



Bio information: **THE CLAUDIA QUINTET + 1 featuring KURT ELLING and THEO BLECKMANN**

Title: **WHAT IS THE BEAUTIFUL?** (Cuneiform Rune 327)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ

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

"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***

"Rich with ambition and empathetic interplay...the Claudia Quintet doesn't entirely sound like anybody else. Which is exactly what makes them worth seeking out." – **Chris Barton, *Los Angeles Times***

"...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***

"Soon it will/Be showtime again," recites **Kurt Elling** at the outset of the **Claudia Quintet**'s sixth CD, *What Is the Beautiful?* "Somebody will paint beautiful faces all over the sky."

The sentiment expressed by those lines, penned by poet/visual artist **Kenneth Patchen**, captures something of the anticipation proffered by the release of a new Claudia album. Bandleader/percussionist **John Hollenbeck**'s evocative, richly luminescent compositions definitely possess the suggestive power to encourage listeners to look heavenward, searching for those faces in the sky.

Richard Peek, director of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of Rochester Libraries, describes Patchen's body of work as one that "defies easy categorization and is undeniably his own." Perhaps in that one statement, more than in any aesthetic choice or thematic material, we can find the common ground between poet and composer.

Most of the material on *What Is the Beautiful?* was commissioned by the **University of Rochester** for its **100th birthday celebration of Patchen** in 2011. Not particularly conversant with the poet's work, Hollenbeck began a crash course and found himself immediately drawn to the breadth of Patchen's themes.

"He has a wide palette, which I like," Hollenbeck says. "There are a lot of really dark, political poems, but then he has whole collections of almost childlike drawings with very short, funny poems. And usually in every collection there are lyrical love poems, always dedicated to his wife, which are more flowery, almost old-fashioned. I really started to love the humor, the darkness, and the sincere love he had for his wife."

Born in 1911, Patchen was an avant-gardist with strong pacifist leanings. His work bears an obvious kinship with the Beats, though he dwelt on the periphery of that scene, never one to align himself with any movement or affiliation. He was an early experimenter in the fusion of jazz and poetry, often reciting his work against a bebop backdrop (slyly alluded to here in the eccentric swing during the opening moments of "Showtime"). A debilitating back injury kept him away from public engagements for most of his life, and he spent more than a decade bedridden before his death in 1972.

Hollenbeck immediately thought of singer Kurt Elling to give voice to these poems – wholly unaware that Elling is something of a Patchen aficionado. "Kurt is a scholar with this stuff," Hollenbeck says. "He knew Patchen and knew exactly what to do. He's amazing."

On his own recordings, Patchen recites his work in a gruff monotone; Elling, on the other hand, inhabits these poems as an actor would a role. On "Showtime," he welcomes listeners with the bold enunciation of a television emcee; he lurches through "Opening the Window" with an intoxicated stagger; and he recounts the menacing absurdities of the surreal "Job" with dueling voices: his own and a blue-collar Chicago accent, transforming the piece into a duet of narrator and character.

Surprisingly, Hollenbeck discovered that engineer **Andy Taub** was also a Patchen fanatic, with his own collection of the poet's works. It was his idea to alternate Elling's two readings. "He was really into the material and was blown away by the way Kurt was reading the poems," Hollenbeck recalls. "More than your average engineer, he was really involved in the creative process."

Vocalist **Theo Bleckmann**, probably Hollenbeck's most frequent collaborator, was also enlisted to lend a dreamier, more song-like atmosphere to several of the poems. "Theo has a very gentle, open, vulnerable approach," Hollenbeck says. He uses that voice to stunning effect on "The Snow Is Deep On the Ground," which conjures the image of swirling snow and the crystalline hush of a fresh snowfall on a still morning.

Two of the session's three instrumental tracks were commissioned by the **Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival** and inspired by the Scottish island of Islay, renowned for its wintering geese. "Mates For Life" unfolds with a rich narrative progression, while "Flock" lives up to its name with a frenzy of percussive fluttering.

As on their previous CD, *Royal Toast*, the Claudia Quintet is again supplemented by a +1, in this case Philadelphia-based pianist **Matt Mitchell**, a member of saxophonist **Tim Berne**'s **Adobe Probe** who has collaborated with the likes of **Ravi Coltrane**, **Ralph Alessi**, **Mark Helias**, **Ari Hoenig** and **Josh Roseman**. His virtuosity and spontaneity make him a perfect fit with the long-running core group – 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.

