



Bio information: **THE MICROSCOPIC SEPTET**

Title: **BEEN UP SO LONG IT LOOKS LIKE DOWN TO ME: THE MICROS PLAY THE BLUES** (Cuneiform Rune 425)

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Cuneiform Promotion Dept: (301) 589-8894 / Fax (301) 589-1819

Press and world radio: joyce@cuneiformrecords.com | North American and world radio: radio@cuneiformrecords.com

www.cuneiformrecords.com

FILE UNDER: **JAZZ**

### Putting the Blues in the News: The Microscopic Septet takes the Blues Uptown, Downtown, and All Around on *Been Up So Long It Looks Like Down to Me: The Micros Play the Blues*

What happens when you put the blues under a microscope? When the lens is wielded by the incisive deconstructivists of the **Microscopic Septet**, the musical odyssey traverses territory that's disarmingly strange, pleasingly familiar and consistently revelatory. It takes an unusual band to make news out of the blues, and the Micros deliver a gripping investigation of the form on *Been Up So Long It Looks Like Down to Me: The Micros Play the Blues*.

The new album continues the Micros' brilliant resurgence, storming back into action in 2006 after a 14-year hiatus to reissue its old and release new recordings on **Cuneiform Records**. Since then, the radically old-school new-context combo has continued to evolve, extending its reputation as one of New York's most ardently inventive ensembles of the 1980s to being recognized as one of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's most accomplished, informed, and iconoclastic jazz groups. Throughout, they maintained their distinctive modus operandi: exploring and unraveling jazz's myriad strains, the Micros re-weave a century of jazz into modern tunes of equal popular and critical appeal. Since 2006, they've collaborated with known cartoonists and/or illustrators for their album art, including **Art Spiegelman**, *New Yorker* cover artist **Barry Blitt**, Australian graphic artists **Antonia Pesenti** and **Keith Lobue**. *The Micros Play the Blues* builds on the band's longstanding love of that most basic and profound musical form, bringing the same reverently irreverent and insistently playful approach to the blues that has marked the Micros' music from the beginning. This album's cover art is by **Kaz**, best known for his comic *Underworld* and his writing for **SpongeBob SquarePants**.

"We've always loved the blues," says soprano saxophonist/composer **Phillip Johnston**, who co-founded the Micros with pianist/composer **Joel Forrester**. "We've recorded blues on every record we've made. I don't think there's anything more sophisticated than the blues. Our only fear was that the tunes would sound too much alike, and we made a conscious effort to cast a wide net. Every tune sounds different."

Along with the co-founders, the seven-piece ensemble features largely the same cast of improvisers with which it emerged from Manhattan's wild and wooly **Downtown** scene in 1980. Drummer **Richard Dworkin**, baritone saxophonist **David Sewelson**, bassist **David Hofstra**, and altoist **Don Davis** (who replaced **John Zorn** in 1981) have all been along for almost the entire Microscopic sojourn, while **Mike Hashim** came on board for the 2006 reboot, taking over the tenor sax chair from **Paul Shapiro** (the only Micros spot that's seen real turnover).

As on previous projects, Johnston and Forrester provide the lion's share of tunes and arrangements, and they both dig deep into their voluminous catalogs for interesting material. The album opens with Johnston's late-night cinematic joy ride "**Cat Toys**," a piece inspired by Hammond B-3-driven soul jazz and originally written for the credit sequence of a short film about a San Fernando Valley-dwelling space alien with a taste for felines (seriously).

Johnston's cascading 14-bar "**Blues Cubistico**" features some brawny baritone sax work by Dave Sewelson, while his cheerful soprano sax intro on "**Don't Mind If I Do**" sounds like a rent party picking up steam around 11 pm on a Saturday night. Johnston repurposed "**When It's Getting Dark**" from his rock band **The Public Servants** (which featured guitarist **Bill Horvitz**, vocalist **Shelley Hirsch**, and several Micros), and the tune retains its predatory rock 'n' rhythm vibe.

