



*Imagine Giving Up* | Helsinki 8.12.18  
Jonah Parzen-Johnson (WeJazz)  
by George Grella

Jonah Parzen-Johnson is one of the most notable of the musicians who perform solo with electronics. His direct peer is saxophonist Colin Stetson, but though they both play the baritone saxophone, Parzen-Johnson is a vastly different musical thinker. What sets him apart from pretty much every other solo-with-electronics musician—including Rachel Z and Zoe Keating—is his concept and process.

An instrument, a microphone, a loop pedal and maybe some software have created vast new universes for the likes of Z, Keating and Bill Frisell. The past decade has added a silver-age throwback revolution in modular synthesis and Parzen-Johnson shows himself as a key product of his times.

That makes him sort of an old-school futurist. The tracks on these albums (as well as those on his two recent ones, *I Try To Remember Where I Came From*, a 2017 release on Clean Feed, and the 2015 *Remember When Things Were Better Tomorrow*, on Primary Records) are homophonic in nature and more often than not in easy-to-grasp song form. Parzen-Johnson is the lead voice and his accompaniment comes via a custom analog synthesizer setup.

The conceptual style may be familiar, but the aesthetic is something else altogether and altogether unique. Parzen-Johnson is playing a woodwind instrument with all that entails, especially breathing. He uses advanced techniques such as multiphonics and circular breathing, but even with those his sound is human through and through—he's got to breathe after all. There's signal processing at times, but nothing else in terms of recording production to integrate him with the synthesizer except melody and harmony.

In other words, what *Imagine Giving Up* and the live cassette tape *Helsinki 8.12.18* are about is songs, the quality of music rather than the fascinations of technology. And this is where Parzen-Johnson, like his notable peers, excels. These two albums are about a musician making songs, melodies set against harmonic rhythm. If the saxophonist were playing his lead lines with a rhythm section backing him, these would be solid albums, with satisfying tunes and playing.

But there's something else going on here and it's important. He uses a custom modular setup as his band and there's the stripped-down quality of a busker in the subway with a horn, a bass drum pedal and a hat for contributions. This is man-against-machine stuff and it's gripping in a way unparalleled in jazz, even including Steve Lehman's *Demian as Post-Human*. Parzen-Johnson programs the machine, sets it loose and then faces it with his horn.

Permit one to get profound, but Parzen-Johnson is one of the few musicians engaging his body (not just thoughts) with the future. As just listening, tunes like "Focus Re-Focus", on *Imagine Giving Up*, are awesome, pithy platforms for him to play the hell out of his horn.

But this is breath and sinew and mind against oscillators and voltage. One hears these recordings as statements of the musician's aesthetic values and pleasures, but as a listener these are also full of the tension between the predictable security of digital technology and the messy chaos of what makes us human. In the context of his still-young career, these albums are carving out a superb musical statement in a cultural concept introduced by *The Terminator* and Harlan Ellison's masterpiece "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream". May Parzen-Johnson long reign, over

creative music and also over his machines.

For more information, visit [wejazz.fi](http://wejazz.fi). Parzen-Johnson plays solo at Nublu 151 Feb. 12th. See Calendar.



*Dream A Little...*  
Champion Fulton/Cory Weeds (Cellar Live)  
by Alex Henderson

In the liner notes she wrote for *Dream a Little...*, singer/pianist Champion Fulton compares the album's duet performances to "walking a tightrope without a net" and notes that for alto saxophonist Cory Weeds, there is "no rhythm section to catch you if you fall." Indeed, having only two instruments on *Dream a Little...* (recorded live at a house concert in Vancouver, Canada on Feb. 24th, 2019) makes Weeds more vulnerable and exposed than he would be in a quartet or quintet. But both of them rise to the occasion nicely, offering six songs with vocals ("I Thought About You", "Dream a Little Dream of Me", "Pennies from Heaven", "I'd Give a Dollar for a Dime", "Darn That Dream" and "Fly Me to the Moon") and four instrumentals ("Tangerine", "Secret Love", "Lullaby for Art" and "Save Your Love for Me").