For more information, visit **The Claudia Quintet** online at: www.johnhollenbeck.com

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET +1 featuring KURT ELLING and THEO BLECKMANN: MEMBER BIOS

JOHN HOLLENBECK

[see also: www.johnhollenbeck.com]

It's traditional, when paying compliment to drummers, to draw comparisons with the octopus, implying agility beyond the means of a paltry pair of human hands. But when considering John Hollenbeck, the multi-limbed creature that seems most appropriate to invoke is the mythical hydra; for while Hollenbeck is certainly no stranger to rhythmic intricacy, it's *ideas* that seem to spring forth like so many heads, two more arising as one falls away.

Hollenbeck is a composer of music uncategorizable beyond the fact of being always identifiably his. A conceptualist able to translate the traditions of jazz and new music into a fresh, eclectic, forward-looking language of his own invention, intellectually rewarding yet ever accessibly vibrant. A drummer and percussionist possessed of a playful versatility and a virtuosic wit. Most of all, a musical thinker – whether putting pen to paper or conjuring spontaneous sound – allergic to repetition, forever seeking to surprise himself and his audiences.

The prolific and unpredictable nature of Hollenbeck's output has been evident since he first emerged as a leader in late 2001, releasing four completely different albums within a matter of months. Three of them (*Quartet Lucy*, the duo CD *Static Still*, and *no images*, featuring several different configurations) introduced the partnership of Hollenbeck and iconoclastic vocalist Theo Bleckmann, who continue to collaborate in a variety of offbeat settings. Along with keyboardist Gary Versace, they form the Refuge Trio, as boundary-free a small group as one is likely to find.

The last of that initial burst of creativity was the self-titled debut of the Claudia Quintet, Hollenbeck's longest-running ensemble. Over the course of its six CDs, Claudia has cemented its reputation as one of the most innovative and adaptable units in modern jazz, so deftly attuned to one another that Hollenbeck's most dizzying compositional leaps are taken with an air of playfulness and skewed humor. The group was named "Rising Star Jazz Group" in DownBeat Magazine's 2008 Critics' Poll, received a grant from the Chamber Music America New Jazz Works: Commissioning and Ensemble Development program to compose a suite which can be heard on 2009's *Royal Toast*, and received a grant from Arts International to travel to Brazil for performances in the spring of 2002. The quintet was also commissioned by the University of Rochester to set the work of Kenneth Patchen as part of their 100th birthday celebration of the ground-breaking poet. Those pieces can be heard on Claudia's latest release, *What Is the Beautiful?*, featuring vocals by Bleckmann and Kurt Elling.

Hollenbeck has also rethought the big band via his Large Ensemble, which topped the "Rising Star Big Band" category in DownBeat's 2011 Critics' Poll. The JHLE trades the gale force blowing of most such bands for a multi-hued palette of tonal colors and rich, evocative atmospheres. Both of the ensemble's releases have been nominated for Grammys, *A Blessing* in 2006 and *eternal interlude* in 2009. His large-band pieces have also been recorded by Austria's Jazz Bigband Graz on 2006's critically-acclaimed *Joys and Desires*. In 2010, the CMA/FACE French-American Jazz Exchange Program awarded Hollenbeck a grant to develop work with Daniel Yvinec and the Orchestre National de Jazz of France, resulting in the release of *Shut up and Dance* (Bee Jazz), named as one of the top five albums of the year by *Le Monde*.

If these projects can safely be termed "jazz" (at least by those comfortable with the label's more progressive interpretations), they should by no means be taken as indicating that Hollenbeck's output is limited to even that genre's most elastic borders. His growing body of commissioned compositions relate just as obliquely to the "new music" tag, exemplifying his ability to not so much defy categorization as to evolve beyond its necessity.

One of Hollenbeck's earliest appearances on record was as the composer of "The Shape of Spirit," a piece for wind ensemble issued on the Mons label in 1998. The following year he composed "Processional and Desiderata" for wind ensemble and orator (released by Challenge Records in 2001), written for and featuring the voice and trombone of Bob Brookmeyer, with whom Hollenbeck studied composition under a National Endowment grant in 1994.

His piece "The Cloud of Unknowing," commissioned by the Bamberg Choir in Germany, fit comfortably alongside works by J.S. Bach, Igor Stravinsky & Paul Hindemith when it was released in 2001 on the Edel Classics label, while his 2004 chamber piece "Demütig Bitten," commissioned by Germany's Windsbacher Knabenchor, was released on the Rondeau label along with works by Giovanni Gabrieli, Josquin des Prez and J.S. Bach (again). In 2002, his IAJE Gil Evans Fellowship Commission piece, "A Blessing," featuring Theo Bleckmann's stunning vocals, was performed to critical acclaim at the IAJE Conference; and in 2003 his IAJE/ASCAP Commission, "Folkmoot," was premiered in Toronto, Canada. A self-released collection of commissioned works, *Rainbow Jimmies*, showcased several of his chamber pieces.