"**12 Angry Birds**" delivers a triumphant verdict on the enduring power of **Ellingtonian** cadences, as the piece sounds like a forgotten number from the 1927 session on Victor, complete with a deliciously squally soprano sax solo. Long time Micros fans will be delighted to hear tunes that have been in the repertoire for decades but never recorded, like "**I've Got a Right to Cry**." While not actually a blues, the piece was a 1950 hit for the great Los Angeles R&B band **Joe Liggins and the Honeydrippers**. Dave Swelson provides the vocals on the Micros version.

"That's a tune we did from the very beginning," Johnston says. "We've always played tunes by other people, but didn't record a lot of them. We have a number of vocal tunes, and we never recorded any of those and I love Dave's singing on this. 'I've Got a Right to Cry' isn't a blues, but it fit in so well with the rest of the album."

[press release continued on verso]

Forrester contributes about half of the album's tunes, including the sensually slow drag "**Dark Blue,**" a feature for bassist David Hofstra (who's walking figure guides the band even when he sits out). The pianist offers a propulsive jazz march with "**Migraine Blues,**" and designs a deliciously woozy and off-kilter jaunt with "**Simple-Minded Blues.**" In another utterly surprisingly but entirely sensible move, Forrester turns the carol "**Silent Night**" into a convincing blues that captures the angst too many people feel as the holidays approach. In fact, Forrester staked a claim to the song at a Christmas party where he "took it into my head to derange Silent Night, which has always struck me as close to the blues," he says. "During the improvisation the chords were really stripped down. I wanted people to take a more primal approach."

Whatever the music's origin or vintage, the Micros put their indelible stamp on each piece, with loose and limber arrangements combining stellar craftsmanship and extroverted improvisation. The blues provide another avenue for the band to explore jazz history while forging a sound quite unlike any other ensemble.

Simultaneously embracing the past and the future makes perfect sense when you consider the fraught time and place that gave birth to the Microscopic Septet. In the early 1980s the New York jazz scene was bitterly divided. Irony-laced Downtown players explored new territory drawing on free jazz, rock, funk and later, Balkan influences. At the same time, other young players, following in the footsteps of trumpeter **Wynton Marsalis**, defined mainstream jazz by looking backwards to 1950s hard bop and 1960s post bop. Rejecting allegiance to any particular camp or faction, the Micros forged their own path with an ethos succinctly summed up by Johnston: "Break all the rules and respect all the saints."

Embracing jazz's populist legacy, the Micros brought Uptown jazz back Downtown, where they made a compelling case that swing could look forward as well as backward. The band adopted a name that playfully alluded to its orchestral palette. As Johnston explained at the time, "The instrumentation is enough to give us a big range of colors and work compositionally in a more expansive way." But the name also described their compositions, which often distilled the essence of an era within an artfully executed voicing. "Through its command of idiomatic detail," opined *The New York Times*, "the group summons the sound of an Ellington orchestra, or the feel of a 50's rhythm-and-blues band, with a few well-chosen phrases and sonorities."

The band was built upon the felicitous partnership of Johnston and Forrester, who met in the early 70s and bonded over shared musical aesthetics, humor, and similarly skewed worldviews. Eager to break away from the jazz straightjacket of head-solo-head formats, they honed extended, lapidary jazz compositions that segued gracefully between different themes in a single piece, hearkening forward to forms employed by **Sun Ra**, **Duke Ellington** and **Jelly Roll Morton**. The music drew on the entire history of jazz, as well as polkas, tangos, antic cartoon themes, klezmer, and new wave rock. No matter how eclectic their influences, the Micros always hewed to the band's prime directive. "It's gotta swing, whether its Latin or R&B or straight-ahead blowing," Johnston says. "That's the foundation of what we do."

