

“...there is a move to make jazz fun again... The Micros might have done it first, and it's not too late to do it again.

... Highlights include the cartoon stylings of "Twilight Time Zone" and the incessantly crazed "Money Money Money," fat with a tortured saxophone solo by baritone Dave Sewelsson. It morphs into the sweetest of songs...

Those with a taste for R&B, swing, avant and bop, who don't mind mixing a tango with a polka at times, will gladly welcome back the Microscopic Septet.”

– Mark Corroto, *All About Jazz*, December 27, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

““New York's Most Famous Unknown Band" is back after years of inactivity, with a new album every bit as rollicking and ebullient as those made in its prime. ...

With a back catalog of 180 unrecorded tunes and renewed interest in their oeuvre, co-band leader and soprano saxophonist Phillip Johnston decided it was time for the Micros to record some of these undocumented gems, which rank up there with the band's classic material. Drawing inspiration from the Swing Era, they also incorporate myriad styles and genres into their mercurial structures, including calypso, free jazz, polka, R&B, rumba, tango, and countless others.

The reunited septet is remarkably tight... they have lost none of their enthusiasm or wily sense of humor. ...all maintained active careers as leaders and sidemen, which lends this session a carefree sensibility.

The tunes unfold like a retrospective of sorts, with a zany blend of styles and genres, all rolled up in a bustling undercurrent of good humor. ...the title track is a sly noir-inflected swinger filled with descending angles and coiling rhythmic turns. ...

Packed with soaring melodies, jubilant riffs, joyous shout choruses, infectious rhythms and incisive solos, *Lobster Leaps In* is the most fun one can have listening to contemporary jazz. Considering their recent spate of activity, this is probably not the last we've heard from the Microscopic Septet, and that dear reader, is a good thing.”

– Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, November 6, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...the Microscopic Septet made their mark on the Downtown scene in the '80s with a boisterous, genre-busting blend of swing, bebop and avant-garde jazz, delivered with a healthy dose of offbeat humor. Now, after a hiatus of more than a decade-and-a-half, the group...is back. ...if a new album...and a March gig at New York's Le Poisson Rouge are any indication...middle age has done little to cool the band's sense of adventure and appreciation for the absurd.

With most of its original lineup still intact, the septet (four saxophones, piano, bass and drums) sounds remarkably tight despite its long layoff. ...

At the Poisson Rouge date...the Septet was in top form, mixing selections from the new album with unique arrangements of Monk's "Mysterioso" and Billy Strayhorn's "Johnny Come Lately." Between Johnston's wry between-song patter and the fine, crowd-pleasing solos from everyone...the Microscopic Septet served notice that they remain one of New York's most distinctive and entertaining groups.”

– Joel Roberts, *All About Jazz*, April 6, 2009, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...the Microscopic Septet has been the missing link between experimental music and jazz as it originally was known—popular music intended for dancing and celebration. ... the group is a swinging, versatile organism, reveling in the sound of chromatic harmony and the sheer joy of blowing. The Micros...pull off the near-impossible task of melding jump blues, swing, Afro-Cuban, and free jazz on a recording that is equal parts fun and timeless virtuosity.”

– Seth Rogovoy, *Berkshire Living*, January 2010, www.berkshirelivingmag.com

“Already twenty years have passed since the time when the bizarre US "para-jazz" line-up called the Microscopic Septet released their fourth (and last) album. *Beauty Based On Science*... was in many ways the apex in the career...of an ensemble that was as original as it was misunderstood. ... the group's back catalogue being re-released (with added material) on CD...(the Two Volumes of History Of The Micros, respectively titled *Seven Men In Neckties* and *Surrealistic Swing*), has not really provoked a new evaluation, a fresh examination, of the group's music. ...

...*Lobster Leaps In* is a really, really good album. ... It's also an album where the recorded sound sometimes masks a lot of those ingenious arrangement parts that make the whole really worth listening to. Here listeners are required to employ a little extra care...to me it's definitely worth it.

With the exception of the first track - a composition by Wayne Horvitz that the group often performed in concert as piece #1 - the repertoire here is equally split between Phillip Johnston and Joel Forrester. ...pieces written by Johnston are shorter and use counterpoint more, while Forrester's appear to be longer, with more space for solos. From Dixieland to Ellington, from Monk to Carla Bley, a lot of the history of "good jazz" gets referred here. ... Also, Charles Mingus's shadow appeared...

We have excellent reeds, my favourite being Dave Sewelson, a versatile and spiky baritone, but Mike Hashim on tenor (replacing Paul Shapiro), Don Davis on alto, and Johnston on soprano are just as good. As usual, the "rhythm sections" is fine...

Got Lucky is another fine theme by Johnston, with complex articulation. ...