Hollenbeck'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; the Painted Bride Art Center of Philadelphia; the Frankfurt Radio Big Band; and the University of the Arts, Philadelphia.

Hollenbeck received degrees in percussion and jazz composition from the Eastman School of Music before moving to New York City in the early 1990s. He quickly struck up relationships with some of the leading lights of jazz (Fred Hersch, Tony Malaby, Kenny Wheeler) and new music (composer/choreographer Meredith Monk, for whose works "Magic Frequencies," "Mercy," and "The Impermanence Project" he composed and performed percussion scores). His awards and honors include winning the Jazz Composers Alliance Composition Contest in 1995 and 2002; Meet the Composer's Grants in 1995 and 2001; top spots in the Rising Star Composer and Arranger categories in the 2008 & 2009 DownBeat Critics' Poll; the 2010 ASCAP Jazz Vanguard Award; and a 2007 Guggenheim Fellowship. Since 2005, he has been a professor of Jazz Drums and Improvisation at the Jazz Institute Berlin.

DREW GRESS

[see also: www.drewgress.com]

Bassist/composer Drew Gress performs extensively with artists on the cutting edge of contemporary improvised music. His latest project-*The Sky Inside*, features Drew's original compositions for quintet. Earlier releases include the critically-acclaimed *The Irrational Numbers* (2008) *7 Black Butterflies* (2005), *Spin & Drift* (2001), and *Heyday* (1997). Future projects include 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, Steve Lehman, Tony Malaby, Angelica Sanchez, Paul Smoker and John Surman. To date he has appeared on over 250 recordings.

(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, Asia, Africa, and Australia and has served as Artist-in-Residence at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in Russia, and the Paris Conservatoire. He also holds ongoing teaching positions at NYU and at the Siena Jazz Workshop. 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]

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, Raif Hyseni, 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) and Slavic Soul Party! albums; he currently leads an organ trio with Gary Versace and Tom Rainey. His name appears regularly in the Downbeat Critic's Poll for vibraphone, and also in the New York list of prison visitors, where he has been performing since 2009 under the auspices of Carnegie Hall.

TED REICHMAN[see also: 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) and "My Ears are Bent" (Skirl 2006). He is very active in film composition- his most recent work, "Dear Mandela," will be screening in 2012. In 2010 he was a fellow at the Sundance Institute's Documentary Composers Lab. Also in 2010 he joined the faculty of the New England Conservatory of Music's Contemporary Improvisation Department.

CHRIS SPEED[see also: 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.

MATT MITCHELL[see also: www.mattmitchell.us]

Matt Mitchell is a pianist and composer interested in the intersections of various strains of acoustic, electric, composed, and improvised new music. He has lived in Philadelphia since 1999 and performs regularly in New York City, throughout the United States and around the world. He is a member of Tim Berne's Los Totopos, the collective trio Snake Oil with Tim Berne and Ches Smith, a duo with Ches Smith, John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet + 1, John Hollenbeck's Large Ensemble, the Darius Jones Quartet, the duo Fourth Floor with Dan Weiss, and a duo with Dave King. He also performs frequently with Rudresh Mahanthappa and Bunky Green's Apex and Rez Abbasi's Invocation, and has also performed with Shane Endsley, Brad Shepik, Ralph Alessi, Tom Rainey, and Ingrid Laubrock. He has released several albums on Scrapple Records and is also active as an educator, most visibly with the Brooklyn, NY based Center for Improvisational Music.

KURT ELLING[see also: www.kurtelling.com]

Kurt Elling is among the world's foremost jazz vocalists. He has been named "Male Singer of the Year" by the Jazz Journalists Association on half a dozen occasions in the past ten years, and during the same interval has been the perennial winner of the DownBeat Critics Poll. He is also a Grammy winner, and every record he has made has been Grammy nominated.

Elling's rich baritone spans four octaves and features both astonishing technical mastery and emotional depth. His command of rhythm, texture, phrasing, and dynamics is more like a virtuoso jazz instrumentalist than a vocalist. His repertoire includes original compositions and modern interpretations of standards, all of which are springboards for inspired improvisation, scatting, spoken word, and poetry.

