

Press Kit - Currently Booking 2017-2018

I Try To Remember Where I Come From out now on Clean Feed Records

Jonah Parzen-Johnson - jonah@jonahpj.com
Saxophonist, Electronic Musician, Educator



Artist Information

Label: Clean Feed Records

Genre: Jazz/Experimental/Electronic

Based In: Brooklyn NY

Instrumentation: Solo Baritone
Saxophone & Analog Synthesizer

Sounds Like: The emotionally evocative nature of folk music melded with the chilling power of experimental and ambient textures. All performed live on analog instruments without loops or overdubs.

Website: jonahpj.com

Facebook: facebook.com/jonahbaritone

Bandcamp: jonahpj.bandcamp.com

Youtube: youtube.com/jonahpj

Biography

Jonah Parzen-Johnson, a resident of Brooklyn NY, plays music for solo baritone saxophone and analog synthesizer. Imagine the raw energy of an Appalachian choir, balanced by a fearlessly exposed saxophone voice, resting on a unique combination of analog synthesizer components sitting on the floor in front of him. It all breathes together, as he uses his feet to weave square and sawtooth waves into a surging base for folk inspired saxophone melodies, overblown multi phonics, and patiently developed circular breathing passages. Every element is performed and recorded live, solo, without any looping, overdubbing or recorded samples. It is music with texture, and depth, but most of all, it is direct and grounded in performance. Jonah remains deeply committed to music that connects

to the listener. In July 2017, Jonah released his third full length solo album, 'I Try To Remember Where I Come From' (Clean Feed). The release has been described as, "haunted by abstraction but guided by a compassionate pulse," (New York Times), as it, "vividly channels free-jazz with elements of improvisation and composition, combining to create a sustained meditative mood, transporting listeners to another world." (Downbeat Magazine).

A Chicago native, Jonah's circular breathing, multi-phonics and inclusively experimental style owe a debt to the Chicago saxophone legacy, but his devotion to a quirky almost vocal approach places him in new territory for the instrument. Since 2012, Jonah has toured over 40 thousand miles, by himself, across the US and Canada. Highlights

include shows at The Stone in New York NY, Constellation in Chicago IL, Suoni Per il Popolo festival in Montreal, and the Creative Music Guild Improvisors Summit in Portland OR. Along with playing solo, he is a co-leader of Brooklyn Afrobeat outfit, Zongo Junction, and an active part of Brooklyn NY's independent and experimental music communities. He has appeared as a sideman with, Kenny Werner, Randy Brecker, Lenny Pickett, Adia Victoria, This Is The Kit, and Ex Reyes. Jonah has a Bachelor's of Music from NYU, and a Master's of Music from The Manhattan School of Music. In addition to performing, Jonah is a busy instructor with, a full studio of private students, weekly classroom instruction, and guest master classes at schools including Oberlin and Princeton.

Recent Press Highlights

The New York Times

Jonah Parzen-Johnson, 'Too Many Dreams'

When the baritone saxophonist Jonah Parzen-Johnson started playing solo shows, he often held long tones, or played simple, repeating phrases that felt more like sentences than simple melodic patterns. The space around him felt fuller than the sound, which was probably the point. Over the past few years he's expanded, starting to accompany himself with warbling, chiptune-like analog synthesizers — and on the just-released "I Like to Remember Where I Came From," his fourth solo album, the synths complete the story. Unlike Colin Stetson, a more famous solo baritone player, he's not emphasizing the physical demands of his approach, or suggesting some postindustrial lament. Mr. Parzen-Johnson is more interested in memory, as a wisp and a venue for solidarity with oneself. It works. Thanks to dewy immersions like "Too Many Dreams," haunted by abstraction but guided by a compassionate pulse, this is his strongest statement yet. GIOVANNI RUSSONELLO

Los Angeles Times

Jonah Parzen-Johnson's "I Try to Remember Where I Come From": A Brooklyn-based baritone saxophonist who was raised in Chicago, Parzen-Johnson pays homage to the black American music that influenced him with this swirling, oddly addictive album. Using circular breathing and multiple synthesizer loops to churn around his solo excursions, Parzen-Johnson's vaguely alien compositions split the difference between the organic and the synthetic with a far-reaching, expressive sound that carries an indefinable beauty. With a reverence for the jazz and creative music traditions of his hometown, Parzen-Johnson has found something new and unexpected.