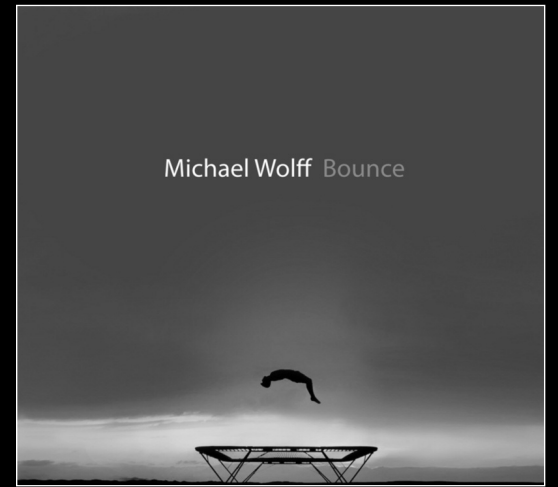
The New York City-based Fulton, now 34, is a warm and expressive, if derivative, vocalist with an affinity for Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and Dinah Washington. And when she stretches out on piano, one hears echoes of Red Garland, Wynton Kelly and other bop pianists of the '50s-60s. Meanwhile, Vancouver resident Weeds (who owns Cellar Live Records) plays a gutsy but melodic alto saxophone along the lines of Cannonball Adderley, Gigi Gryce, Frank Morgan and Phil Woods.

Unfortunately, *Dream a Little...* plays it much too safe in its choice of material: most of the selections are overdone standards that myriad other jazz artists have recorded over the years. But there are a few surprises, including pianist Eubie Blake's lesser known "I'd Give a Dollar for a Dime" and Fulton's hardbop original "Lullaby for Art" (which would have been perfect for a Blue Note session in the late '50s). Fulton certainly brings plenty of charisma to her performances: when she sings the Jimmy Van Heusen standards "I Thought About You" (with Johnny Mercer) and "Darn That Dream" (with Eddie De Lange) or Johnny Burke-Arthur Johnston's "Pennies from Heaven", it's obvious that she has a strong emotional connection to these Great American Songbook favorites.

Another vocal highlight of the CD is the Fabian Andre-Wilbur Schwandt standard "Dream a Little Dream of Me", which was written in 1931 but famously received a pop-rock makeover from The Mamas and Papas in 1968. Fulton and Weeds are faithful to the song's pre-rock history, sticking to jazz and avoiding a pop-rock interpretation.

Weeds has plenty of room to stretch out whether Fulton is singing on Bart Howard's Frank Sinatra-associated "Fly Me to the Moon" or strictly playing piano on Buddy Johnson's "Save Your Love For Me" and an exuberant performance of Sammy Fain's "Secret Love". Fulton and Weeds sound like equal partners on their duets, making *Dream a Little...* a solid and consistent outing.

For more information, visit [cellarlive.com](http://cellarlive.com). Fulton is at Birdland Theater Feb. 12th-13th and Mezzrow Feb. 26th. See Calendar.



## MICHAEL WOLFF BOUNCE

MICHAEL WOLFF piano  
BEN ALLISON bass  
ALLAN MEDNARD drums

SSC 1574 - Available February 7

Acclaimed jazz pianist Michael Wolff has confirmed a February 7th, 2020 release date for his joyful new album, **Bounce**. Exuberant, beautiful and able to convey a range of emotions, *Bounce* reflects Wolff's upbeat state of mind following his 'miraculous' recovery from aggressive cancer. He comments, "Isn't it great to be alive? I'm celebrating life every day. This album is dedicated to that celebration. I have the good fortune to play with these fantastic musicians: Ben Allison on bass and Allan Mednard on drums. Their playing, ideas and vibes imbue this music with creativity and soul. It's really a listenable album. I thought about what I'd like to listen to at home, and tried to make that album."

**Bounce** features an engaging range of songs, including the aptly named 'Cool Kids', written by Wolff's son Nat (and featuring Nat on lead vocals as well). Other tracks evoke 'West Side Story' or nods to the Great American Songbook. Album highlights include the memorable title track, the lovely ballad 'Long Lost', the strong 'Caribbean Rain Dance' and 'Omar Sharif' by David Yazbek, from THE BAND'S VISIT musical. In all, the album is mostly original compositions by Wolff, a tune by Ben Allison, and two covers: 'Omar Sharif' and the standard, 'You and The Night and The Music'.

Wolff notes, "**Bounce** is filled with music like the music I grew up listening to and playing. It transcends jazz and it feels like the best album I've ever made. It also comes at such a perfect time for me. It expresses my inner soul and the joy of living and making music. It's the most important release of my life."

ALBUM RELEASE CONCERTS  
February 7 & 8  
BIRDLAND THEATER  
sets at 7 & 9:45 PM



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