



Portrait of the Artist: The Music of Gregg Hill
 Ben Rosenblum Trio (Cold Plunge)
Kites and Strings
 Ben Rosenblum Nebula Project (One Trick Dog)
 by Dan Bilawsky

In some respects these two albums couldn't be more different. One is a live trio date where Ben Rosenblum leads exclusively from the piano and performs somebody else's music. The other is a studio set from an expandable sextet, with Rosenblum often pulling double duty on accordion and piano while focusing on his own compositions.

The contrast is written clearly through context, but the commonalities—a balance between historical precedent and personal voicings, the use of the same nuanced rhythm core to bring out the best in different situations, an artful coloring of compositions and interpretations with a multihued complexion—also prove obvious. Complementary in every way, these two albums offer a more complete picture of this rising star than either would be able to provide on its own.

Rosenblum is right at home in the trio format, having opted for that setting on his first two albums. And it serves him well on *Portrait of the Artist: The Music of Gregg Hill*, where he explores the music of the titular Michigan-based composer.

Premiering a fair number of Hill's pieces on record and given free rein to mold them to his liking with the help of bassist Marty Jaffe and drummer Ben Zweig, Rosenblum finds a way to honor the music and its inspirations while remaining true to his own vision. Mysticism and hints of Bill Evans factor into the title track; the language and muscularity of McCoy Tyner loom large on "Modal Yodel"; and an Ellingtonian grace floats on by during the gorgeous daydreams in "New Sunday". Not to be left out, Thelonious Monk also receives his due with some quotes during bop-based closer "Thank You Notes". All at once, Rosenblum minds Hill's writing, mines the masters and maximizes his own potential.

Kites and Strings, the debut from Rosenblum's Nebula Project, is something else entirely. It's a work bent on offering luminous beauty and striking juxtapositions through the use of a colorful palette and the embrace of broad influences.

There's a bright nod to Cedar Walton with opener "Cedar Place"; an intriguing blend of the leader's accordion and guest Jake Chapman's vibraphone during the odd-metered title track; an acknowledgement of classicism's reach on "Motif from Brahms (op. 98)"; and Klezmer-carnival slant in the zany "Fight or Flight". Three covers make it into the mix—Leonard Bernstein's "Somewhere", Neil Young's "Philadelphia" and the chorale-like Bulgarian traditional "Izpoved"—but it's the original music that shines brightest. With a gift for shaping seemingly odd phrases into the inevitable, the smarts to utilize the full textural possibilities offered through his bandmates (i.e. trumpeter Wayne Tucker, reedplayer Jasper Dutz and guitarist Rafael Rosa), a simpatico relationship with Jaffe and Zweig underscoring these performances and his own accordion and piano at the fore, Rosenblum's personality truly resounds throughout this brilliant production.

For more information, visit gregghilljazz.com and onetrickdogrecords.com. Rosenblum live-streams Feb. 12th at timucua.com/event/live-at-timucua-ben-rosenblum-trio-in-person-830-pm and Feb. 14th at artsgarage.org/event/ben-rosenblum-trio-a-jazz-valentines-celebration.

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