Elling has recorded and/or performed with an array of artists, including Terence Blanchard, Dave Brubeck, Jon Hendricks, Charlie Hunter, Al Jarreau, Christian McBride, and Kurt Rosenwinkel. He served as the Artist-in-Residence for the Singapore Music and Monterey Jazz Festivals. He has also written multi-disciplinary works for The Steppenwolf Theatre and the City of Chicago. The Obama Administration's first state dinner featured Elling in a command performance.

Elling is a renowned artist of vocalese—the writing and performing of words over recorded improvised jazz solos. The natural heir to jazz pioneers Eddie Jefferson, King Pleasure, and Jon Hendricks, Elling has set his own lyrics to the improvised solos of Wayne Shorter, Keith Jarrett, and Pat Metheny. He often incorporates images and references from writers such as Rilke, Rumi, Neruda, and Proust into his work.

In 2010 Elling completed an extensive tour with the Monterey Jazz Festival All-Stars and staged Passion World, a commissioned event for Jazz at Lincoln Center with French accordion virtuoso Richard Galliano, singing songs of love and loss in five languages.

The Gate, Elling's much anticipated new recording, opened 2011. Produced by the legendary Don Was (The Rolling Stones, Bonnie Raitt, Bob Dylan), Elling's latest offering features inspired interpretations of songs by The Beatles, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, and Stevie Wonder.

THEO BLECKMANN[see also: www.theobleckmann.com]

A jazz singer and new music composer of eclectic tastes and prodigious gifts, GRAMMY NOMINATED and ECHO award recipient Theo Bleckmann makes music that is accessibly sophisticated, unsentimentally emotional, and seriously playful, leading his work to be described as "from another planet" (New York Times), as "magical, futuristic," (AllAboutJazz), "limitless" (Citypaper, Philadelphia) "transcendent" (Village Voice) and "brilliant" (New York Magazine).

Bleckmann has released a series of gorgeous and irreverent albums on Winter & Winter, including recordings of Las Vegas standards, of Berlin Kabarett, and of popular "bar songs" (all with pianist Fumio Yasuda), a recording of newly-arranged songs by Charles Ives (with jazz/rock collective Kneebody), his acoustic Solos for Voice "I dwell in possibility" and his latest project: "Hello Earth - the music of Kate Bush."

Bleckmann has additionally collaborated with musicians and composers, including Laurie Anderson, Uri Caine, Philip Glass, John Hollenbeck, Sheila Jordan, Phil Kline, David Lang, Kirk Nurock, Ben Monder, Michael Tilson Thomas, Julia Wolfe, John Zorn, the Bang on a Can All-stars, and, most prominently, Meredith Monk, with whom Bleckmann worked as a core ensemble member for fifteen years.

He has recently been interviewed by Terry Gross on NPR's Fresh Air and appeared on the Letterman show with Laurie Anderson.

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS



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

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT PREVIOUS CLAUDIA QUINTET RELEASES ON CUNEIFORM:

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET with GARY VERSACE ROYAL TOAST CUNEIFORM 2010

"On *Royal Toast*, the Quintet...augmented to a sextet...moves easily between improvisation and intricately arranged composition. The band's unorthodox instrumentation-- bass, drums, reeds, accordion, and vibraphone-- gives it a distinct sonic signature. Ted Reichman's accordion is used in every conceivable way, playing leads, soloing, harmonizing with the clarinet, and in some of the album's...most rewarding passages, hypnotically vamping in a static dance with Matt Moran's vibraphone. Though they can clang along with the best of them, they do quiet and meditative well. ... It's fitting they'd land on the Cuneiform label."
– Joe Tangari, *Pitchfork*, August 19, 2010

"...Instrumentally, and in the album's far-flung rhythmic and harmonic textures, *Royal Toast* is a world of ideas, sometimes diverging from sharp, angular rhythms to haunting ambient harmonies. ...
Sonically, Hollenbeck (who also serves as producer), along with engineers Andy Taub and Ben Liscio, has created an airy, open soundstage that complements these rich harmonic textures while bringing the soloists into sharp focus."
– Greg Cahill, *The Absolute Sound*, September 2010

"...the Claudia Quintet comes from a jazz foundation, and it's played by musicians fluent in jazz. But there's a lot of other stuff mixed in... There are cries of free improvisation and interlocking layers of minimalism, and there's the complexity and clean precision of math-/post-/prog-rock. ...
This music definitely grooves, unconventionally but head-forward and throbbing... But it also develops over time as its beats shift shape ... And it isn't afraid to slow down in search of the probingly beautiful... this is music that resists idiom."
– Patrick Jarenwattananon, *NPR Music*, www.npr.org