The *Big Squeeze* by Forrester is in a sense my favourite track on this album, and a perfect close. Nice interlocking melodic phrases by reeds, mid-tempo, with counterpoint by soprano. ...”

– Beppe Colli, *Clouds and Clocks*, December 7, 2008, www.cloudsandclocks.net

“... Led by Phillip Johnson (sax) they seem to get better with time. The music is jazzy large ensemble blues that rock. They absolutely are having a ball playing and it is contagious! ... Watch out for a highly energetic and entertaining experience.”

– Oscar, *O's Place Jazz Newsletter*, 2009 Summer Issue, 15-2, www.OsPlaceJazz.com

“... It's new CD is a lot like the old records, only more so.

...the septet finds the normal in the idiosyncratic. Or maybe it's vice versa.

The work is swinging, infectious, and full of wit.

A lot of jazz is very weighty these days and CREATIVE, but the septet takes turns tweaking the music's self-importance.

...it won't put you to sleep. [3 stars]”

– Karl Stark, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 27, 2008

“*Lobster Leaps In*... hints to a middle-aged kind of harmonic exquisiteness... The superimposition of styles typical of the band has remained intact, but the quality of playing is now enriched by a more relaxed, nearly contemplative feel that occasionally becomes the reason... of a pinch of sadness, that deriving from the scent of epochs that are gone forever. ...the memories keep lingering on...

... The execution... is technically perfect...

The greatness of this ensemble... resides in the detached manner in which the music is rendered... “Almost Right”... full...of extremely dissonant parallelisms and quirky counter-themes. Needless to say, it’s among the disc’s best tracks.

In the era of computerized vacuum, this outing is a veritable oasis of acoustic relief. ...the Micros belong to that endangered species called “musicians” ... who can really play an instrument and transmit energies, a living organism with its muscles, bones, wrinkles and several scars, too – and whose appearance elicits immediate recognition and respect.”

– Massimo Ricci, *Touching Extremes*, April 2, 2009, touchingextremes.blogspot.com

“...new product from an excitingly hip and critically acclaimed unit will undoubtedly spark additional interest amid the septet’s past accolades.

The New York City-based group...embark upon a musical trek that looms as a modernist/retro type history of jazz music. And its all executed with the panache of an outfit that covers a lot of turf while maintaining a signature sound. ...a seamless merger of bop, boogie-woogie, traditional jazz, swing and a few deconstructions that parallel the avant stylizations of the City’s notorious downtown scene. Extremely tight, yet loose and open-ended when required, the ensemble generates toe-tapping grooves amid brisk swing vamps and full-speed-ahead soloing maneuvers. They...are apt to shift strategies and cadences on a nanosecond’s notice...

...the artists generally render a high-flying game-plan, all subsidized by their sharpshooter like technical faculties. But the unit also...is equally adept at venturing into the freer scheme... with this release, the musical joyride continues. (Essential...)”

– Glenn Astarita, *Jazzreview.com*

“The concept of separating music into serious and not-so-serious categories is anathema to the men of the Microscopic Septet. ...players have fought against the notion that fun and art are mutually exclusive by creating genre-defying mélanges that regularly jitterbug along the edges of anarchy.

...the Forrester penned, “Disconcerto for Donnie,” ...begins with dramatic chords and mournful saxophone wails that overtly recall Albert Ayler...until the rhythms...enter in finger-poppin’ fashion amid a boisterous chorus of vocal doo-dah-doo. The transition is a declaration of purpose, delivered through a cracked smile.

The title cut, by soprano saxophonist/Septet co-founder Phillip Johnston, makes the same point in a less obvious way, with the notes...alternately massing together and flying apart in a manner that’s undeniably danceable. And if “Lies,” ...and “Life’s Other Mystery,” ...flirt with satire, they also allows the seven players to go off-script whenever the feeling strikes.

This approach peaks on the satisfying improv-fest “Money, Money, Money” and the thoroughly mad closer, “The Big Squeeze,” both of which bring a renewed sense of fun to the often-humorless jazz milieu.”

– Michael Roberts, *Jazziz*, March/April 2009

“This is the first new album in 20 years from the septet whose fame was enlarged by use of their music as the theme of the NPR show Fresh Air. They originally put together in 1980 a sax quartet with a swinging piano trio for a fresh sound that distills the essence of jazz while communicating great intelligence and a spirit of good fun. ...

...the musical mix leans on pre-WW II styles but brought up to date with sophisticated and often humorous arrangements influenced by Dixieland, tango, polka, boogie-woogie, Latin, rock, lounge jazz, bebop, klezmer, blues... The group’s enthusiasm and tongue-in-cheek approach is what makes them so enjoyable compared to many straight-ahead jazz groups, as well as compared to the more avant-garde aggregations. ... The...sonics are excellent.”