Prolific composers, Forrester and Johnston had created a songbook of nearly 200 tunes by the time the band called it a day in 1992. During the Micros' first incarnation they only got around to recording 34 pieces on four albums, which were all released on small labels to an impressive array of critical acclaim. The band's 1983 debut LP, *Take the Z Train*, came out on **Press Records** and featured cover art by San Francisco artist **Bill Paradise**. "It is as if the entire history of improvisatory music is on parade," *Cadence* exclaimed. A live album, *Let's Flip!*, followed in 1985, recorded in Rotterdam and released by Dutch label **Osmosis Records**, which also released 1986's *Off Beat Glory*. **Stash** put out *Beauty Based on Science* in 1988 with liner notes by "New York School" poet, **Ron Padgett**, cover art by painter **Bob Tuska**, and cartoons by **Collin Kellogg**.

In keeping with the band's perverse ways, they were reaching a vast new audience when they disbanded. Forrester's theme song for the long-running NPR show *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, which continues to be heard by millions of public radio listeners every day, was introduced in 1990. Cuneiform's decision to reissue the band's albums on two double albums in 2006, *Seven Men in Neckties* and *Surrealistic Swing*, introduced the band to a generation of jazz fans who came of age in the ensuing years. Featuring striking CD artwork by Pulitzer Prize-winning New York cartoonist **Art Spiegelman**, (creator of the graphic novel *Maus*), the *History of the Micros* albums contain all the music from the four original albums and 11 previously unreleased tracks.

The reception was so positive that the band reunited for a European tour, which led to the Micros returning to the studio for 2008's *Lobster Leaps In*, an acclaimed Cuneiform album featuring beloved tunes and overlooked gems from the band's original book. They followed up two years later with the masterful Monk album *Friday the Thirteenth: The Micros Play Monk*, illustrated with **Barry Blitt**'s artwork, and made another major leap back into the future with 2014's acclaimed *Manhattan Moonrise*, an album that shows the Micros are still a cutting-edge ensemble forging boldly into old territory. "Neither Phillip nor I want to settle into any definite harmonic groove," Forrester says "Coming up with an array of the blues is just a means taking the Micros into the next century."

*For more information on The Microscopic Septet:*

[www.microscopicseptet.com](http://www.microscopicseptet.com) - [www.facebook.com/MicroscopicSeptet](https://www.facebook.com/MicroscopicSeptet) - [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)

## **PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available on the *The Microscopic Septet* page @ [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)



***Cuneiform asked Phillip Johnston [PJ] & Joel Forrester [JF], The Microscopic Septet's co-leaders/ co-composers, questions about the Micros' new album.***

***Tell us about the ALBUM'S NAME: Been Up So Long It Looks Like Down To Me: The Micros Play The Blues.***

***PJ:*** A pun on the title of Richard Fariña's 1966 novel, the title speaks to the essential optimism of the Micros' music, and the paradox that the blues—ostensibly a music that is meant to express suffering and longing—can as easily express joy, rebellion and boisterous eroticism.

***JF:*** PJ chose the name but I like it because it reflects the Micros' approach to the Blues: to the content, whole-hearted; to the form, unfaithful.

***Tell us what the music on THIS album means to you, any personal thoughts.***

***PJ:*** Blues and jazz have been inextricable since the beginning, and the blues have been a substantial part of the Micros' repertoire since our beginning. Every one of our recordings contains a blues in one form or another and the blues language is part of the expression of every soloist here. It made sense to devote an entire recording to various expressions of the blues. -

***JF:*** I love the music on this recording because it underscores that although our lives have gone in seven differing directions, we can still get together as a band.

***The TRACK titles: how did they come about?***

***PJ:*** (This information is already in the liner notes)

***JF:*** Nearly each of my titles is a verbal glove that fits snugly over the principal hook of the tune.

***How does this album DIFFER from your previous works - and how is it the SAME?***

***PJ:*** Different: The CD is different in that it focuses on one particular form—the blues—(like the *Micros Play Monk* focussed on the music of Thelonious Monk). It also maybe focuses on the soloists a little more.

