



SPOTLIGHT

JONAH PARZEN-JOHNSON

Pilot Light (106 E. Jackson Ave.) • Tuesday, June 23 • 9 p.m. • \$5 •
18 and up • thepilotlight.com

The analog synth revival shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. While noise heads, avant dance-music producers and horror-movie soundtrack aficionados have been doing much of the knob twiddling, the instruments also show up in more unlikely places. Jonah Parzen-Johnson has recently taken to playing them alongside his baritone saxophone.

Synthesizers in jazz are nothing new, of course. Miles Davis' and Herbie Hancock's various groups throughout the 1970s covered an amazing amount of ground with these instruments, creating music that still sounds more adventurous than most of what came in their wakes. But the solo nature of Parzen-Johnson's work makes for an unusual listening experience. He plays both instruments live simultaneously, with no overdubbing or looping. Often, this results in melodic, soulful sax playing over repetitive synth lines reminiscent of Terry Riley. It can get kind of drone-y and dissonant, but it's largely devoid of the skronk and overplaying that a lot of younger solo sax players seem to favor. The music is more traditionally pleasant-sounding than not, which is not always something you can say about experimental music. The title of his new album, *Remember When Things Were Better Tomorrow*, and a backstory about Parzen-Johnson's desire to inspire others to resist nostalgia may or may not help you navigate what he's trying to get at musically. Regardless, there is an intimacy and cohesiveness to the album that suggest the labor and thought that went into it and make it a compelling listen. (Eric Dawson)