

Bio information: **ANTHONY PIROG**

Title: **POCKET POEM** (Cuneiform Rune 468) | Format: CD / DIGITAL

www.cuneiformrecords.com

FILE UNDER: **POST-GENRE GUITAR/ POST-JAZZ/ POST-ROCK/ AVANT GARDE / SOUNDSCAPE**

**After Releasing Two Records and Touring the World with post-Fugazi Power Trio, Messthetics,
Guitarist/Composer
ANTHONY PIROG
Reignites Creative Magic with Modern Jazz Greats
Michael Formanek and Ches Smith
as Collaborators on his Sophomore Solo Album on Cuneiform Records
– POCKET POEM –
A Masterwork of Guitar Synthesis Explorations**

"Pirog can quickly move from a seductive and tranquil atmosphere of chime-like echoes to the sonic bombast of a finely tuned power trio, generating a multitude of contrasting soundscapes." - All About Jazz

*"Anthony Pirog's work is otherworldly – feverish in its delivery and interstellar in its complexity – but his feet have long been planted on the ground in Washington DC. When he was a kid he soaked up the city's music, studying **Danny Gatton** and blues transplant **Roy Buchanan**... But what's the most DC thing a DC musician can do? Well, they could start a band with members of **Fugazi**. That would do it..." – Guitar.com*

*"Anthony Pirog... His own sound suggests a remarkable distillation of about 60 years of electric guitar history. On his debut solo album, **"Palo Colorado Dream"**...his nearest antecedent is **Nels Cline** — the downtown New York guitarist known for his palette of ghostly effects — but you'll also quickly find the warble of **Bill Frisell**; **Sonny Sharrock**'s searing swarm; the noisy clatter of **Glenn Branca**." – The New York Times*

In music, the art of the trio involves a delicate balance and holds the potential for great power. On **Anthony Pirog's** *Pocket Poem*, his second solo album and fifth release on D.C. based **Cuneiform Records**, the **Washington D.C.** alt guitar hero and his rhythm section wring all the beauty, majesty, and mayhem possible from their triumvirate. Pirog is to guitar what **Michael Jordan** was to basketball — he's capable of anything he can conceive, and his conception covers quite a bit, from ambient atmospheres and mind-melting electronic subversions of sound to lyrical acoustic picking and fiery fusion.

One of Pirog's most recent projects before releasing *Pocket Poem* was a band that redefines the rock power trio (a concept that runs all the way back to the days of **Cream** and **The Jimi Hendrix Experience**). Pirog teamed with hometown legends **Brendan Canty** and **Joe Lally** of punk rock superband **Fugazi** to form **The Messthetics**, releasing two albums on **Ian MacKaye's** iconic D.C. label **Dischord** and delivering their post-post-punk brain/brawn merger to tens of thousands at the **2019 Coachella** festival.

But rock is not the only arena in which trios hold a powerful sway. From **Oscar Peterson** to **Wes Montgomery**, some of jazz's greatest moments were also realized by trios. And from the time Pirog was studying music at **Berklee College of Music**, specializing in jazz guitar, and **NYU**, where he received a degree in jazz performance, progressive jazz was part of his artistic DNA.

Returning to D.C. after graduation, he and local cello star **Janel Leppin** blended improv, ambient, and electro-acoustic sounds as **Janel and Anthony**, which quickly became one of the Capital City's most in-demand live acts and released several albums, including *Where Is Home* (Cuneiform 2012). D.C.'s diverse music scene thrived in the new millennium, and Pirog played with countless musicians in the city's jazz, experimental, rock and modern classical scenes. He also began recording with nationally established, older musicians. Pirog's blend of searching and searing guitar found its way into works by avant-jazz hero **William Hooker**, free improv guitar giant **Henry Kaiser** (on 2019 Cuneiform release *Five Times Surprise*), and more. In **The Spellcasters**, which included late guitar-legend **Danny Gatton's** rhythm section (**John Previte**, **Barry Hart**) and guitarists **Joel Harrison** and **Dave Chappell**, he recorded *Music of the Anacostia Delta* (Cuneiform 2016), which celebrated D.C.'s indigenous, hybrid guitar sound. But when Pirog partnered with acoustic bassist **Michael Formanek** and drummer **Ches Smith** for his first solo session, 2014's *Palo Colorado Dream* (also on Cuneiform) he happened upon a special kind of chemistry.

