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I Try To Remember Where I Come From

Artist: Jonah Parzen-Johnson // Release Date: 7/7/2017

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

I think it's worthwhile for those of us who devote our lives to making stuff, to be sure we ask ourselves why we're spending our time this way. Each of us is a collection of gravitations. In my first saxophone lesson with Mwata Bowden, my baritone saxophone hero, and one of Chicago's creative leaders, he told me, "we call it Creative Music, because...". All I heard was "we". Community. An important reminder that Creative Music was about more than a style, or a skill. It is part of a movement that exists in concert with American history, and a tradition of explosive creativity in response to deep hardship. That "we" is important to me. Something to respect, and place above other things.

Community is a funny thing to think about when standing on a stage by myself getting ready to play a solo saxophone set. Experimental music can feel very isolating, but it doesn't have to be. I think a lot about sound as I build each piece of music using extended saxophone techniques, and carefully assembled analog synthesizer components that breath and pulse with my wiry saxophone melodies. I find joy in the craft, but beyond that, I aim to make something that if placed in the right context, can tell a story that each person in the room can connect with. Something simple, and honest enough, that although it might be painful, it can resonate with anyone.

I've lived in Brooklyn NY since 2006, but I was very lucky to grow up on the Southside of Chicago, surrounded by incredible musicians that I met at Jazz clubs, studied with, and saw around my neighborhood. They defined my musical world, were receptive to my curiosity, and deeply supportive as I honed my musical voice. The title of this album, *I Try To Remember Where I Come From*, is a direct expression of my gratitude, but, on a deeper level, it is a reminder that I have taken inspiration from a tradition that isn't rooted in my own experience. It is a pattern repeated regularly in American music history. Something that I think about a lot.

In many ways, Black American music is a response to an environment of exclusion, oppression, and institutional silencing that I, a white American man, have not, and will never experience. Despite this fact, throughout my teenage years, Black musicians in Chicago shared their traditions, their gatherings, their bandstands, their living rooms, and their musical incites with me in a generous, and enduring way. I find it deeply humbling that a community that formed, in part, to protect its members from an environment where everything could be taken from them, is also one of the most generous sources of creativity and inspiration in American art. I think this generosity deserves music that is loyal to the truth behind the tradition. I wrote these songs because I care about the people who own that tradition, and who forged it as a tool of inclusion. I seek to honor their battle for institutional recognition, and racial equality, with every show I play, and everything that I make. Their fight continues today, and deserves all of our attention.

- Jonah Parzen-Johnson

Press Quotes

"Saxophonist Jonah Parzen-Johnson tells stories in sound."

- **The Boston Globe**

"A poetic horn-smith and master manipulator of melodic sounds."

- **The Village Voice**

"Parzen-Johnson doesn't care much for musical labels, preferring instead to carve out unique sonic spaces"

- **PopMatters**

Upcoming Tour Dates

- 6/27 - Bootleg Theatre - Los Angeles CA
- 6/28 - Octopus Literary Salon - San Francisco CA
- 6/29 - Wayward Music Series - Seattle WA
- 6/30 - Improvisation Summit - Portland OR
- 7/5 - Casa Del Popolo - Montreal QC
- 7/6 - The Burdock - Toronto ON
- 7/7 - New Ghosts Series - Cleveland OH
- 7/8 - Trinosophes - Detroit MI
- 7/9 - The Spot - Lafayette IN
- 7/10 - Ice House - Minneapolis MN
- 7/11 - Arts & Literature Laboratory - Madison WI
- 7/12 - The Jazz Gallery - Milwaukee WI
- 7/13 - The Blockhouse - Bloomington IN
- 7/14 - The Hungry Brain - Chicago IL
- 7/15 - The Pilot Light - Knoxville TN
- 7/17 - The Mothlight - Asheville NC
- 7/18 - TBA - Baltimore MD
- 7/20 - TBA - Philadelphia PA
- 7/21 - Mandorla Music Series - Boston MA
- 7/23 - Machines With Magnets - Providence RI
- 7/27 - Union Pool - Brooklyn NY