



James Brandon Lewis Quartet

Omni

INTAKT

★★★★★

It's somewhat unique to hear an artist's music gleam with refinement while waxing more and more expansive each year; somehow those achievements tend to be at odds. But the six-album run started by the James Brandon Lewis Quartet in 2020 has found the band's interplay tightening as its reach continues to grow.

Such achievements likely stem from personnel stability. Pianist Aruán Ortiz, drummer Chad Taylor and bassist Brad Jones have

displayed mind-reading skills from the get-go, but these days their bond is more effective than ever. Without ditching the details, they come on strong. Way strong.

This deployment of power starts with the leader's tenor sax. Lewis' horn lines, when melded with commotion as they are on *Omni*'s "Line Upon Line" or "Testify," can overwhelm. There's an ardent froth lining Lewis' bluesy broadcasts, even on ballads such as "Call To Worship." Its potency casts it as a metaphor for the foursome's acute teamwork. One of their key calling cards, this unity is front and center on the rampaging "Spirit Of The Living God," the album's longest performance and the spot where Taylor's fluid tomtom work supercharges the squad's expressive contributions.

As its song titles suggest, *Omni* finds this preacher's son turning to his church roots, with fiery prayers and fervent hymns stacking up as articles of faith. By the time the program closes with the soul-sating "Omnipresent," the group's commitment to Lewis' spiritual outlook presents itself as assurance of solidarity that also feels like a triumph of fellowship.

—Jim Macnie

Omni: Omnipotent; The Sermon; Fire In My Bones; Testify; Omniscent; Call To Worship; Line Upon Line; Spirit Of The Living God; Omnipresent. (44:49)

Personnel: Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; Chad Taylor, drums; Aruán Ortiz, piano; Brad Jones, bass.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

Patricia Brennan & Sylvie Courvoisier

TALAMANTI

★★★★½

Piano, vibraphone and marimba being percussion instruments, it's natural to expect their duets to put the emphasis on rhythm, especially given the towering precedent of Chick Corea and Gary Burton's numerous collaborations. But the music Patricia Brennan makes here with Sylvie Courvoisier takes an entirely different tack, focusing less on the burst of energy that comes from a hammer or mallet striking a string or tone bar than on the resonance and textures that emerge from allowing those notes to reverberate.

Mind you, *Talamanti* doesn't downplay percussiveness; it's evident in everything from the crisp, tinkly vibes figure Brennan plays at the beginning of "The Time We Spent" to the dark, gamelan-like clang of Courvoisier's prepared piano in "Knots And Dander." But throughout the album, that's balanced by a cloud of overlapping overtones as the undampened notes are allowed to linger and decay.

Because the mix mostly centers the two — Courvoisier is slightly left, Brennan slightly right — the instruments are often as intertwined as the melody lines. On "Trece Cielos," the arc of slow-



ly swelling chords seems to rise up out of a single instrument, while parts of "Dei Ex Machina" are played in such precise unison that it's hard to tell the piano ends and the marimba begins.

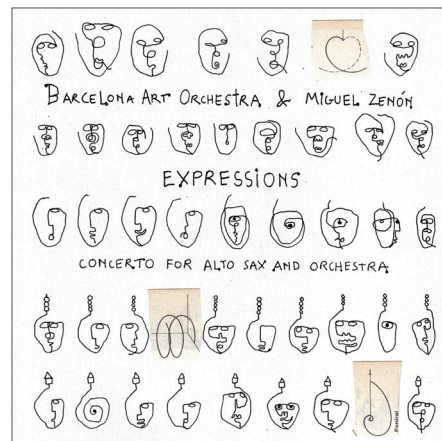
Talamanti may not have the large-ensemble ambition of Brennan's last two albums, *Breaking Stretch* and *Of The Near And Far*, but it delivers the same sort of compositional ingenuity and improvisational fire. I can't wait to hear what she does next.

—J.D. Considine

Talamanti: Disparate Chase; The Time We Spent; Corto; Perdidos en el Lamento; Trece Cielos; Hojas de Malabar; Knots And Dander; Coma Berenices; EQ Distant. (43:07)

Personnel: Patricia Brennan, vibraphone, marimba; Sylvie Courvoisier, piano.

Ordering info: antliarecords.com



Barcelona Art Orchestra & Miguel Zenón

Expressions: Concerto For Alto Saxophone And Orchestra

MIEL

★★★

Barcelona Art Orchestra's newest album, *Expressions*, is an imaginative, sprightly work that centers Miguel Zenón's distinctive alto sax within chamber arrangements, big band horns, bluesy rhythms and concerto concepts. Each of the orchestra's four founders contributes a movement, reflecting the ensemble's diverse perspectives and collective creative approach.

The first movement, "Silenci-Xiscle," thrives on juxtaposition: of sound, time and space. Zenón and the orchestra oscillate between playful call-and-response and high-intensity duets through mini-movements that shift pacing and groove. It's cinematic, narrative, told in vignettes.

"Canta-Parla" is more dramatic yet understated. Slinky percussion and piano give way to a front-and-center alto solo. Here, Zenón shines brightest.

The third movement learns into a noir undertone, delving into dissonant classical forms and avant-garde jazz. Zenón plays more of a supporting role to the ensemble, adding color to the song's drama.

The finale opens with a bluesy solo by the orchestra's violin section, as Zenón eases into a waltz before horns and reeds slowly bloom into a dark, atonal overture. The movement closes not with a bang but a warm, unhurried glow.

Expressions is an ambitious record exploring a full emotional range, with four distinct yet complementary voices coming through clearly. It's a strong outing that deepens the Barcelona Art Orchestra's compositional scope and rapport.

—Ivana Ng

Expressions: Concerto For Alto Saxophone And Orchestra: Silenci-Xiscle; Canta-Parla; Xiuxiueix-Esglai; Lament-Crit. (57:20)

Personnel: Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; Anna Pujol, Gabriel Amargant, Lluís Casares, Jordi Santanach, reeds; Joan Mar Sauqué, Óscar Latorre, Álvaro Ocón, trumpet; Pau Vallis, French horn; Alba Pujals, trombone; Vicente López, guitar; Néstor Giménez, Lluís Vidal, piano; Miquel Casanova, bass; Joan Vidal, drums; Carlota Amargós, Sara Balasch, violin; Nina Sunyer, viola; Jordi Claret, cello.

Ordering info: barcelonaartorchestra.com