Formanek is a jazz vet who's recorded with **Dave Liebman**, **Fred Hersch**, and the **Mingus Big Band**, as well as popping up on albums by **Elvis Costello** and the like. Smith is a fixture of the downtown NYC scene who's worked with other forward-thinking guitar conceptualists like **Mary Halvorson**, **Marc Ribot**, and **Elliott Sharp**, in addition to making records with **Tim Berne**, **John Zorn**, and countless others.

When the three first came together, their ability to egg each other on to fresh territory led to some lightning-in-a-bottle moments. So it isn't hard to see why Pirog would summon Formanek and Smith back to the studio for his second solo project. After reaching new heights with Messthetics, he returned to the trio that first showed the world the range and reach of his guitar gifts.

For *Pocket Poem*, Pirog decided to expand the trio's palette by mixing modern technology with vintage guitar synthesizers. "The use of guitar synths by **John Abercrombie** and **Allan Holdsworth** is very interesting to me," he says, "and I wanted to explore the timbral possibilities available using these instruments in the recording process."

Envision **Adrian Belew**, **Tortoise**, **Bill Frisell**, **Bert Jansch**, and **Brian Eno** squeezing into a particle accelerator. The end result after flipping the switch might sound something like *Pocket Poem*. The album touches on every aspect of Pirog's musical personality — rock, jazz, avant garde, electronic, even folk — and with his cohorts' contributions, it all arrives at a place that's progressive in the most literal sense. At once exploratory and reflective, subtle and storm-brewing, organic and high-tech, *Pocket Poem* establishes Pirog's place not just as a major guitar threat but as a gifted composer.

The album opens on a gently ominous note with "**Dog Daze**," as Pirog lays down a sprinkling of subtly disquieting textures befitting a film noir soundtrack, before things erupt halfway through into crashing power chords, martial rhythms, and grandly gliding, **Robert Fripp**-like lead lines, for a **King Crimson** murder mystery vibe.

Electronics drift gracefully into the mix with the pretty pointillism of "**Dawn Cloud**," as they waltz with watercolor guitar melodies and Smith's impressionistic brushwork. Meanwhile, Pirog's acoustic side slips into the spotlight with the downright folksy fingerpicking of "**Sitting Under Stars**," evoking a place somewhere between **John Fahey's "American primitive"** style and '60s **Britfolk**.

"The Severing" keeps the gentle arpeggios going, but with an aqueous, electric tone complemented by ambient swells, for a feel not a million miles from some of **Terje Rypdal's** legendary ECM sessions.

The trio's interdependence really comes into focus on "**Adonna the Painter**," as Formanek's sustained notes and Smith's whispering cymbals become one with Pirog's plangent splashes of color. After Pirog unfurls some delicate melodic daubs, Formanek's tumbling bass solo carries the conversation forward, with Smith's toms providing the perfect punctuation.

At the album's midpoint, the title track provides a kind of palate cleanser/dividing line, making the most of wide open spaces and deftly applied dissonances. Simple lines hang suspended in mid air, saying more than a million frenetic flurries of notes could, as minimalism commands the moment.

On *Pocket Poem's* second half, it sometimes seems like a mischievous gremlin has crept into the inner workings of the Pirog/Formanek/Smith machine and begun engaging in subversive hijinks. On "**Mori Point**" crazed electronics crash against Smith's volcanic drumming for the distinct impression of clock springs dramatically coming unwound.

Even the seeming calm of "**Beecher**" is deceptive — amid a sea of reverb and delay, Formanek' alternately bowed and plucked bass and Pirog's trumpet-like guitar synth suggest something mysterious stirring beneath the water. But there's no gray area involved in "**Spinal Fusion**," where frantic electronic beats and rapid-fire guitar bursts let you know what it would feel like to be trapped inside a video game gone insane.

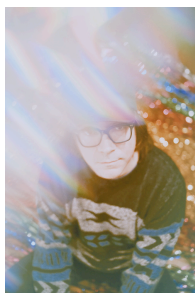
About a minute into "**Untitled Atlas**," the machinery-gone-wild vibe is amplified as we're thrust inside the fraying neural networks of a crashing computer. Smith's clattering percussion, Pirog's mad-scientist electronics, and Formanek's insistent thrumming provide a guided tour to a complex mechanism's internal destruction. Call it high-tech free improv.