"... With John Hollenbeck...everything he puts his name to claims a worthwhile place... What's especially interesting about this recording is how easily Versace is assimilated. ...It's a record that is perhaps best absorbed slowly and by stages, but it is essential listening and consolidates the Quintet's high standing on the current scene. ..."
– Brian Morton, *Point of Departure*, #29, www.pointofdeparture.org

"... If John Hollenbeck is approximately the hottest drummer/composer in New York jazz circles, then the Claudia Quintet is the hottest of his many projects as well as one of the city's most passionately complex live bands. ... the neon-knotted compositions on *Royal Toast* (Cuneiform) torque and twist... A mighty fine album by any standard-but don't miss Claudia in the flesh."
– Richard Gehr, *Relix*, June 2010

"...starkly beautiful... You could say that *Royal Toast* relishes reconciling opposites -- wood and metal, cerebral melodies and forthright grooves, stuttering rhythms and simple ... it's mind-expanding... it will reward your attention many times over."
– Peter Hum, *Ottawa Citizen*, May 21 2010

"The Claudia Quintet...turns out music of clockwork intricacy and crisp premeditation. ...
Mr. Hollenbeck composes with an ear for passing tensions, some breezier than others. His band mates, all thoughtful improvisers, fill in the gaps... Structure and liberty are both so integrated into the band playbook that they don't assume any kind of opposition. That's more commonplace than it used to be too, though this group still makes it feel special."
– Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, May 16, 2010

"...Touching on enough influences to resemble an expertly curated corner record shop — a thicket of Steve Reich-informed vibraphone here, a dash of knotty chamber jazz there — the Claudia Quintet is one of the more adventurous jazz ensembles working today. ...unexpected pleasures lie below the surface. ...
Rich with ambition and empathetic interplay that never allows one player to rise above any other for long, the Claudia Quintet doesn't entirely sound like anybody else. Which is exactly what makes them worth seeking out."
– Chris Barton, *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 2010

"This fifth release by my current favourite group finds them joined by pianist Gary Versace... His addition means that half the band is now playing percussive instruments, giving Hollenbeck more compositional opportunity to indulge his polyrhythmic passions. ...Claudia's music is edgy, angular and often intricate, the different instruments layering across each other in almost contrapuntal fashion. ... This latest installment does them proud."
– Simon Adams, *Jazz Journal*, July 2010

"... *Royal Toast* adds pianist Gary Versace, introducing even more contrapuntal potential without over-thickening the stew, and releasing the remarkable Hollenbeck to play a freer textural role. ...the overlays of vibes motifs, sax riffing, flowing accordion improv and thunderous drumming makes Armitage Shanks...a melodically mercurial triumph. Short, overdubbed dialogue solos by Speed, bassist Drew Gress and vibist Matt Moran add diverting interludes, and there's plenty of dreamy humming-glass sounds and luxurious accordion sighs to balance all this fine album's industrious busyness. [4 out of 5 stars]"
– John Fordham, *The Guardian*, September 16, 2010

"The best chamber jazz band in the world do it again with another challenging and successful set of dense ensemble work that succeeds on every level. Whether fiercely polyrhythmic or totally strung out and devoid of momentum, the Claudias swing with an identifiably jazz feel, but are at ease with a dizzying array of genres and techniques. What's always so scary about this band is the songwriting...there's a distinct sound to each song to give it identity. ..."
– David Dacks, *Exclaim*, August 2010, exclaim.ca

“In the sometimes murky world of experimental jazz, New York’s Claudia Quintet stands out with a playful spirit and utterly distinctive sound that gets hips swaying and heads nodding in even the most austere music-nerd performance spaces. A not-found-elsewhere front line of accordion...”

– Siddhartha Mitter, *The Boston Globe*, May 17, 2010, www.boston.com

“The buzz around this New York ensemble has grown to a roar over the last few years, which is a delicious irony given that The Claudia Quintet is often at its most affecting when playing sotto voce, as if content to whisper rather than bellow... Ted Reichman’s accordion, Chris Speed’s clarinet, Matt Moran’s vibraphone, Drew Gress’ double bass, John Hollenbeck’s drums and (guest) Gary Versace’s piano often blend into an ensemble sound that has the vaporous drift and haze that one might associate with hushed ambient electronica or at least very produced or studio sculpted music.

