



Bio information: **EMPIRICAL**

Title: **CONNECTION** (Cuneiform Rune 416) Format: CD / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ

**MOBO Award-Winning British Jazz Quartet
– EMPIRICAL –
Delivers a Potent Dispatch from the Post-Bop Frontier with *CONNECTION*,
a Program of Smart and Searing Originals**

While **Empirical**'s moniker implies cool detachment and disinterested observation, the quartet has become one of Europe's top jazz ensembles by creating a bracing sound rife with roiling emotion. The band builds on the extroverted improvisational ethos of the **1960s New Thing**, embracing oblique harmonies, translucent textures and jagged, quick shifting rhythms. Featuring **Nathaniel Facey** (alto saxophone), **Shaney Forbes** (drums), **Lewis Wright** (vibraphone) and **Tom Farmer** (bass), *Connection* is the fifth Empirical album. The band's first release on the American label **Cuneiform**, it captures the ensemble at its most pure and potent.

"Each of our previous albums was an experiment, where we included various guests from a string quartet to a pianist to bass clarinet," Farmer says. "This time we went into a great sounding studio with just the four of us. It's an accurate representation of what we're doing now, what our gigs sound like. This is our expression."

Following the release of its eponymous debut album in 2007, which was produced by British saxophone star **Courtney Pine** and released on his **Destin-E** label, Empirical quickly established itself as a creatively-charged crew unafraid to explore jazz's wild and wooly left field. They threw down the gauntlet with their acclaimed second album, 2009's *Out 'n' In* (Naim). Produced by rising British saxophonist **Jason Yarde**, the project offers a highly personal salute to **Eric Dolphy** that won the band **Best Jazz Act in the 2010 MOBO Awards** (MOBO stands for **Music Of Black Origin**).

In many ways *Connection* is a similarly bold statement, a program of original music that unfolds with the kind of intuitive narrative momentum generated by a great set. Opening with Farmer's concise stop-and-start "**Initiate the Initiations**," the album kicks off like a carnival parade driven by Forbes' deft trap work. Farmer contributes half of the album's 10 tracks, and his pieces often key on particular emotional states. "**Anxiety Society**" pits Facey discursive alto against Wright's calm and cool vibes. By the end of the piece, they are both caught in a labyrinth, searching for a way out. He explores a different kind of disorientation on "**Maze**," a piece that sways too and fro in various directions before breaking apart at the end as the center cannot hold.

Facey offers several surprises on "**Stay the Course**," the album's longest track. With three distinct sections, it opens with a brooding theme, moves to an introverted swagger, and resolves with a long skittering vibes solo that's unlike anything else on the album. Wright contributes some of the album's most divergent tracks, from the seductive tranquility of "**Lethe**" to the angular "**Mind Over Mayhem**," an abstract, intricately constructed sojourn tips the balance from order to disorder. In a fascinating pairing, Wright's "**It's Out of Your Hands**" follows, closing the album on a soft, insinuating ostinato. It's another moment of probing contemplation on a musical journey marked by unanticipated swerves and cutting drama.

If Empirical sounds uncommonly grounded in jazz's experimental tradition, it's probably because the quartet came together in an environment that treats jazz as a search rather than a destination. The musicians came together while involved in the scene around the acclaimed program **Tomorrow's Warriors**, which was founded by prolific Jamaican-born bassist and arranger **Gary Crosby** (the nephew of guitar legend **Ernest Ranglin** and a founding member of the hugely influential mid-80s band **Jazz Warriors**).

With its West African-tinged compositions and conventional hard-bop instrumentation of trumpet, sax, piano, bass and drums, Empirical's 2007 debut album hinted at the band's potential. But it wasn't until the horn players and pianist dropped out, Farmer took over the bass chair, and vibraphonist Lewis Wright joined the following year that the quartet's distinctive sound came sharply into focus. While developing arrangements for a tribute to **Eric Dolphy**, Empirical delved into his classic 1964 **Blue Note** album *Out To Lunch!* featuring vibraphonist **Bobby Hutcherson**. The concert was a huge success, but more importantly, the musicians bonded with a sense of purpose driven by devotion to jazz's defiant ethos.

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“We were working really well, taking it really seriously,” Farmer says. “I’d never met guys who took it so seriously. The process of studying together is really what brought us together, and we just carried on doing it.”

The band’s interactive group approach is built on Farmer and Forbes highly kinetic rhythm section tandem, while Facey possesses an instantly recognizable alto tone. But in many ways Wright’s vibes define the group’s sound. From the moment he joined the band, he catalyzed a new way of writing and arranging material. “We all loved the transparency,” Farmer says. “You can hear exactly what everyone’s playing. Lewis is quite a unique player. He gets this warmth on an instrument that can sound quite harsh and metallic. I love having all this room on the bottom, without having to think about a pianist’s left hand.”

After the 2011 release of the band’s third album *Elements of Truth* (Naim), Empirical won the inaugural **Golubovich Jazz Scholars fellowship** at **Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance**. The residency at the prestigious conservatory led to the band’s collaboration with the all-women string ensemble **Benyounes Quartet**, who were featured on Empirical’s 2013 double album *Tabula Rasa* (Naim). The ambitious, often spiritually-tinged project featured some of the band’s most beautiful and complex writing.

Released by Cuneiform in February 2016, it’s no surprise that *Connection* finds the quartet getting back to basics. Recorded after a week-long run at **Foyles Bookshop London**, the album captures the raw energy, brash ideas, and volatile group sound that Empirical has built upon the vast territory opened by jazz’s mid-1960s explorers. “That particular period isn’t just a musical inspiration,” Farmer says. “That constant search for meaning in the early avant garde was really powerful. A lot of those ideas are relevant today and they’re essential to our band.”

For more information on Empirical:

www.empiricalmusic.com – www.facebook.com/Empirical – www.cuneiformrecords.com

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available on the Empirical artist page @ www.cuneiformrecords.com

