

Mumpbeak
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RARENOISE 035

★★★

A progressive outfit fueled by four bassists and worn copies of King Crimson's *Red* and Allan Holdsworth's *Metal Fatigue*, Mumpbeak explores drum fulminations and exotic, effected keyboard riffs on its self-titled debut. Though it's easy to think of classic progressive rock as a festival of capes (Rick Wakeman) and spinning grand pianos (Keith Emerson), the music was often as delicate and thoughtful as it was speed-ridden, complex and grandiose. King Crimson's "Book Of Saturday" and Jethro Tull's "Wond'ring Aloud" revealed the artists' fingerpicking folk-music heritage. Mumpbeak has little use for prog's pastoral lineage, however. They opt for a Godzilla-like approach. The lineup includes King Crimson regulars Tony Levin on bass and Pat Mastelotto on drums, giving Mumpbeak rhythmic tonnage, but less in the way of melodic flow. Producer and bassist Bill Laswell added his parts from his studio in Orange, N.J., while the other members recorded from locales as far flung as Oslo and Austin, Texas. The fact that the disc sounds live and improvisational is a testament to the individuals' skills, but perhaps something more interesting would have resulted if these extremely talented musicians had recorded in one spot. As it is, the crash and doom of "Oak," the ethereal "Monocle" and the lead-footed "Piehole" make for anti-easy listening through and through.

—Ken Micallef

Mumpbeak: Biscuit; Forelock; Monocle; Nork; Oak; Chain; Piehole. (40:42)

Personnel: Roy Powell, keyboards; Pat Mastelotto, drums; Bill Laswell (1–5, 7), Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz (1–3, 5, 7), Tony Levin (5), Lorenzo Feliciati (4), electric bass.

Ordering info: rarenoiserecords.com



Nir Felder
Golden Age

OKEH 888837962926

★★★

Nir Felder kicks off his anticipated debut in a fashion befitting the hubbub that's surrounded him in the last few years. On the modern rock-tinted "Lights," he strings together spoken-word samples of famous speeches by civil rights figures, politicians and cultural icons. For the foundation, his band locks into a forward-moving groove that suggests cinematic vision and confident urgency.

It's an apt entrance for an instrumentalist who won the Berklee College of Music's Jimi Hendrix Award and a Billboard scholarship before cutting his teeth with veterans such as Greg Osby and Jack DeJohnette. Due to his pedigree, Felder is currently enjoying support rarely afforded new jazz artists. Promotional literature touts the weighty philosophical questions surrounding the album's seemingly simple title and, for sentimental value, plays up the fact that he uses the same \$250 Mexican Stratocaster he did when he was a kid.

Sharp, accessible and adorned with rounded melodies, the record spotlights tunefulness over technique. Given its apparent desire to please jazz traditionalists and touch bases with pop, blues and distant hip-hop threads, the uneven effort recalls the strong, albeit flawed, opening salvo by his Texas-based contemporary Gary Clark Jr., a fellow guitarist challenged with living up to similarly lofty expectations.

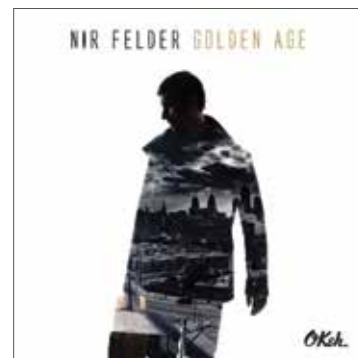
Like Clark, Felder succeeds when he sounds free ("Ernest/Protector," "Memorial") and unencumbered with fitting into certain molds ("Lover"). Slower compositions—as well as Felder's repeat dalliances with brighter pop structures and samples—mute his personality and momentum. Next time out, he'd be better served by lessening the gloss and increasing the rapport with his skilled mates.

—Bob Gendron

Golden Age: Lights; Bandits; Ernest/Protector; Sketch 2; Code; Memorial; Lower; Bandits II; Slower Machinery; Before The Tsars. (61:19)

Personnel: Nir Felder, guitar; Aaron Parks, piano; Matt Penman, bass; Nate Smith, drums.

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Natalie Fernandez with Zaccai Curtis & Insight
Nuestro Tango

TRUTH REVOLUTION 008

★★★½

Born in Argentina but raised in Miami, vocalist Natalie Fernandez appears to be an excellent conduit for blending the styles of tango, r&b, jazz and pop music. On "Afrotangojazz," she drafts a flowery mission statement over pulsating Latin hand percussion and a skittering bandoneon. The dense female harmonies swell and fade before a blues-fueled piano closes out the tune. Elsewhere, a spoken word guest spot from Giovanni Almonte almost derails the album but is rescued by the vibrant "El Viaje Del Negro," which dips into a sly display of vocal skill and tempo. For the most part, Fernandez's performance of the tango standard "El Dia Que Me Quieras" is respectfully traditional. The percussionists dig into a nice groove over Zaccai Curtis' bright piano montuno. Only the polished vocal overdubs at the fadeout belie the tune's timelessness.

—Sean J. O'Connell

Nuestro Tango: Azabache; El Dia Que Me Quieras; Adios Nonino; Afrotangojazz; Malena; My True Love; Free Me; El Viaje Del Negro; Nostalgias; Un Semejante. (51:02)

Personnel: Natalie Fernandez, vocals; Zaccai Curtis, piano; Luques Curtis, bass; Richie Barshay, drums; Reinaldo De Jesus, congas, timbales; Daniel Antonetti, timbales; Julie Acosta, trumpet; Tokunori Kajiwara, trombone; Zach Lucas, saxophone; Philip Dizack, Christian Scott, trumpet; Orlando Vega, bongos; Richard Scofano, bandoneon; Giovanni Almonte, vocals; Obanilu Ire Allende, panderos; Chris Sanchez, guira.

Ordering info: truthrevolutionrecords.com