... Claudia’s timbres, eerie and winsome in equal measure, prove its greatest strong point. The combination of clarinet, accordion and vibraphone fashions an electric whistle and whir that squares the circle between 90s indie science frictioners Stereolab and 60s proto-proggers Soft Machine ... Claudia is a jazz group questioning the divide between genres and points in time.”

– Kevin Le Gendre, *BBC Music*, 2010-09-07, www.bbc.co.uk

“... The resulting music is...bold, groundbreaking, and spread across numerous colorful sonic palettes. ... Versace's role is that of shading or propping up these melodies, and one should listen closely to his contributions... It's another extraordinary musical experience from the Claudia Quintet, who deserve all the high marks they receive as an innovative, thought-provoking, singularly unique contemporary ensemble. [4.5/5 stars]“

– Michael G. Nastos, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

FOR

CUNEIFORM

2007

“...the title is a pun. Such personal playfulness keeps with a chamber band that has tickled the ears of adventurous listeners...with its deft blend of improvised jazz solos, run-on, minimalist figures that gradually shift shape and color, and unusual instrumentation. ...

More than many hybrid jazz forms on offer these days, *For*’s rhythmic propulsion, bursts of blues feeling and first-rate soloing should make it attractive to swing purists who may think it’s not ‘for’ them. [4 Stars]”

– Paul de Barros, “Reviews,” *Downbeat*, Vol. 74 No. 10, October 2007

“Since their founding in the late 1990s, The Claudia Quintet has walked a unique path in contemporary jazz. ... An astonishing band with a huge range of emotional depth and range and with appeal far beyond strictly 'jazz' listeners.”

– *The Vortex*, www.vortexjazz.co.uk

“... The opening track, shifting through free-jazz, polyphonic clamour and a klezmerish bounce, set against a hip-hop beat, is typical. Mat Moran's vibes are sometimes gently blended with clarinet and accordion, while lyrical pealing-bells cascades contrast with edgy free-swing. It's all far from just another exercise in eclecticism, and ushers in one of the most characterful small jazz groups of recent times. [4 stars]” – John Fordham, *The Guardian*, Aug. 10, 2007

“...the Claudia Quintet has navigated the boundary lines between free jazz, contemporary composition, progressive rock and electronica so successfully that its output is virtually uncategorizable. ...

... A fertile blend of infectious grooves, euphonious melodies, rich harmonies, adventurous improvisation and cinematic ambience, *For* is another winning chapter in the saga of the peerless Claudia Quintet.”

– Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, July 01, 2007

“...the group combines the shimmering clarity of the George Shearing Quintet with the ADHD adventurousness of John Zorn, the structured dorkiness of a string quartet with the shrieking madness of Albert Ayler. The Claudia Quintet...is one of the most exciting groups in contemporary jazz.... Each of the discs comes at you with the force of a manifesto: this band knows exactly what it is about, and the compositions charge forward with inevitability. ... the band now sounds so thoroughly integrated and seamless that you'd think it was a tenor-trumpet quintet or a 16-piece big band. ...The Claudia Quintet, inimitable, deserves to inspire. ... Rating:[7]

– Will Layman, *PopMatters*, October 1, 2007, www.popmatters.com

“...this group's material is built upon paradox; ...under the appearance of sheer “linear” themes or minimalist repetitions there's a puzzling world of details and structures that, taken as a whole, furnish the compositions with the richness that's typical of a great “progressive” band mixing contemporary jazz, Reich, Piazzolla and Bulgarian folk played with the same attitude of a technically hyper-advanced bionic busker. ... astounding musicianship...”

– Massimo Ricci, *Touching Extremes*, October 2007

“... The band combines the Carpenters' (that's right the whacky 1970s pop unit) hit 'Rainy Days’ with Stan Kenton's arrangement of “The Peanut Vendor.” Now, you're wondering, does Hollenbeck have big ears or is he the Raymond Scott of this new millennium? The answer is yes and, hopefully, yes.”

– Mark Corroto, *All About Jazz*, September 21, 2007

“John Hollenbeck’s New York based ensemble...continues to trace an original route through contemporary jazz....Influences ranging from minimalism to post-rock are filtered through a cutting edge jazz sensibility, and tonalities are predominantly bright...” – Andy Hamilton, *The Wire*, Issue 288, Feb. 2008

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

SEMI-FORMAL

CUNEIFORM

2005

“...*Semi-Formal* continues to explore the meeting point of through-composition, exploratory improvisation, and textural soundscapes... Impossible to categorize stylistically, the album’s boundaries are further broken by shifting musical responsibilities. ...Clearly the quintet views itself as a mini-orchestra, rather than an ensemble based on traditional roles.