"Cabin Pressure" is from the album, "I Try to Remember Where I Come From."



Editors' Picks

AUGUST 2017

Jonah Parzen-Johnson I Try To Remember Where I Come From (Clean Feed)

By Izzy Yellen

There are only two instruments on Jonah Parzen-Johnson's new album—baritone saxophone and analog synthesizer—and he plays both of them. Despite the unlikely instrumentation, this seven-song, 35-minute program is so successful that it actually feels a bit too short. On *I Try to Remember Where I Come From*, he finds the common ground between two of his musical voices. On the opening track, "Cabin Pressure," Parzen-Johnson's assertive baritone calls precede a series of long tones that a filtered synth line dances on top of, creating a contrast between a drone-type element and a more kinetic one. He doesn't stick to just a few tones for the album—he dives headfirst into the pool of possibilities, exploring the range of each instrument, sculpting sounds that are akin to peanut butter on a cheeseburger. It doesn't make sense in theory, but give it a try and you'll be glad you did. Despite being made by recording sax solos and then assembling the synth parts around them, each track has a unified feeling that contributes to an overall sense of cohesiveness. This album vividly channels free-jazz with elements of improvisation and composition, combining to create a sustained, meditative mood, transporting listeners to another world.



Chicago native Jonah Parzen-Johnson salutes the legacy and generosity of the AACM on his new solo effort

By Peter Margasak @pmarg



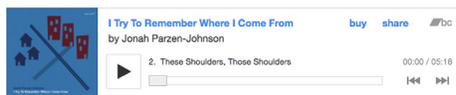
Jonah Parzen-Johnson
WILHELM MATTHIES

Baritone saxophonist and Chicago native **Jonah Parzen-Johnson** uses his new album, *I Try to Remember Where I Come From* (Clean Feed), as a statement of thanks for his artistic roots. He grew up on the south side and became an adherent of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), studying under the great reedist **Mwata Bowden**, who imparted the organization's communal sensibility to the young musician. The music Parzen-Johnson now creates in Brooklyn, where he moved in 2006, bears little resemblance to the output of AACM members, but its spirit of creativity and freedom certainly stems from his experiences here. In the press materials he notes that black music in America was developed under horrible circumstances in which art became a crucial tool of empowerment and protection from the oppressive forces surrounding the community. He goes on to acknowledge that the community members he interacted with "shared their traditions, their gatherings, their bandstands, their living rooms, and their musical insights with me in a generous and enduring way." The new album contains seven tender, minimal original pieces that are built around rustic, folksy melodies—Parzen-Johnson used circular breathing techniques in his saxophone playing and controlled the simple analog synthesizer counterpoint with foot pedals of his own design. The synthetic pulses, bleeps, and vibrato-rich long tones engage beautifully in a close dance with his grainy baritone, which occasionally sounds like it's offering to complement the electronics. Whatever improvisation exists on the record is deeply entwined in the hypnotic, uninterrupted melody lines he blows on each piece. 📌

Jonah Parzen-Johnson, Hanging Hearts
Fri 7-14, 8:30 PM, Hungry Brain, 2309 W. Belmont, \$10



Jonah Parzen-Johnson, *I Try To Remember Where I Come From*



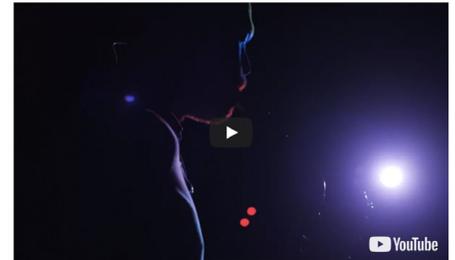
This is what it might sound like if John Carpenter composed an avant-garde soundtrack for one of his horror movies. Baritone saxophonist Jonah Parzen-Johnson came up through the jazz tradition, but he also has both old-school and modern folk coursing through his blood. That he's found a way to bind those elements together into a series of solo recordings is, in itself, a fine accomplishment, but that he's developed a rather singular voicing along the way is what's truly remarkable. On his latest release, he adds analog synths to the mix. It's a concept he's been working out on tour for a little while, and those live test runs pay off on *I Try To Remember Where I Come From*. It's an intriguing option for listeners wanting something adventurous.