The Same: It is the same in that Joel and I are writing in the Micros idiom that we have established over the past 35 years or so, combining arrangements which invoke various eras of the history of jazz ensemble writing (Ellington/Mingus/Gil Evans) with other elements from free jazz to R&B and our own personal peculiarities.

***JF:*** We are older than we were. We're thinking younger than we did. -

***Tell us about the COVER ART.***

***PJ:*** The cover art is by the great comic artist Kaz, best known for his comic *Underworld*, and his writing for *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Post 2005 Micros cover art has included works by Art Spiegelman, New Yorker cover artist Barry Blitt, Australian graphic artists Antonia Pesenti and Keith Lobue, and this wonderful cover extends that tradition in his own unique style. Check out *Underworld* online!

***JF:*** Well-chosen as almost always.

***What would YOU like the public to REMEMBER about this album?***

***JF:*** I'd like the public to recognize that "Silent Night" has always been a blues. -JF

***Do you see your music as part of any musical movement?***

***PJ:*** No, not really.

I do consider us to be part of a peer group that has continued since our youth, so that would include groups like the Jazz Passengers, Kamikaze Ground Crew, Steve Bernstein's groups, all of whom are currently performing. While none of us have ever really fit into any movement or style, we have all individually found a place for ourselves in music, and continued to make our own idiosyncratic contribution.

***JF:*** All music can be viewed as commentary. And you can't escape your time. But I think the Micros continue to speak to the present.

***Tell us about other interesting projects that each of you are working on outside of The Micros.***

***PJ:*** [currently based in Sydney, Australia] I have been touring internationally with my collaboration with graphic artist Art Spiegelman, *Wordless!*. We just opened the London Jazz Festival at the Barbican Centre, and recent gigs have included Comicópolis in Buenos Aires, and a 10-city tour of the US. I've also been touring my original silent film scores, primarily Lotte Reiniger's *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, in Australia at venues including the Sydney VIVID Festival, the Capital Jazz Project (Canberra), MONA FOMA (Tasmania) and the upcoming Woodford Folk Festival (Queensland). A 2015 residency at John Zorn's The Stone was also a recent highlight.

I'm doing the Australian premiere of *Page of Madness: Suite for Improvisers*, in 2017 at SIMA's Sound Lounge, a large ensemble piece based on one of my silent film scores that premiered at The Stone. I also have a once-a-month residency at Foundry616 in Sydney with a band of great Sydney jazz musicians, which plays (mostly) my arrangements of jazz tunes from the 1920s and 30s, focussing on early Duke Ellington and Jelly Roll Morton. I'm soon going to start some other new projects but right now I'm focussing on continuing to tour *Wordless!* and *Prince Achmed*.

***JF:*** [based in NYC] In January 2017, I'll be touring all over France.

Proudest claim: steady work in a falling New York market for music of our sort.

I will have written 2000 tunes, by sometime in 2017.

***What do you want to do NEXT / in the FUTURE?***

***JF:*** I want to keep playing with the Microscopic Septet. I want people to keep wondering, "How many people are in that band?"

**- Joel Forrester & Phillip Johnston, November 2016**

“Ever since its cutting-edge debut, 1983’s *Take The Z Train*, there has been an air of mystery and mirth surrounding The Microscopic Septet. ... Thirty-one years later... The ensemble...is still quirky after all these years. There’s a touch of retro to this kind of tight ensemble writing, which harkens back to such groups as Raymond Scott’s Quintette and the John Kirby Sextet... But a post-Art Ensemble aesthetic is also expressed here on the densely chaotic-sounding “Blue” and also in the wildly dissonant solos that occasionally crop up... There’s a whole lot of quirk here, but it’s always on the joyous side... **An eclectic bunch of kindred spirits still doing it against all odds. [4 out of 5 stars]**”  
-Bill Milkowski, *Downbeat*, September 2014