...It’s wholly appropriate that this release appear on Cuneiform, a progressive and impossible to pigeonhole label. ...Contemporary classical, jazz, minimal, progressive... genre matters not. The Claudia Quintet is, quite simply, a category all its own – a group of players with the kind of infinite reach to give Hollenbeck’s captivating compositions an approach like no other.”

– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, 10/6/05, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...Drummer/leader John Hollenbeck’s compositions for The Claudia Quintet evoke occasional...memories of Steve Reich’s pattern music, where initial repetition soon evolves into subtle variation... You could just as well invoke the beautiful precision of M.C. Escher’s drawings, for the mathematics involved are that smooth. As neatly machined as this music can be, however, the group’s music welcomes friction, combustion and surprise. ...”

– Randal McIlroy, *Coda*, Issue 325, Jan/Feb 2006

“... It’s music that, in keeping with Cuneiform’s devotion to...uncategorisable forms, breaks down boundaries. Lots of clever stuff and a leaven of humour...make it an appealing set...genuinely though-provoking. ...”

– Brian Morton, “Jazz & Improv,” *Wire*, Issue 263, Jan. 2006

“... As much a soundtrack for a nonexistent movie as it is a jazz set, the music on *Semi-Formal* is quite cinematic, moody, and thoroughly intriguing. ...this is very much a 13-song suite, with one selection leading logically if unpredictably to another. ...”

– Scott Yanow, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

“...Mixing minimalist avant-rock, fiery improvisation and razor sharp writing, these boys manage to reference everything from the metric trickery of Dave Holland (“Drewslate”) to the glowing ambience of The Necks (“Kord”), but they don’t really sound like anyone but themselves.

... Though Hollenbeck’s music is undoubtedly clever stuff...it’s played with enough heart to make it lovable rather than just admirable. Brilliant.”

– Peter Marsh. *BBC Online*, www.bbc.co.uk

“...An inventive amalgamation of Downtown compositional intricacies, post-minimalist classical technique, and a contemporary post-rock instrumental vibe, along with a healthy dose of non-Western concepts, the Claudia Quintet is truly an unclassifiable ensemble. ...With their distinctive merger of old world timbres and futuristic concepts, the Claudia Quintet truly sounds like no other working ensemble today.”

– Troy Collins, *One Final Note*

“...drummer John Hollenbeck earns his tag as a leader by composing the music, but when it comes to performing it the credit couldn’t be more equally distributed. This is a true ensemble from top to bottom, a sonic equivalent to a hand-woven tapestry, where the quirky personalities of the individuals surface as dynamic imperfections and variations in the patterns. ...

The quintet’s instrumental palette has never before been this expansive, with all of the players doubling and tripling on different instruments, and the scattered solos emerge in a satisfyingly organic fashion, spouting from a passage in such a way that it might just sound like part of the writing. Impressive. 3 1/2 STARS.”

– Peter Margasak, *Down Beat*, Vol. 73, No. 1, January 2006

“... Hollenbeck’s gift for imaginative, finely woven orchestration couldn’t be clearer, whether he’s working with five pieces or 16.

...*Semi-Formal* follows logically from Claudia’s previous outings in its harmonic depth, formal unpredictability, sonic clarity and overall approachability.

The references span from surf rock to chamber jazz to hyperarticulate “acoustica” club beats, all rendered with exquisite precision and heedless abandon... Compositionally, there are too many moments of brilliance to list here...”

– David R. Adler, *JazzTimes*

“...The clockwork precision of ‘Drewslate’ weds the self-conscious trickiness of Tortoise with Steve Reich’s investigations into repetitive Serialism, while ‘Limp Mint’ is a suitably wounded, abstract groove with an impossibly disorientating rhythm and woozy vibes – like a post-rock take on Eric Dolphy’s *Out to Lunch*. ... 3 STARS”

– Daniel Spicer, *Jazzwise*, Issue 94, February 2006

THE CLAUDIA QUINTET

I, CLAUDIA

CUNEIFORM

2004

“...these adventurous musicians are pushing the edge of what jazz is, remaking the “is” part with influences taken from Frank Zappa, Steve Gadd, Astor Piazzolla... Playful and exotic, moody and dark, *I, Claudia* will excite those ready for jazz beyond major label narrow-mindedness... *I, Claudia* is exhilarating...”

