



## James Brandon Lewis Red Lily Quintet *For Mahalia, With Love*

TAO FORMS

★★★★½

Inspired by one of America's most distinctive singers, Mahalia Jackson (1911-'72), this album is reminiscent of earlier tribute recordings that mined the shared fervor of gospel music and free jazz. So ardent is the improvisation on fully half the recording that you can easily forgive some of the more discursive and less-inspired playing that occurs.

## Veronica Swift *Veronica Swift*

MACK AVENUE

★★★★½

*Veronica Swift* opens with a cool blast of onomatopoeic hipness, scattering with gleeful precision into the distinctly un-hip gay anthem "I Am What I Am" as if she were tearing into "I Got Rhythm." With only a hi-hat sizzle beneath her prologue, the song appears briefly, then melts away in the shadow of a propelling vocal agility. Ironically, Swift is not quite sure what she is.

She's not the first singer to colonize diverse categories. It took separate labels — Mercury and EmArcy — to contain the expansive swath of Sarah Vaughan, who built dual audiences by making sure neither had to suffer the unwanted preferences of the other. Not here. I don't know a lot jazz people, for example, who are dreaming of the next Nine Inch Nails tour. So what is "Closer" doing here? Swift gives it a lusty power, then tosses it aside for a 4/4 scat flight. It's as if two different singers are having at it. We also get pair of jazz-resistant Queen songs. Even "Moonlight Sonata" is burdened with pop gimmickry.

Swift is clearly a special talent of rare class and presence, evident in "Rainbows" and her comfortably relaxed "Je Veux," seasoned with

At its best — including an especially rollicking section in the middle of "Swing Low" — the quintet sounds like the spirit of Charles Mingus is moving among its members. From a rambunctious prayer meeting, the band begins to shift in and out of rhythm, and by the time the piece rumbles to a close it feels like you've just had a ride on a celestial chariot.

Likewise, "Elijah Rock" moves from William Parker's resonant introduction into a plaintive exchange between Lewis' tenor and Kirk Knuffke's cornet. Best of all is "Calvary," which builds steadily from the dark, dual-arco introduction through a stately lead harmony line for saxophone and cornet.

"Go Down Moses" begins with a similar emotive feel, but loses momentum midway until its swaggering, joyous, final two minutes. Momentum is also an issue on "Wade In The Water," which has an alluring, thorny harmony line, and a very free "Were You There" seems especially slight when compared to the strongest performances here.

—James Hale

**For Mahalia, With Love:** Sparrow; Swing Low; Go Down Moses; Wade In The Water; Calvary; Deep River; Elijah Rock; Were You There; Precious Lord. (71:36)

**Personnel:** James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Chris Hoffman, cello; William Parker, bass; Chad Taylor, drums, tambourine.

**Ordering info:** [taoforms.bandcamp.com](http://taoforms.bandcamp.com)



delicious Django-isms and a touch of accordion. So if she wants to do jazz, she should do it and not punch below her weight just to prove she can do stuff the jazz world doesn't care about anyway.

—John McDonough

**Veronica Swift:** I Am What I Am; Closer; Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me; The Show Must Go On; I'm Always Chasing Rainbows; In The Moonlight; Severed Heads; Je Veux Vivre; Chega de Saudade; Keep Yourself Alive; Don't Rain On My Parade (CD/digital only). (47:58)

**Personnel:** Veronica Swift, vocals; James Sarno, Benny Benack III, trumpet; Javier Nero, trombone; Troy Roberts, David Leon, reeds; Pierre Blanchard, Antoine Silverman, violin; Ludovic Bier, accordion; Adam Klipple, Randy Waldman, piano, keyboards, organ; Philip Norris, Felix Blanchard, electric bass; Alex Claffy, Antonio Lucasati, upright bass; Chris Whiteman, Samson Schmitt, guitar; Brian Viglione, drums, rhythm guitar, vocals; Luisito Quintero, percussion; Mariano Lucasati, Carolynne Framil, Austin Patterson, background vocals.

**Ordering info:** [mackavenue.com](http://mackavenue.com)



## Damon Locks & Rob Mazurek *New Future City Radio* INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

★★★★½

Pirate radio might be a phenomenon better associated with developing DIY dancefloor genres like jungle and garage throughout the UK in the '90s, but for Chicago experimentalists Damon Locks and Rob Mazurek it's equally a source of improvisatory inspiration. On their debut album as a duo, *New Future City Radio*, the pair have a weighty concept: fragmented transmissions from a near-future pirate station announcing the collapse of society while punchy electronic samples play beneath snatches of improvised melody.

Over 18 tracks, Locks and Mazurek expand on their playful thesis, traversing the opening, percussive salvo of "Yes!" to the dancefloor electronica of "The Sun Returns," the chopped breakbeats of "Flitting Splits Reverb Adage" and even snatches of reggae on "New Future." Per its theme, *New Future City Radio* skips through its tracks and sounds at pace, barely leaving the listener time to catch up with Locks's artful sonic collages and Mazurek's bursts of trumpet melody. On "Droids!" we hear a welcome snatch of Mazurek wrestling his trumpet into submission over a distorted, dread-filled background of noise loops, yet after two minutes we have already moved on to the modular ambience of the following number.

*New Future City Radio* is an admirable, experimental project that leaves the listener lacking thanks to its uneven pacing. Explosions of sound like the cacophonous "The Beat" and the glitch melodies of "Polaris Radio" beg to be expanded upon further, highlighting how this is an album bursting with creativity but only given space to breathe in the wrong places.

—Ammar Kalia

**New Future City Radio:** 5-4-3-2-1; Yes!; The Sun Returns; Breeze Of Time; Your Name Gonna Ring The Bell; New Future; Droids!; The Concord Hour; Future City; 10mins Past The Hour; Support The Youth (With Sound); The Beat; Las Niñas Están Escuchando (The Children Are Listening); Flitting Splits Reverb Adage; Twilight Shimmer; Suspense In The Grip Of Suspense; Polaris Radio; Drop. (39:52)

**Personnel:** Damon Locks, voice, sampler; Rob Mazurek, trumpet, sampler, modular synthesizers, voice, flutes; Mauricio Takara, percussion (12, 14); Helado Negro, voice (14); Brandi Augustus, vocals (6).

**Ordering info:** [intanthem.bandcamp.com](http://intanthem.bandcamp.com)