



Partial Custody
Max Kutner (Orenda)
by Elijah Shiffer

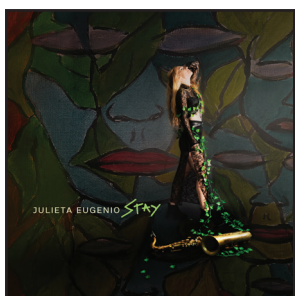
Guitarist Max Kutner almost always makes fascinating choices as a composer and bandleader. On *Partial Custody*, he returns to the unlikely lineup of electric guitar, tuba and percussion, an instrumentation he explored in two previous releases (also on Orenda) with his Evil Genius trio. This time around, Kutner is joined by Ben Stapp (tuba) and James Paul Nadien (drums, glockenspiel), like-minded improvisers who share the leader's playfulness.

As with most of Kutner's music, it is impossible to assign *Partial Custody* to a specific genre. This album draws on influences as far-flung as prog rock, free jazz, minimalism and trad jazz, with the latter often spurred by Stapp. Several tracks are full of quirky shifts between styles, including the Frank Zappa-esque "Exaggeration Holmes". Electronic effects expand the trio's capacity of tone colors with space-age quonks and skronks. However, despite all the textural twists and turns, the album has a focused sonic palette throughout—a dark and close-up vibe, often a bit sinister. This focus is particularly apparent on the final track, "Jet Plane", an epic 24-minute rager in which the trio vamps relentlessly over the simplest of themes.

The seven tracks have a subtle story arc in their harmonic material. The first three are more tonally ambiguous, but the others, including a glitched-out version of Brian Eno's "Bone Jump", trend gradually toward more stable key centers. The narrative reaches its inevitable conclusion in "Jet Plane", with its three-note vamp, a starkly obvious riff that seemingly threatens to break into "Hot Cross Buns" at any moment (or perhaps Ornette Coleman's "Theme from a Symphony").

The physical format of *Partial Custody* is a casino chip with a QR code. This is not only a nod to the leader's Las Vegas upbringing but also a fitting indicator of the album's individualism. Kutner creates a musical world all his own by recombining familiar elements in unexpected ways.

For more info visit orendarecords.bandcamp.com. The album release concert is at Mama Tried May 15. See Calendar.



Stay
Julieta Eugenio (Cristalyn)
by Mike Shanley

Julieta Eugenio's 2022 album *Jump* was a debut that bypassed the young-player-with-potential trappings of such releases, revealing instead a tenor saxophonist who had already developed a strong

voice after nearly a decade of performing in New York City. The Argentina native boldly worked in the trio format with just bass and drums, and mastered the chordless setting. Her second-round features basically the same instrumentation, and marks continued growth as a writer and leader. *Stay* (Eugenio prefers command words as titles) isn't billed as a concept album specifically, but several track titles ("Stay", "Trapped", "Out There"), and an original poem included in the liner notes, point toward what she calls "an inward spiritual journey." Perhaps that inner turmoil is felt by most improvisers, but that searching quality manifests in her playing. The minor key title track finds her lengthy phrases unfurling over steady bass and drums. Bassist Matt Dwonszyk straddles a pedal point with upper register licks, working so deftly with drummer Jonathan Barber that it isn't immediately apparent that they're flowing easily in 5/4.

Throughout the album, Dwonszyk slides up and down the neck of his instrument and plucks fifths to deepen the group sound. "Blue" begins with the saxophonist alone, sounding pensive before really stretching out; "Sunday Stranger" builds on a line that begins high and soulful before dipping into the low register of her horn. Two of the four vignettes, entitled "Breathe" (a reference to her poem), include Leo Genovese (Fender Rhodes). His appearance adds a dreamlike quality to the set and serves as a worthwhile break from the acoustic dynamics of the rest of the album. The third and fourth "Breathe" tracks consist of free-flowing tenor/drum duets. Duke Ellington's classic "Sophisticated Lady" is the album's sole non-original. Eugenio uses the standard to prove her skills of musical exploration, as she delivers a smoky performance that gives a slight hat tip to Archie Shepp's breathy trio version from 1968, minus his cathartic embellishments.

If ever internal thoughts were making it difficult for Eugenio to find her musical path, *Stay* proves that eventually it revealed itself.

