemplary rhythm team of Schuller and Gress and admirably augmented by...guitarist Ellman. ... Good stuff and recommended."

– David Kane, *Cadence*, April 2001

"...On *The Two Faces of Janus*...Jason Robinson reveals a multi-contextual and many-sided stance, while maximizing the talents of his estimable support system.

Robinson soars to a zenith during his alliances with reed man Marty Ehrlich and alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa But with the core ensemble, Robinson scores a highly literate set of jazz frameworks that integrate nouveau stylization with bop, swing and nods to the freer realm. Contrasts abound... Robinson offers the antithesis to jazz highways frequently traversed."

- Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, Feb. 21, 2011, www.allaboutjazz.com

"It should no longer be surprising that great jazz is being made outside of New York. ... Thus my frustration with terms like "West Coast jazz" ... Straddling academic and performance roles is, in my opinion, much more notable than straddling geographies.

Jazz musicians have been known to turn up their noses at...holders of Ph.D.s perceived as sterilizing the music... Robinson, whose lush, vibrato-heavy tone oozes passion in the midst of technical mastery on "The Elders," defies this stereotype. Equally mesmerizing is his treatment of "Cerberus Reigning," where his playing smoothes over a heavily syncopated drum pattern with a song-like simplicity.

... Each musician shows the ability to listen and react to the others in the midst of high-energy collective improvisation, and angular unison melodies are executed with precision.

The whirlwind of collective improvisation is balanced throughout the album by compositional direction. ...a recording of staggering diversity, even within individual tracks.

The Two Faces of Janus animates Robinson's formidable compositional skill with a lively rhythmic playfulness. The result sounds anything but academic."

– James Hall, *About.com*

"...*The Two Faces of Janus*... lineup... is a well-chosen, very lucidly fluent ensemble indeed. ... This is a band with a definite identity. The rhythm team of Gress and Schuller can do anything and they do it well, whether it touches on the realm of swing, elaborated rock inflected time or freetime. ... The horn lineup is...impressive... three distinct masters of saxaphony, Rudresh the chromatic firebrand, Marty the deft abstractionist, and Mr. Robinson, who holds his own...company as a very limber post-Trane exponent that manages to stay clear of some of the phrases and certain uses of multiphonics some players tend to overuse.

This is a full-length CD with ten very interesting Robinson compositional vehicles, from the ultramodern balladic, to the open-ended motifs and the hard-edge chromatic contrapuntal lines that form a catalyst for burning ensemble improvisations. ...these players have plenty to express and do so with a convincing directness...

Jason Robinson is a force to be reckoned with on the contemporary jazz scene... *The Two Faces of Janus* is excellent modern jazz on all fronts...

Take note: Jason Robinson is somebody to listen to closely in the coming decade. Start with this album. ..."

– Grego Applegate Edwards, *GappleGate Guitar and Bass Blog*, February 7, 2011, gapplegateguitar.blogspot.com

"...Robinson claims an alternative musical lineage to the cool style usually associated with West Coast Jazz, a more maverick legacy that is reflected in both his strong, inventive compositions and the creative collective interplay and improvisation which his collaborators bring to this project. Robinson leads by example, supported by a core quartet... Guest saxophonists Marty Ehrlich and Rudresh Mahanthappa add depth and imagination to a compelling and resourceful set of ultimately forward-looking contemporary jazz."

– Kenny Mathieson, *The Scotsman*, January 18, 2011, www.scotsman.com

"... Robinson's music is conceived and constructed with both historical perspective and a doorway to the future...*Janus* is part of several interconnected Robinson projects and one of three late 2010 releases...

With highly diverse backgrounds, Robinson's confederates are five of the most insightful, intelligent and skilled available anywhere: guitarist Liberty Ellman...percussionist George Schuller... bassist Drew Gress...reed player Marty Ehrlich...and on three tracks, alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa...