– John Henry, *Audiophile Audition*, November 14, 2008, www.audaud.com

“... There’s a certain contradiction inherent in a genre so submerged in scholarship being celebrated as a music of primitive passions. The way out? A sardonic and pun-filled meta-textualism! Groovy! Which is to say that the band thinks nothing of evoking and occasionally mocking previous eras while pointing forward. ...that approach has been around so long that it defines the mainstream. But if the mainstream sounds like this, then we may have gotten somewhere.”

– D. Strauss, *Exberliner*, November 2008

“On this...the Microscopic Septet has mined its songbook for some of the 150-odd tunes (of over 180) not previously recorded.

...they play celebratory, fun (verging on the downright pranksterish) jazz embracing everything from the music’s traditional New Orleans beginnings through swing and bop to free and avant garde.

With the accent heavily on the more accessible branches of jazz (boogie-woogie, bluesy mooches etc.), Johnson and Forrester’s compositions are none the less musicianly for that, their rowdy blowsiness never purely arbitrary but intelligently (and unpretentiously) arranged to produce maximum excitement from a series of hard-blown solos and sharp ensemble riffing.”

– Chris Parker, *Vortex Jazz*, www.vortexjazz.co.uk

“... A distinctive band that merged a big band ethos with a modern eclectic approach, the group won many fans over the course of their four albums. They even once appeared on a VH-1 concert program, surely an unusual occurrence for a band associated with the New York Avant-garde, albeit from the more accessible end. ... When, in 2006 the Cuneiform label re-released all four of the septet’s original albums...these records found a whole new audience. ... The result is *Lobster Leaps In*.

Many of these pieces had their origins in the band’s repertoire ca. 1990-1992.... several...appeared on Johnson’s 2001 release *Normalogy* where the arrangements were revised... Here they are present with the classic Microscopic Septet lineup of four reeds and rhythm section... The band has the same lineup as the one that disbanded in 1992 with one exception. The tenor chair is now filled by Mike Hashim. ...an in-the-tradition alto saxophone player. But...he’s very much on the spirit...and his soloing if full of surprises. the rest of the band is very strong. ...

Basically this is a Microscopic album in keeping with the originals, not surprising considering the genesis of many of these compositions. But what’s impressive is that the original band’s spirit and enthusiasm is still there. ...”

– Robert Iannapolo, *Cadence*, July-Aug-Sept 2009

“The Microscopic Septet had been disbanded for quite a few years by the time a pair of twin CD reissue compilations...prompting a brief reunion of the group to support sales. The musicians had so much fun that they decided to get together again to record a few of the many compositions that the

band played during its existence... As on their recordings of the 1980s, the originals by either Forrester or Johnston are often loopy and unpredictable, with lots of sudden twists and plenty of room for spirited improvisations. Wayne Horvitz's "Night Train Express," which was often used as an opening number when the band was in its heyday, is revived as a perfect way to reintroduce the Microscopic Septet.... Johnston's "Lobster Leaps In" has the flavor of Raymond Scott's works of the 1930s and 1940s, though it quickly loosens up. Forrester's "Money Money Money" is a wailing avant-garde masterpiece that sounds as if it could have been recorded during the 1960s. Rest assured that if you enjoyed earlier recordings by the Microscopic Septet, you will be delighted with their nostalgic yet forward-looking reunion."

– Ken Dryden, *All Music Guide*, September 2008, www.allmusic.com

"Critics' Choice 2008... The Microscopic Septet *Lobster Leaps In* (Cuneiform)"

– Larry Blumenfield, *Jazziz*, January/February 2009

"Vintage postmoderns regroup for a rousing round of trad jazz in a tradition wholly their own. ..."

– Tom Hull, *The Village Voice*, May 27, 2009

"... "Money, Money, Money" has been bouncing around my brain since hearing them introduce it at a dump across Cooper Square from the *Voice* 20 years ago, and now that they've reunited to record it and other gems they never got around to the first time. I swear it's never going away. ..."

– Francis Davis, *The Village Voice*, December 31, 2008

"2008 Jazz Poll: A-O... Larry Blumenfield (*Jazziz*, *Wall Street Journal*)...6. The Microscopic Septet *Lobster Leaps In* (Cuneiform)"

– David R. Adler, "New releases, reissues, debuts, and more—each critic's picks," *The Village Voice*, December 31, 2008

"Adventurous music rises to top of bountiful year's crop of discs... **8. The Microscopic Septet, "Lobster Leaps In" (Cuneiform Records)** They took 20 years off, but it seems like they never went away by supplying the theme music to NPR's "Fresh Air" program. Lots of comedy, which is sorely missing from most jazz, and whacked-out solos and ensemble playing. Why wasn't this disc more celebrated?"

– Bret Saunders, "Indie labels deliver the goods," www.denverpost.com