Pocket Poem makes concision a virtue. Tracks exceeding two minutes are in the minority, as the trio makes its points and moves along. It's no accident. "This collection of pieces is focused on shorter statements that don't rely on extended 'blowing sections,'" Pirog explains. "My aim was to explore succinct harmonic and melodic movements that would collectively weave a narrative and arc together." For all the album's stylistic shifts, the trio weaves that arc expertly, and *Pocket Poem* provides a wake-up call to those who've been sleeping on Pirog's status as one of America's most promising guitar stylists.

For more info on **Anthony Pirog**:

<http://cuneiformrecords.com/bandshtml/anthonypirog.html>

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS [Digital images available on Cuneiform's Anthony Pirog page.]



WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT ANTHONY PIROG:

"Palo Colorado Dream...marks Pirog's debut as a solo artist. It also marks his entry into the growing pantheon of modern guitar heroes." – Michael Ross, "[Spotlight: Anthony Pirog](#),"

–**Guitar Moderne**

"So this is what all the fuss is about...[regarding] Anthony Pirog's status as a Washington, D.C. area guitar god...the fiery and noisy tunes are still balanced with calming ones -- everything sympathetically captured by engineer, mixer, and co-producer **Mike Reina**, Pirog's former bandmate in **Skysaw** -- and for all his technical prowess, **Pirog** possesses a skilled composer's knack for memorable themes and melodies.

...**Palo Colorado Dream** is an **Anthony Pirog** session all the way, and an ear-opening display of his stunningly wide range of talents. 4/5 stars."

– Dave Lynch, [AllMusic](#)

"**Joe Lally** and **Brendan Canty** hadn't performed together in 15 years — the exact amount of time they'd spent...in **Fugazi**, one of punk rock's most influential bands of the 1980s and '90s — when they played their first gig as the **Messthetics**...

What pulled them back together was Anthony Pirog, a young electric guitarist from the Washington area, who had been listening to **Fugazi** since childhood. In the past few years he has accrued a mystique in various pockets of the city's music world — jazz, indie rock, the media-mixing avant-garde— but remains little-known outside Washington. Maybe the Messthetics' new album [on **Dischord**] is the sound of that changing. ...

His own sound suggests a remarkable distillation of about 60 years of electric guitar history. On his debut solo album, "Palo Colorado Dream," released in 2014, his nearest antecedent is **Nels Cline** — the downtown New York guitarist known for his palette of ghostly effects — but you'll also quickly find the warble of **Bill Frisell**; **Sonny Sharrock**'s searing swarm; the noisy clatter of **Glenn Branca**.

– G. Russonello, "[To Make the Messthetics, Mix a Reunion With One Virtuoso Newcomer](#)," **The New York Times**

"This is a fine album, lush, diverse and filled with texture--but notably grounded in musicality, structured as an album, and a cc piece of content. It's very good, and it sounds like the work of one highly skilled player whose muse is taking him to that special where genre classifications have no meaning. You'll like it if you hear it, so maybe you should."

– **Rolling Stone**

"[**Palo Colorado Dream**] covers a sprawling musical terrain—avant jazz, atmospheric soundscapes, earthy Americana, math-ro arsenal of effects hardware and studio production techniques..."

– **JazzTimes**

"So this is what all the fuss is about...**Palo Colorado Dream** (is)...an ear-opening display of his stunningly wide range of talents

– **All Music Guide**

"One of jazz's most reliable conduits to a living, breathing audience is electric-guitar heroism, and Anthony Pirog, from Washi has built great chops and technique while remaining fairly little known, seems poised to become a hero of the instrument."

– **The New York Times**

"A record that's equally capable of enchanting you and pummeling you with many shades of aura in between, **Palo Colorado Dream** catapults Anthony Pirog into the corps of elite experimental guitarists."

– **Something Else Reviews**

"...the D.C.-based guitarist creates swirling sonic textures while also unleashing distortion-laced fustilades...incorporating perc: string and electronic touches of his own on this provocative debut."

– **DownBeat**