Jonah Parzen-Johnson Announces New Album, Shares Video

The Brooklyn-based artist crafts singular pieces that are performed live with a saxophone and synthesizer, which he controls with his feet.

LINE CHROME | MAY 16, 2017



On July 7, Brooklyn-based artist **Jonah Parzen-Johnson** will release his latest album, *I Try To Remember Where I Come From*.

Parzen-Johnson's music is created in a singular process that combines circular breathing and solo saxophone lines with the sounds of a swirling analog synthesizer that he controls with his feet—all this is performed live without any looping or sampling. Via this confounding method, Parzen-Johnson crafts transfixing sonics that meld traditional folk ideals with his own experimentation.

With the announcement of the album, Parzen-Johnson has shared a video for opening cut, "Cabin Pressure," which was written to represent his struggle with acknowledging privilege, as he explains:

"Cabin Pressure" was something I wrote to represent my daily struggle to acknowledge the role of privilege in my life. As a white man, it's so easy for me to lose focus and fall into a pattern of self interest, but I have to hold myself responsible for the inequality that's embedded in every part of our society and address it as well as I can. Vanessa & Adam from Slopehouse created this awesome visual representation of my daily process of focusing and refocusing over and over, as I struggle with how easily I lose sight of this ever-present reality."

You can watch the stunning video for "Cabin Pressure" in full via the player above, with the album available for pre-order [here](#).



Jonah Parzen-Johnson: I Try To Remember Where I Come From

By **KARL ACKERMANN**
June 30, 2017
Sign in to view read count

★★★★★

Chicago native and Brooklyn resident **Jonah Parzen-Johnson** has strong links to the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), having studied with that organization's **Mwata Bowden**. Parzen-Johnson—a co-leader of the Afro-beat ensemble, **Zongo Junction**—plays the baritone saxophone and analog synthesizers in each of his loft solo outings, to date. His new album *I Try To Remember Where I Come From* further Parzen-Johnson's exploration of his genre-defying music.



SLIDESHOW

A creator of experimental music in a different vein, Parzen-Johnson had released two previous albums—both on the **Primary Records** label—that were solo efforts, each utilizing the saxophone and synthesizers, recorded live and without overdubs. *Michigan* (2012) and *Remember When Things Were Better Tomorrow* (2015) both display Parzen-Johnson's skill at telling stories through the voices of his instruments and making the foot pedal technicalities of the synthesizer/saxophone connection, a non-intrusive conduit.

Each of the eight compositions on *I Try To Remember Where I Come From* are originals penned by Parzen-Johnson. His inventive use of the synthesizer allows him the flexibility to accompany his sax in a wide variety of settings. On the opening piece, "Cabin Pressure," he blends blues and funk with the baritone supplying the former in deep, resonant lines. "These Shoulders, Those Shoulders" has a Celtic feel to it—a stylistic touch that is similar to "Stay There, I'll Come to You" (from the previous album), where the synthesizer approximated bagpipes. "Guns Make Us Murderers" and "I Have Questions" create a folksy atmosphere of Americana, the electronics not so much mimicking any one dynamic, but blending with the baritone's sound in a pastoral drone.

What Parzen-Johnson accomplishes with synthesizer and saxophone can be conceptually compared to some of **Nate Wooley's** work with trumpet and electronics though Parzen-Johnson has a stronger focus on melody. He has a higher cause as well; in his liner notes, he points to his wish to give voice to those who have experienced "...physical and mental silencing..." The move to the Clean Feed label should bring Parzen-Johnson more recognition for the unique music and the equally unique artist.

Recent Press Highlights Continued

MAGNIFIED

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

with JONAH PARZEN-JOHNSON

01 THE NEW CONGRESS
"This is a post-partisan organization trying to replace corporate and careerist politicians in Congress with everyday Americans ready to fight for a government that helps everyday people."

02 HURRAY FOR THE RIFF RAFF AND HALF WAIF
"Two bands making really good and fun music while addressing some of society's deeply ingrained inequalities."