“In the 80s, the band engendered a cagey slant on mainstream swing and then morphed into the risk-taking New York downtown scene... **Known for its quirky deviations, razor-sharp horns arrangements and melodic hooks, the septet's spunkiness and tightknit overtures align with the stars on *Manhattan Moonrise*. ...another stirring and broadly entertaining production by these consummate team players.**”  
-Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, September 13, 2014, [www.allaboutjazz.com](http://www.allaboutjazz.com)

“Joel Forrester, pianist and composer of the Microscopic Septet, says the band might come off like a revival group, but what they attempt to revive never really existed. “A revival of the future, then?” he asks. ...The septet came to life in 1980s New York and once included John Zorn, but this isn’t downtown experimentation. They aren’t straight swingers either... *Manhattan Moonrise* marks the first album of new Microscopic Septet compositions in 25 years... **Forrester and soprano saxophonist Philip Johnston both write for the band, blending adventure and reverence with a pinch of dry wit. ...the four horns argue and wail on the way to the semi-sweet theme of “Blue” like the World Saxophone Quartet just crashed the party.** ... Along with the ingenuity, tracks like “No Time” show that the band’s conviction remains high when they play it straight. In fact, *Manhattan Moonrise* reveals more subtle tricks of harmony and melodic invention with each listen.”  
- Mike Shanley, *JazzTimes*, October 2014

“**If you were first exposed to The Microscopic Septet via NPR’s *Fresh Air with Terry Gross* radio theme song, you may have been equally struck by the commercial potential of so-called serious music. On *Manhattan Moonrise*... this same ability to deliver deep-content art music with a strong sense of humor and swing has not abated.** Composers and co-leaders soprano saxophonist Phillip Johnston and pianist Joel Forrester unearthed previously unrecorded charts... the group plays with the familiarity and familiarity once common to the heavily-touring big bands of the Swing Era. ... **it is amazing how this four-saxophone section compiled of markedly idiosyncratic soloists can blend together so seamlessly.** Drawing on various roots styles...**the album is more than a retrospective of jazzified Americana: it is a revitalization of these roots in the spirit of discovery.** ... **Live, the group is even zanier and more rambunctious than their records might suggest,** sparked by acting emcee Johnson’s waggish repartee, Forrester’s outlandish comping and a friendly rivalry among the horn players to impress each other with outrageous musical behavior.”  
-Tom Greenland, *The New York City Jazz Record*, July 2014

“**With this blend of swing, modern, and post-modern jazz, these veterans manage, in spite of some offbeat arrangements, to remain highly accessible. Their first album of all-original material since the late 1980s, *Manhattan Moonrise* is classic Microscopic Septet...a sense of humor and a rich sense of jazz history.** This four-saxophone ensemble has a whimsical streak, and they don’t mind getting a little raunchy... The record also contains some pretty songs... **While listening I sometimes find myself thinking of Strayhorn, Mingus, and, on the gospel-tinged “Star Turn,” Oliver Nelson.**”  
-Jeff Wilson, “Ten Recent Outstanding But Easily Overlooked Jazz Recordings”, *The Absolute Sound*, Nov. 2014

“...They present **an enjoyable retro sense with original compositions that evoke a sense of Louis Jordan in enthusiasm, antics...** Johnston and co-collaborator Joel Forrester...lead the group the majority of whom have been working together for decades and who, like the Willem Breuker Kollektief, are **made up of players who can repeatedly hold their own as soloists.** ...”  
-*Cadence Magazine*, October 2014

“...vivacious little big band The Microscopic Septet has come back with a vengeance over the past ten years. With an approach that covers much of jazz history, they advance a methodology that begins with the territory bands of the 1930's and moves through the Knitting Factory heyday of the 1980's and then then lands gracefully in the post-modern jazz scene of today. ... **The band's music is extroverted, friendly and accessible** as exemplified on "Manhattan Moonrise" which...builds in an epic ear-worm. ... With a wonderful title and sentiment, "Occupy Your Life" is sly and playful... **This a very fun and successful album;** the musicians are very tight and play strong arrangements and use them as jumping off for fine solo statements.”  
- Tim Niland, *Music and More*, July 2014

