



The City Champs *Luna '68*

BIG LEGAL MESS RECORDS

★★★★

Ground control to The City Champs! The storied psychedelic soul power trio from Memphis — organist Al Gamble, drummer George Sluppick and guitarist Joe Restivo — only manifests as a unit every decade or so. On *Luna '68*, their first Champs release since *The Set-Up* (2010), they blast back to the future that launched them and take everyone along for the ride.

Launch yourself directly into the Champs' topsy-turvy orbit by watching the "Lunar '68"

James Brandon Lewis *Red Lily Quintet* *Jesup Wagon*

TAO FORMS

★★★★

James Brandon Lewis does not take the easy road. Having forged a singular sound on the tenor saxophone, he could simply devise settings that showcase his brawny tone. Instead, he has rooted his recent music in extramusical research. The harmonic structures of last year's quartet date, *Molecular*, arose from his studies of the DNA helix.

If *Molecular* dealt with the influence of nature, then *Jesup Wagon* deals with nurture. Since childhood, George Washington Carver's combination of scientific and creative inquiries has been a template for the saxophonist's own multidisciplinary pursuits. Each of the album's seven pieces refers to an aspect of the dedicatee's legacy, which extended beyond the practical application of scientific, musical and painting skills to visionary proposals to transform society.

But while the record's narrative presents a series of teaching points, the music is anything but pedantic. Lewis' vibrato-laden, solitary introduction to the title track sets the listener up for tragedy, only to have his band march jubilantly in, banishing his blues like a

video. Directed by family filmmaker Andrew Fleming, the trippy mini-movie quotes everything from *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *Star Trek* to *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and blazes across the cosmos, soaring above iconic hometown architecture like the Memphis Pyramid.

Perfectly situated between now and then on the space-time continuum, *Luna '68*'s title track blasts off with Restivo's reverb-vibrato homage to power-chord pioneer Link Wray. And the retro-futuristic hits just keep on coming, fueled by Restivo's obsession with art-film composers like Piero Umilian and the one-two punch of Gamble's Muscle Shoals-meets-Memphis organ and the Beale Street beats Sluppick mastered as a kid playing drums with his guitarist dad.

As titles like "A-Meld-A-Marcos" suggest, the Champs have their pop culture memes down. But their Deep South roots run deep and intertwine with hometown elders Booker T & the MGs on tracks like "The Lockdown," while "Freddie King For Now" amps the propulsive drone of the octogenarian New Orleans blues great.

Lunar '68 kicks out the jams with instruments that know how to fly, and gives us the wings we need to join them. —Cree McCree

Luna '68: Lockdown City; Mack Lean; A-Meld-A-Marcos; Hanzo; Skinny Mac; Freddie King For Now; Thinking Of You; Voyage To Vega (For Felix). (38:14)

Personnel: Al Gamble, organ; Joe Restivo, guitar; George Sluppick, drums.

Ordering info: biglegalmessrecords.com



New Orleans parade. The interlocking gimbri (Moroccan bass lute), cello and cowbell groove of "Lowlands Of Sorrow" covers ground in a hurry, bucking and loping while Lewis and cornetist Kirk Knuffke float ragged, soulful cries over the top. And "Arachis," which is named for Carver's most famous research subject, the peanut, builds from ballad to blowout in classic Albert Ayler-esque fashion. —Bill Meyer

Jesup Wagon: Jesup Wagon; Lowlands Of Sorrow; Arachis; Fallen Flowers; Experiment Station; Seer; Chemurgy. (51:17)

Personnel: James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone, recitations; Kirk Knuffke, cornet; William Parker, bass, gimbri (2, 7); Chris Hoffman, cello; Chad Taylor, drums, mbira (6).

Ordering info: aumfidelity.com

EVAN PARKER QUARTET



"ALL KNAVERY AND COLLUSION"

Evan Parker Quartet *All Knavery And Collusion*

CADILLAC

★★★★

While British saxophonist Evan Parker has been duly celebrated for his mastery of free improvisation, his roots are deep in jazz. He has maintained performances that he himself calls his "jazz" gigs, such as a regular monthly show at London's Vortex.

The superb quartet on this new album joined him for one such gig in June 2019, and the next day they went into the studio. This date was delayed, like so many things, by the onset of the COVID pandemic — which the skeptical musician has cruelly dismissed as something of a ruse — and the title and some tracks were named after passages from Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Luckily, Parker's COVID denial goes no further in this particular project, a wonderful document of the sort of feverish group interplay he's thrived upon for a half-century.

Although composer credits are given, the music is all improvised. Most of the seven tracks come in uncharacteristically bite-sized chunks, ranging from two to eight minutes, and some subtle fades suggest edits. Only the 24-minute "The Weather Set In Hot" resembles the kind of extended excursion we've come to expect from Parker. Still, the music is superb, whether fueled by the febrile tangles, thwacks and astringent arco strokes bassist John Edwards unleashes on "The Alchemy Of John Edwards" or the halting chords and flurries pianist Alexander Hawkins uses to slow down time on "A Blazing Star Or Comet Appeared." But it is the long track that's most satisfying, as the music patiently builds up its head of steam, each participant getting their say while inextricably connected to the flow of the ensemble. —Peter Margasak

All Knavery And Collusion: All Knavery And Collusion; The Alchemy Of John Edwards; A Well Staring At The Sky; The Influence Of The Dog Star; A Blazing Star Or Comet Appeared; The Weather Set In Hot; Art Is A Science. . . (51:35)

Personnel: Evan Parker, tenor saxophone; Alexander Hawkins, piano; John Edwards, bass; Paul Lytton, drums.

Ordering info: cadillacrecords77.com