

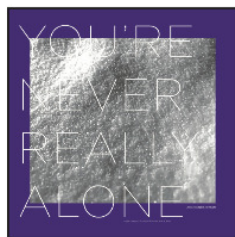


THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD



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You're Never Really Alone
Jonah Parzen-Johnson (We Jazz)
by Brad Cohan



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At the heart of the remarkable, and positively spellbinding sound worlds that Jonah Parzen-Johnson elicits from his baritone saxophone, is an ethos he's staunchly faithful to: less is more. Beginning with his 2012 debut *Michiana*, Parzen-Johnson has carved an indelible mark for himself by rendering singular forms of minimalism created with only baritone, flute and a stockpile of electronics and effects pedals. When it comes to the Brooklyn-based composer's gripping, soul-baring pieces, he has certainly earned his keep as a consummate one-man-show over the course of five recordings.

On the latest entry in his catalog, *You're Never Really Alone*, Parzen-Johnson plays his customary role of perennial solitary craftsman to perfection, but with a mission statement: he couldn't accomplish this feat without help. The fittingly named album is actually a joint effort of sorts, but not in the cooperative way you might think. The synergy laid bare is not between musicians but by the performer and audience. In the album's liner notes, he proclaims that he and the listener are united as a community in which "we made this together." But Parzen-Johnson has never sounded as exposed and vulnerable as he does here on the set's eight selections. On previous efforts, electronics-based rhythms and synthesizer flourishes would serve as melodic drivers. Those instruments are nowhere to be found on his new set but he's just as formidable a voice and storyteller without them. The carefully constructed pieces attain such a deeply meditative level that with every melodious note, circular breath

and heavy drone, Parzen-Johnson delivers a work of intense beauty.

The opening track, "When I Feel Like Myself", is evidence of his challenging compositional technique. Over its six-and-a-half-minute length, it doesn't develop beyond a slow crawl, but its deliberate pace and every sound is striking in its attention to detail. The approach is meticulous while the atmosphere Parzen-Johnson sets is also ethereal; it's easy for the listener to fall into its trance and become one with the performer, just as intended. He is masterful in unloading a catchy line that will linger in your head ("When I Feel Like Myself") to laying out cathartic drones on flute that conjure doom metal vibes ("There Is So Much To Be Afraid Of") then back again to jazzy melodicism ("Not Writing About This").

Parzen-Johnson certainly throws out a wide net on *You're Never Really Alone*, but it's his unmistakably warm tone radiating from his baritone saxophone that translates as a healing force.

For more info visit wejazzrecords.bandcamp.com. Parzen-Johnson's album release concert is at Nublu Mar. 7. See Calendar.