“The past is a big place filled with music. ... The smart ones use the past as a resource... But borrowing from the past is different from wallowing in it, and **hip modernity springs from the subtlest tweak of something old. That's the game the Microscopic Septet plays. Although you might variously hear echoes of Duke Ellington, Sun Ra or Louis Jordan, the compositions by pianist Joel Forrester and soprano saxophonist Phillip Johnston suddenly dart up unforeseen alleys, like the past is chasing with sirens screaming.** ... Now, 34 years on, the Microscopics have their own past to cannibalise... **The result? One of the most distinctive sounds in contemporary jazz.**”  
- John Shand, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 13 2015

“...**Innovation and experiment has been at the heart of ‘the Micros’ music since the beginning... *Manhattan Moonrise* touches on the band’s entire three and half decade history, with several previously unrecorded tunes from the Micros’ early years, like Forrester’s lushly orchestrated “No Time,” which sounds like a catchy back page from Cedar Walton’s songbook. Johnston’s brief but**

scorching “Obeying The Chemicals” is another early piece, a deliciously telegraphic booting barrelhouse romp. And then there’s the new work... **Whatever the music’s vintage, it shares the unmistakable Micro stamp, a convivial marriage of ingenious craftsmanship and extroverted improvisation.** If the band has a patron saint, it’s clearly Thelonious Sphere Monk, whose presence is manifest in the Micros’ cagey humor, harmonic syntax and hurtling rhythms. **In much the same way that Monk’s music existed apart from contemporaneous bebop, drawing directly on Ellington and Harlem stride piano while inhabiting its own avant-garde zone, the Micros are avid students of jazz history but unburdened by revivalist notions.”**

- *Eastside FM 89.7*, eastsidefm.org

“Now that Phillip Johnston...resides in Australia, the beloved Micros convene only rarely. Nevertheless, **the sterling musicianship and the antic verve of this saxophone-heavy band remain intact, as exhibited in its bustling performances and on its most recent recording, “Manhattan Moonrise.”**

- *The New Yorker*

“...*Manhattan Moonrise*...their first set of all new compositions in 25 years...sparkles with joyous delirium mirrored in the cover art (also bringing to mind Woody Allen’s enduring love of Manhattan as seen across his films... The septet (piano, bass, drums and four saxes: soprano, alto, tenor and baritone) brings to mind **the warm ease and confident interplay of Ellington’s small ensembles, as well as Monk’s sly playfulness.”**

-David Greenberger, *Metroland*, December 11, 2014

“...there's no reason music can't be both fun and artistically satisfying, both engaging mind and bringing a smile to the face. **The Microscopic Septet fits in here, with music that could be...described as jazz that mostly takes after the pre-bop era, before jazz split so decisively from pop... the playing is all fresh, and the solos venture outside swing-era sweetness... Melody and groove are the watchwords,** and the arrangements for multiples saxes are all tasty and impeccably executed, with a balance of harmonies and polyphonic lines to keep it interesting. There are some elements of 60s soul-jazz as well... **The result is a kind of music-out-of-time** that can as easily appeal... It's jazz made both accessible and brainy, worthy of both toe-tapping and close analysis. ...”

-Jon Davis, *Exposé*, September 2014, www.expose.org

“10.) The Microscopic Septet, “Manhattan Moonrise”(Cuneiform)... **Micros still sound airtight, agile and ready for anything co-founders Joel Forrester and Philip Johnston toss into their playpen,** whether it’s a funk stomp a la Johnston’s “Obeying the Chemicals,” a Monk-ish pastiche from Forrester, “A Snapshot of the Soul” or the snap-brim eminently danceable swinger, also from Forrester, that gives the disc its title. ...**it’s a genre that they, and they alone, own: Microscopic Septet music at its most proficient, inquisitive and enjoyable. There may have been more significant and ambitious albums I heard or missed out on this year, but few that had as much trouble staying out of my machines as this. Long Live The Micros! And Long Live Jazz – whatever the heck that means!**