– Ken Micallef, *Launch/Yahoo Music*, www.music.yahoo.com

“The Claudia Quintet creates a fresh, distinctive sound while it obliterates barriers between jazz, classical and progressive rock. ...This unusually configured quintet challenges listeners with layered arrangements that undergo almost continuous transformations. ... Though unpredictable, Hollenbeck’s transitions sound unforced and natural. The versatility of the quintet accommodates Hollenbeck’s shape-shifting pieces.4 stars”

– Jon Andrews, *DownBeat*, May 2004, v. 71,#5

“Drummer John Hollenbeck often has been quoted as saying his music “sounds like everything.” ...if “I, Claudia” is any indication, “everything” in Hollenbeck’s book apparently encompasses chamber jazz sonorities, free haze interplay, electronica-like atmospheres, post-rock funk rhythms, Sanskrit chants, West African beats, Balkan dances, plus echoes of Steve Reich, Astor Piazzolla and Jimmy Giuffre. Mind you, that’s the short list.

...in keeping with the spirit of its title, the music on “I, Claudia” comes across as witty and playful rather than cerebral and self-consciously cutting edge. ...the quintet is composed of seasoned jazz musicians who venture beyond genre borders with a light-hearted curiosity that keeps the music from devolving into avant-garde noisemaking.”

– Mike Joyce, *The Washington Post*, Feb 4, 2005

“...The Claudia Quintet has been compared favorably to Tortoise, and it’s an apt analogy...but The Quintet brings a different mix to the table, with a stronger jazz presence, more musical intellect, and a bit less of the slacker/ stoner vibe embraced by the post-rock crowd. ...Hollenbeck’s compositions are so deft and fluid that any movements towards the fringes are integrated into a broader musical palette that beguiles and seduces rather than throwing a thorny musical challenge at the listener. ... 4 stars”

– Bill Tilland, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

“The unusual front line combination gives the music a very light, airy quality which keeps their interlocking syncopations nice and clear. ...their music is drawn to chamber scale, but moves in expanding ellipses instead of locked circles and spirals. The moments when the Quintet’s jazz impulses break through the careful mosaic are brilliant...a transcendent peak in an otherwise effectively restrained performance.”

– James Beaudreau, *Signal To Noise*, Spring 2004

“*I, Claudia* follows up the Claudia Quintet’s self-titled debut release and repeats the magic of that 2001 session. ...Hollenbeck’s compositions are beyond jazz, inching up on chamber music but informed by ethnic, rock, and modern composition as well. ...Hollenbeck’s music is all about reflection: the simple note, breath and gesture. ... Hollenbeck lays such a casual groove he lets your mind fill the gaps with imagination. ... a band with the hippest groove in music today.”

– Mark Corroto, *All About Jazz*, Feb 2004, www.allaboutjazz.com

“The appeal of the Claudia Quintet’s second CD comes in the sonorities conjured by drummer/composer John Hollenbeck: the deep woody tones of Chris Speed’s clarinet against the wheezing delicacy of Ted Reichman’s accordion and Matt Moran’s vibes. ...Those cyclical rhythms contribute to the music’s seductiveness, as they do in minimalists like Glass and Reich.”

– Jon Garelick, *The Boston Phoenix*, May 6, 2004

“...Claudia Quintet is both comfortable with fusion and allergic to orthodoxies. ...

Hollenbeck’s compositions are at their best moments...when he’s trying out musical combinations that maybe haven’t been tried before. ...let’s call the group jazz...it’s got the right instrumentation, after all. And jazz, more than most genres, needs a band like Claudia.”

– Brent Burton, “The Quiet Revolution: *I, Claudia*,” *Washington City Paper*, v. 24, No. 6, Feb 13-19, 2004

“Acoustonika. ...something dreamy or hypnotic keeps coming to the fore in Claudia Quintet performances. ...a group of players each very concerned with the expressive and tonal capacities of his specific instrument. ...

The strong rhythmic component of the music brings to mind the African drum ensemble, and the approach to melody is minimalist. ...It’s all lapidary, stone after stone shaped or encountered in a circular movement.”

– Robert R. Calder, *Pop Matters*, May 7, 2004, www.popmatters.com

“The music itself still works the furrow between the “downtown” improvising, post-rock propulsion, and New Music minimalism (in the Glass/Reich sense). ...Quirky polymeters and syncopations abound, and though Hollenbeck likes to bring the funk, there’s plenty to stimulate the ol’ noggin here as well. ...

There are all kinds of details...that reveal themselves on repeated listens.”

– Jason Bivins, *Dusted*, www.dustedmagazine.com, March 29, 2004