



Bio information: **NAIMA**

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ

**Rising from Valencia, Spain, Electro-Acoustic Piano Trio NAIMA
Delves into Dark and Beautiful Territory on *BYE*,
a Selection of Finely Calibrated Originals and Arresting Versions of
Songs by Jaga Jazzist and Elliott Smith**

If creating an unmistakable group sound is the ultimate goal of a jazz ensemble the Spanish trio **Naima** is well on its way to securing a spot as one of the leading combos on the contemporary European scene. Featuring **Enrique Ruiz** on piano and synths, **Luis Torregrosa** on drums, and **Rafael Ramos Sania** on bass, the Valencia-based electro-acoustic band has honed a dramatic, darkly romantic sound marked by astringent textures, arresting melodies, and tightly coiled rhythms. Naima makes its **Cuneiform Records** debut in 2016 with *Bye*, the group's fourth album.

While the group has undergone several changes since coming together a decade ago, Naima has maintained the founding core of Ruiz and Torregrosa, who write and arrange the majority of the material together. Avoiding the jazz trio trope of a theme followed by a string of solos, they've concentrated on a group approach that often erases distinctions between soloist and accompanist. The ebb and flow of energy and finely calibrated inner dynamics sometimes brings to mind **The Bad Plus**, but in the hands of Naima the results reach very different emotional terrain.

The artful use of electronic effects and synthesizer adds an unstable element to the trio's sound, which flows from a collective ethos that "is one of the key factors of Naima's music," says Ruiz. "It is what gives the band its character and also exerts influence while we're writing new material. The new songs are less predictable and you can be more creative and try out things that may open up new pathways for us."

The album kicks off with the gut-punch of "**A Father's Anthem**," a gorgeous, wrenching tune that opens as a mournful elegy and quickly evolves into a defiant *cri de coeur* driven by Ramos's keening distortion-tinged arco bass. The title track picks up on a similar mood, but more in sadness than anger, finding a core of resilience in the insistent snare tattoo, the sinuous synth line, and telegraphic march of Ruiz's piano.

"In this disc we use synthesizers as an extra instrument, amplifying our range of colors and intensities," Ruiz says. "However, this doesn't only happen with the record. We've worked towards making our live sound at least as intense as on the disc."

The album's emotional centerpiece might be "**Al Llegar Sabríamos Tanto Como Ella**" (which translates as "upon arrival we would know as much as she"). With its gradual building of tension and release and lapidary textures, the piece suggests a destination that's both inviting and forbidding. The synth driven opening of "**Future Imperfect**" powerfully evokes the dystopian implications of its title, with a theme that would serve effectively as the soundtrack to a chase scene through a **Blade Runner** movie. Working in a similar vein, "**Les Débris**" paints a portrait in deep shadows, where Ruiz's stuttering piano finally gives way to Ramos's thick, ringing bass.

Aside from the operatic intensity of some pieces, what draws comparisons to The Bad Plus is that Naima possesses a gift for reinterpreting material not often addressed in jazz settings, and the trio closes the album with two revelatory covers. **Jaga Jazzist** reed player **Lars Horntveth** wrote "**Animal Chin**," which is given concise and detailed treatment with zooming synth textures that contrast brightly with the spritely melody. And Naima's version of **Elliott Smith's** "**Can't Make a Sound**" somehow ramps up the song's desperation, adding an additional layer of existential angst to an already haunting plea. Rather than ending the album on that note, Naima offers two alternate takes, finding more resignation and quiet celebration in "**A Father's Anthem**" and "**Les Débris**," while opening a window into the band's creative process in the studio.

The origins for Naima date back to a fateful encounter between Ruiz and Torregrosa as teenagers. "We hit it off from the very start because he was wearing a t-shirt of *Surfer Rosa*," says Ruiz, referring to the classic album by the alt-rock band the **Pixies**. "But it wasn't until nearly 10 years later when we bumped into each other again at a jazz concert that we decided to start up a group together."

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They had a clear sense of musical mission from the beginning, writing original compositions and developing striking arrangements of songs by contemporary artists like **Depeche Mode**, Elliott Smith, the Pixies and **The Smiths**. “We were totally sure about what we were doing and where we were going,” Ruiz recalls. “We wanted to set up a jazz band which would have a sound and some song material closer to the music from groups of the last 30 years, which we grew up with.”

A quartet in its first incarnation with tenor saxophonist **Manolo Valls** and bassist **Alex Olías**, Naima released its debut album in 2006, *Uno*, making a strong impression on the Spanish jazz scene. The group followed with another impressive quartet release, *Buscas*, in 2010 (with **Oscar Cuchillo** taking over the bass chair). The group debuted sans saxophone on 2012’s *A Trio Conspiracy*, an album that captured the band’s volatile new sound. Inspired by other powerhouse triumvirates like The Bad Plus, the **Brad Mehldau Trio**, and **E.S.T.**, Naima has also absorbed concepts from combos like disparate plugged-in bands such as **Tortoise**, **Jaga Jazzist**, **Cinematic Orchestra**, and **Christian Scott’s Stretch Music**.

In many ways, finding **Rafael Ramos Sania** was key to the band’s evolution, which is captured on *Bye*. With his big sound, elastic sense of time, and facility with electronics, he contributed greatly to Naima’s riveting sound.

“We were very lucky to meet him as it’s really difficult to find a musician who can fit into a group with clear ideas about how they should sound,” Torregrosa says. “He was able to adapt wonderfully well and also contribute new ideas. With him we’re now a compact unit and this disc is living proof of that.”

For more information on Naima:

www.naima.es – www.facebook.com/naimajazz – www.cuneiformrecords.com

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