- Gene Seymour, “Gene Seymour’s Top Ten Jazz Albums for 2014,” *GeneSeymour.com*, December 4th, 2014

“... **what absolute fun! The title track alone, “Manhattan Moonrise“, makes the CD worth the purchase...** co-leader Joel Forrester said the the title “evokes the moment when nighttime in New York struggles to come to life. The Micros...has always been a New York band. We bring The City to our music: this amounts to a form of high lunacy”... that lunacy is totally evident on the lively & jazzy “Let’s Coolerate One“...this one is COOKIN’! ... I give these folks a **MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**, with an “EQ” (energy quotient) rating of 4.98”

- Dick Metcalf (aka Rotcod Zzaj), *Improvjazzation*, Issue 146 Reviews

“their 2014 release...**more fully conveys the sheer spark and beauty of the Micros’ unique ensemble sound.** ... Phillip Johnston has lived in Australia since 2005, and now leads a ‘bi-hemispherical life’. He once described the Micros’ credo as, ‘break all the rules and respect all the saints’; if they have a patron saint, his name is Thelonious. ‘Surrealistic swing’ is what the Micros call their ‘thing’. ...”

- “**The Weekend Planet**”, *ABC Radio National*, August 2014

“...formed in 1980...**The Microscopic Septet was both ahead of and behind the times.** Their primary goal was updating the highly entertaining ensemble-driven jazz tradition evinced by bandleaders from Jelly Roll Morton to Sun Ra, which resulted in widespread critical acclaim... **Time has been kind to The Microscopic Septet... Ever the pranksters, the Micros continue to invoke myriad references in their quixotic musical vision, seamlessly unifying disparate antecedents into surprisingly cohesive compositions:** “Hang It On a Line” integrates the familiar chord changes of Hendrix’s “Hey Joe” into an episodic feature for Dave Sewelson’s protean baritone; “Occupy Your Life” transposes the iconic second movement of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony...the music of Thelonious Monk is...emphasized in the modulating rhythms and oblique intervals of “A Snapshot of the Soul,” which includes a conversational duet between the pianist and Johnston that recalls the duo’s formative days. ... Perhaps it was their lengthy hiatus – although an argument could easily be made for the charismatic appeal of **Johnston and Forrester’s timeless melodies and sophisticated arrangements** – but **these fellas still sound inspired. Joyously performed by seasoned veterans, Manhattan Moonrise fits seamlessly into the Micros’ oeuvre, an effort as singularly engaging as the Septet’s earliest recordings.”**

-Troy Collins, *Point of Departure*, Issue 48

“... **On one hand, the Micros could be credited with being forerunners of the Gatsby jazz revival** because they were swinging their collective asses off a good **fifteen years before the new moldy fig crowd started doing it. On the other hand, the Micros’ music actually isn’t retro at all.** Mashing up droll cartoonish themes and eerie Monkish blues with an unselfconsciously joyous dixieland flair...**there’s no other band out there who sound like them.** Their latest album, *Manhattan Moonrise*, comprises both new and older, previously unreleased material... The opening track, When You Get In Over Your Head is a brisk, blustery, noir-tinged stroll... No Time has lustrously shifting, late summer shades as Hashim pulls it further into a latin groove...

... Because Johnston decamped...Australia awhile back, the Micros don’t play as much as they used to, so if you’ve been thinking of seeing them, now’s as good a time as any.”

-*New York Music Daily*, March 3, 2015

“...myriad small US jazz labels. One of the most enterprising of these is Cuneiform, a brave little outfit based in Maryland. It’s long championed the **Microscopic Septet**...playing in a style that is bracingly odd and comfortably familiar at once. Their recent album **Manhattan Moonrise** instantly evokes the unique Micros ambience. Lazy swing beats wrap themselves around distinctly odd harmonic side-slips, punctuated with sudden switchbacks and changes of tempo. **You can tell this band’s guiding deity is Thelonious Monk, even if it never sounds like him.** Despite the engaging oddity the music never loses its soft edge...”

- Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph*, October 7, 2014

““**Break all the rules, and respect all the saints,**” says soprano saxophonist **Phillip Johnston**. Johnston’s musical saints include Ellington, Monk, Sun Ra, Cab Calloway and Jelly Roll Morton, who provide jumping-off points for the Microscopic Septet... **The septet’s rich sound is all its own, as we hear on their new Cuneiform CD, *Manhattan Moonrise*.** At the band’s core is a saxophone choir...bass and...drums. **Forrester’s piano and arrangements create a lush ensemble that...can sound several times larger than its modest size.** ... Fine examples...are “When You Get In Over Your Head” and “Let’s Coolerate One,” whose tight voicings, swinging beat and touches of modernism sound like...the hippest dance band on a transatlantic ocean-liner in the 1930s. ... The album combines new compositions, like “Occupy Your Life,” the album’s Beethoven-takes-a-rumba closer, with songs plucked from the band’s 200-plus book of songs... **In 2014, the band’s swinging modernism sounds as hip, and as danceable, as ever. And as younger ears rediscover the inspirations to be found in jazz that makes the body move, the Micros sound prescient. Sounds for the future, indeed!**”

- Tim Wilkins, WBG0/The Radar

“Those who wonder if The Microscopic Septet still "got it" can stop worrying - and rejoice! ...we have a new album, a very fine one, recorded in Technicolor sound. An album featuring fresh and colourful compositions, dressed in inventive arrangements, enriched by impeccable instrumental contributions. ...

As it's customary when it comes to The Micros, the music featured on the album inhabits many "styles" with great agility and finesse, with no trace of "ironic" postmodernism. Influences can be detected here and there, from Mingus to Monk...

**Very fine instrumental performances abound...** While it's true that the wind section...all the group's instruments, in fact - are perfectly comfortable in their "implicit" swing,...it's the subtle work of Dworkin on drums and cymbals...that gives the group something special. The same being true...to Hofstra's double bass...the epitome of elegance and good taste. ...

Obeying The Chemicals reminded me a bit of Funky AECO by the Art Ensemble Of Chicago...a mix of funk + boogie-woogie. ... A Snapshot Of The Soul sounds quite "Monk-related". Here Johnston's soprano comes to the fore, reminding me of Steve Lacy. ...Great theme. ...”

-Beppe Colli, *Clouds and Clocks*, July 29, 2014

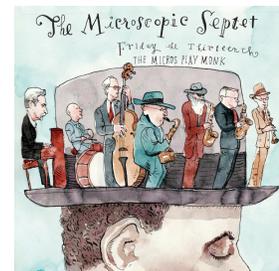
## MICROSCOPIC SEPTET RECORDINGS ON CUNEIFORM RECORDS



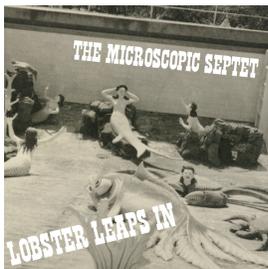
**The Microscopic Septet**  
*Been Up So Long It Looks Like Down to Me:  
The Micros Play the Blues*  
[2017, Rune 425]



**The Microscopic Septet**  
*Manhattan Moonrise*  
[2014, Rune 370]



**The Microscopic Septet**  
*Friday the 13th: The Micros Play Monk*  
[2010, Rune 310]



**The Microscopic Septet**  
*Lobster Leaps In*  
[2008, Rune 272]



**The Microscopic Septet**  
*Seven Men in Neckties*  
[2006, Rune 236/237]



**The Microscopic Septet**  
*Surrealistic Swing*  
[2006, Rune 238/239]