For more info visit julieta-eugenio.com. The album release concert is at Bar Bayeux May 29. Eugenio is also at Down and Out May 19. See Calendar.



Tender Mercies
Frank Gratkowski/Simon Nabatov (Clean Feed)
Verbs
Simon Nabatov 3+2 (Clean Feed)
by Ken Waxman

Tender Mercies and *Verbs* both offer a micro and a macro view of Russian-American Simon Nabatov's piano and improvisational skills in sessions recorded less than nine months apart in Cologne, Germany's LOFT. *Tender Mercies* is a free-form dialogue with longtime associate, German Frank Gratkowski (alto, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet) while *Verbs* expands Nabatov's trio of Stefan Schöneegg (bass) and Dominik Mahnig (drums), augmenting the program with two slightly younger locals, Leonhard Huhn (alto, clarinet) and Philip Zoubek (synthesizers.)

As Gratkowski moves among his horns in *Tender Mercies*, the duo's sounds are alternately meticulous and madcap. Proving that free music can be temperate, "Turn Of Events" and especially "Cagey" depend on gentling piano strums evolving in tandem with clarion clarinet swells. Midway through the former, as Gratkowski switches to

alto saxophone, deconstructing the melody with triple tonguing, aviary twitters and banshee wails, Nabatov responds with pedal point accents and key clanks. These storytelling inferences play a lesser role on other tracks with some sequences as belligerent as others are calm. The focus shifts to Gratkowski's flatulent snorts and reed shrills, challenged by the pianist's processional and percussive chording. On the title tune, Nabatov literally smacks piano wood like a drum top to counter his playing partner's bass clarinet snarls. As the piece accelerates, rasping reed timbres intersect with the pianist's blues sensibility, climaxing as Nabatov lays down a carpet of perfectly round notes, mute reed output and strangled squeaks.

Verbs is almost completely improvised, yet still confirms the pianist's compositional skills. "Breathe" contains as many tonal ambiguities and multiphonic hooks as any free jazz improv. Sparked by keyboard sparkles and saxophone flutters, the track builds to a crescendo of the synthesizer's organ-like pulses and drum beats. Yet this accentuated groove avoids monotony as Nabatov interpolates swift swing. Pointedly, saxophonist/clarinetist Huhn's playing is more orthodox than Gratkowski's, a plus on a track like "Race", whose lively evolution is based around Mahnig's back beat, Schöneegg's pacing on bass, and saxophone honks. As a result, the number comes across as the session's most jazz-like tune. There are other measured outpourings on the release, but the definition of the quintet's ability are tracks such as "Converge" and "Evolve" that forge novel paths. The synthesizer's ability to replicate both a steel guitar and an accordion distinguishes "Evolve". An obtuse exposition, these textures evolve alongside

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Melissa Aldana – *Echoes of the Inner Prophet* (Blue Note)
- Arild Andersen/Daniel Sommer/Rob Luft – *As time passes* (April)
- Brian Bromberg – *LaFaro* (Be Squared Productions)
- Alice Coltrane – *Carnegie Hall Concert* (Impulse!)
- Natalie Cressman & Ian Faquini – *GUINGA* (GroupUP Music)
- Elephant9 – *Mythical River* (Rune Grammofon)
- James Emery – *Inside Outlier* (Solos & Duos) (s/r)
- GinmanBlachmanDahl – *What's To Come!* (Storyville)
- Alex Harding/Lucian Ban – *Blutopia* (Sunnyside)
- Fred Hersch – *Silent, Listening* (ECM)
- Mathias Landæus – *Path* (SFAR)
- NAOM (Nazareno Caputo/Omar Cecchi) – *RADICI* (AUT)
- Sam Newsome/Max Johnson – *Tubes* (Unbroken Sounds)
- Ken Peplowski – *unheard bird* (Arbors)
- Sonny Rollins – *Freedom Weaver* (*The 1959 European Tour Recordings*) (Resonance)
- Joana Sá – *A Body As Listening* (Clean Feed)
- Soft Machine – *Høvikoden 1971* (Cuneiform)
- Louis Stewart Trio – *Louis The First* (Livia-Hawk)
- Void Patrol – *Live @ Victo* (Les Disques Victo)
- Stephane Wrembel – *Triptych Phase III* (feat. Jean-Michel Pilc) (Water Is Life)