A lineup like this, bursting with potential, generates high expectations and they deliver very persuasively. All the material is composed by Robinson who has a talent...for sculpting composed segments so as to blend seamlessly into the extended improvisational sections. Robinson does not allow his compositions to be constrained by the presumption of a six-man group as a unit, using instead various combinations of instruments and personnel... the two-faced elements are evident: thematic rhythms and phrases are shared among instruments and developed; often a composition has an overarching A-B-A form and solo sections are sometimes defined by a sudden shift to more stable, pulsing rhythmic structure at times hinting of swing or bop. But, many forward-looking elements are prominent: collective improvisations, ambiguous or non-essential tonalities, production of non-traditional instrumental sounds ("noise") and melodic material is often angular and truncated. ...

The virtuosity and creativity of Robinson et al should impress even the most traditional of jazz fans and for anyone interested in progressive composed/improvisational multifarious contemporary recordings *The Two Faces of Janus* is a superb find. [rating: 5 stars]"

– Mike Reynolds, *MuzikReviews.com*, December 7, 2010

"...On *The Two Faces of Janus*, Gress is part of groups led by saxophonist Jason Robinson on eight of ten tracks... The remaining two tracks are freely improvised duets between Robinson's tenor and Marty Ehrlich's alto sax.

Gress and drummer George Schuller anchor the other tracks, all but one also featuring the distinctive guitar of Liberty Ellman. The jaunty title track, a sextet with the leader's tenor Ehrlich's bass clarinet and alto sax of Rudresh Mahanthappa, features polyphonal weaving lines and a calibrated momentum unifying the potential pandemonium. ... Robinson may embrace the far reaches of today's free jazz at moment (overblowing, braying, honking and tonguing passages) but his pieces have definite architectonic shape and deft dynamics. With his robust tone, his tenor sound suggests Sonny Rollins as well as Dewey Redman or David S. Ware..."

– George Kanzler, *All About Jazz-New York*, February 2011

"WMUA's - TOP 50 CD's of 2010 ... 35. Jason Robinson - Two Faces of Janus - Cuneiform..." – Ken Irwin, *WMUA*

FEATURES / ARTICLES:

"...Two Faces of Janus, released by Cuneiform Records, features a sterling New York-based post-bop jazz group (including Marty Ehrlich, Rudresh Mahanthappa and Drew Gress) and a compositional approach that Robinson calls "Ellingtonian" in how it's tailored to individual players..."

...Robinson has many irons in the fire (or saxes: he plays tenor, alto, and soprano), with projects in various stages of development. ... When asked who in particular he would like to collaborate with in the future, Robinson signals his ambition and his eclecticism by naming saxophonists Joe Lovano, Evan Parker and Roscoe Mitchell, country legend Willie Nelson and the jam band Phish. ..."

– Bill Tilland, "Jason Robinson," *Signal To Noise*, #61, Spring 2011

"...In this interview, Robinson discusses his use of electronics and computer manipulation in his solo saxophone playing; how the music of Duke Ellington and Cecil Taylor inform his duets with pianist Anthony Davis; and how he very carefully selected the members of his Janus Ensemble. "[LISTEN: <http://thejazzsession.com/2010/12/13/the-jazz-session-224-jason-robinson/>]

– Jason Crane, *The Jazz Session*, #224, December 13th 2011, www.thejazzsession.com

LIVE REVIEW:

"Saxophonist/composer Jason Robinson—whose dual release of *The Two Faces Of Janus* (Cuneiform, 2010), and *Cerulean Landscape* (Clean Feed, 2010), put him on the map of wider recognition—finally made his impending departure from San Diego official with this farewell concert, held at Dizzy's.

... While he was back east, Robinson organized the New York version of his Janus Ensemble, which features guitarist Liberty Ellman, bassist Drew Gress, drummer George Schuller, and fellow horn players Marty Ehrlich and Rudresh Mahanthappa.

The West Coast version of the Janus Ensemble assembled for this event had a core unit with pianist Joshua White, bassist Rob Thorsen and drummer Duncan Moore. ..."

– Robert Bush, *All About Jazz*, June 20, 2011