03 STRANGERS I MEET ON TOUR
"I'm constantly being reminded of how little I know about the people in this country. Everywhere I go, people surprise me with their generosity. Meeting them makes me want to be touring all the time."

THE SEEKER

Jonah Parzen-Johnson asks questions, listens to the answers

JONAH PARZEN-JOHNSON doesn't look like a storyteller when he steps onstage. With a baritone saxophone at his mouth and a rack of pedals at his feet, you might wonder how he'll split the difference between jazz and noise. But the tunes he blows have a strong narrative quality. They drink as deeply from the well of Appalachian folk music as they do from the reservoir of transcendent free jazz exemplified by Albert Ayler and the Art Ensemble Of Chicago.

"I think of the saxophone as stepping forward and being the singer of the project," he says from his home in Brooklyn. The analog synthesizer tones that bubble up around his melodies recall a time when electronic sounds signaled the promise of a better future. And they're all made in real time. "Nothing is prerecorded," he assures. "It's all analog sound, and it's all being generated on the spot."

When Parzen-Johnson stops playing, he starts talking about listening and understanding. At a recent Chicago gig celebrating the release of his third album, *I Try To Remember Where I Come From* (Clean Feed), he spoke about an epiphany that complicated his love for Neil Young.

"He calls the country out about what America does wrong," he says. "Sometimes you have to say directly what's going on." But after Parzen-Johnson noticed that Young's recent songs didn't change a lot of minds, he realized, "Maybe it's about only asking questions."

So that's what Parzen-Johnson does when he takes his one-man show on the road; on- and offstage, he asks questions and listens to what people say. "I feel like getting out in the country and trying to listen is good practice for me," he says. "Because I think it's never really a good idea to tell other people what they think." —Bill Meyer



PHOTO BY LÍVIA MIYADAIRA ITO

MAGNET 29

Venue Highlights

The Mothlight - Asheville NC
Metro Gallery - Baltimore MD
Pioneer Works - Brooklyn, NY
Knitting Factory - Brooklyn, NY
Union Pool - Brooklyn NY
Silent Barn - Brooklyn, NY
Calvin College - Ceder Rapids, MI
Constellation - Chicago, IL
Hungry Brain - Chicago IL

Elastic Arts - Chicago IL
The Velvet Lounge - Chicago IL
New Ghosts Series - Cleveland OH
Trinosophes - Detroit MI
Bootleg Theater - Los Angeles CA
Ice House - Minneapolis MN
Casa Del Popolo - Montreal QC
La Plante - Montreal, QC
The Stone - New York NY

Machines With Magnets - Providence, RI
Oberlin College - Oberlin, OH
Milkboy - Philadelphia PA
CMG Improvisors Summit - Portland OR
The Pilot Light - Knoxville TN
Center For New Music - San Francisco CA
Wayward Music Series - Seattle WA
The Royal Room - Seattle WA
Ratio - Toronto, ON

Masterclasses

Until You're Famous: *Building A Sustainable Income Stream As A Musician While Laying The Groundwork For Maximum Impact As a Solo Act*

60 minute presentation + student Q & A

As a student, it is common to attend master classes by top tier musicians about approaches to performance, and composition, but this *view from the top* approach often gloss over an important question: How do I build a life in music without the name recognition and career experience that established musicians benefit from? In this workshop, I will lay out a set of tools and objectives that I have used to establish sustainable revenue sources, while at the same time building a foundation for name recognition, and a solo career with maximum financial and time efficiency. It's 100% possible to support yourself through music, while making your way up the ladder of name recognition connected to a successful solo career.

Touring with Electronics: *How to Effectively, Write, Record, Tour and Perform Using Electronics with Acoustic Instruments In a Live Setting*

60 minute presentation + student performance and critique

When I first started playing saxophone with electronics, I spent months choosing the best pedals and synthesizer components. But as soon as I started touring, I discovered that when it came to everything from sound checks and monitoring to flying and repairs, electronics presented a set of logistical challenges that I had never considered. My electronics are as much of an instrument as my saxophone, and when you spend every night walking on stage in venues you've never been to, put your instrument on the floor, and then spend an hour stomping on it, contingency plans are a good idea. In this workshop, I offer a set of best practices for writing, recording, touring, and performing with electronics in a flexible, sustainable, and consistent way, night after night.