



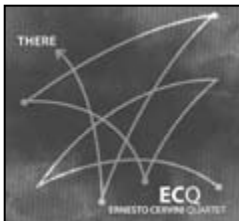
**The Story This Time**  
Jason Stein (Delmark)  
by Stuart Broomer

Originally from Philadelphia, Jason Stein has emerged dramatically from the Chicago scene since relocating there in 2005. Dedicating himself solely to the bass clarinet, Stein is developing a distinctive voice, now documented as both an unaccompanied soloist (on 2009's *In Exchange for a Process* on Leo) and as the composer/leader of the trio Locksmith Isidore on three recordings for Clean Feed and Not Two.

*The Story This Time* marks the recording debut of his quartet, a hard-swinging free jazz band with bassist Joshua Abrams and drummer Frank Rosaly driving an unlikely frontline of Stein's bass clarinet and Keefe Jackson's tenor saxophone or contrabass clarinet. The group balances five of Stein's freebop lines (the tenderly elegiac "Hoke's Dream" stands out) with some real bop, an inspired selection of relatively under-exposed Thelonious Monk compositions - "Skippy", "Gallop's Gallop" and "Work" - and three tunes from the 'school' of one of Chicago's greatest originals, Lennie Tristano, bracketing the CD with uptempo versions of Warne Marsh's "Background Music" and Tristano's own "Lennie Bird" and touching on Lee Konitz' "Palo Alto" along the way.

Whatever cool abstraction one might associate with this material, Stein brings real vigor to it as well as the requisite precision, his bass clarinet sometimes lyrically woody but just as often an explosion of plosives and slippery sibilant leaps around the horn, often propelled by a kind of high-speed scatter tonguing. Stein can play enough to suggest he's dueting with himself, but things are even more impressive when the improvising is collective. Jackson is a brilliant foil, whether contributing gruffly hard-edged tenor solos or exploring the special possibilities of bass and contra-bass clarinet, the clarinets together recalling Eric Dolphy's take on Monk tunes and Anthony Braxton's wonderful adventures in Charlie Parker repertoire on contra-bass clarinet. This is a fine band, as accomplished as it is ambitious.

For more information, visit [delmark.com](http://delmark.com). Stein is at Barbès Feb. 1st. See Calendar.



**There**  
Ernesto Cervini Quartet (Anzic)  
by Ken Waxman

Drummers often make good composers - think Max Roach, Gerry Hemingway and John Hollenbeck - and Toronto's Ernesto Cervini is no exception. On this live session recorded at Cellar Jazz in Vancouver, he has penned a series of memorable lines, played with swinging professionalism by his Big Apple-Hogtown quartet: Toronto pianist Adrean Farrugia plus New Yorkers Joel Frahm, who alternates between slinky soprano and mellow tenor sax, and bassist Dan Loomis.

The quartet's cumulative talent is put in boldest relief on "Secret Love", the set's one standard. Played in a Jazz Messengers manner, the piece includes a gospelish piano intro, Frahm exposing gritty variants, which he elaborates in tandem with the pianist, Cervini holding everything together with rattles and pop.

There contains only two brief percussion displays at set's end, with the inventive leader preferring to shift the focus to his compositions. "TGV", for instance, has a melody based on the recorded music that precedes the arrival of France's bullet train. Given a continental flair by Farrugia's chord pile-up, the theme is then unraveled by Frahm with low-pitched slurs and the occasional, uncharacteristic altissimo screech. Taken out by the composer's rim shots and rolls, this sort of strategy characterizes most of the other speedy pieces. "Tullamore", named for an Ontario hamlet, highlights the combo's ballad skills, with Loomis' low-key basslines introducing the theme and elaborating it while the pianist's baroque-styled noodling provides another interesting take.

Farrugia's facility may be the fine set's one weakness. His speed and overt funkiness is sometimes more reminiscent of Les McCann than Horace Silver and he rarely leaves breathing space in his solos. Someone whose playing is the antithesis of Thelonious Monk's economy, his solo sounds awkward on "The Monks of Oka", which celebrates both the pianist and the clerics who make Quebec's famous cheese. Still this is a minor quibble about a band that obviously excited the audience and accomplished the goals it set for itself. And watch out for Cervini as a composer.

For more information, visit [anzicrecords.com](http://anzicrecords.com). Cervini's Quartet is at Smalls Feb. 1st. See Calendar.



**Descendants**  
Noah Kaplan Quartet (hatOLOGY)  
by John Sharpe

As a disciple of the late saxophonist Joe Maneri, it is no surprise that reedman Noah Kaplan works from a microtonal palette. Although all the pieces are credited to the leader, they are so oblique as to resemble spontaneous creations in their absence of overt melodic material. Kaplan takes an egalitarian approach to leadership, manifest in continuous group interaction, though apart from solo intros, the rest of the band is primarily in supportive mode.

Kaplan's shifting pitches give his flowing lines, sliding across and between notes, even more vocal inflections than a regular hornman might impart, but he tends to be less speech-like in his phrasing and more likely to evoke animal smiles in his flexible expressiveness, ranging from pained braying to exuberant crows. Guitarist Joe Morris provides an unhurried though knotty counterpoint and meshes well with electric bassist Giacomo Merega. At times the latter makes his axe sound like a guitar rather than its deeper cousin, particularly when exploiting high harmonics, but the occasional subterranean rumble apart, he is otherwise difficult to distinguish from a double bass such is his delicacy. Drummer Jason Nazary's odd rhythmic accents enliven and punctuate the six cuts with a nervy drive.

Each track is hewn from the same vein, characterized by drifting give and take, colored by subtle shifts in emphasis. The near titular "Descent", the longest piece at 11 minutes, gives a good indication

of the territory explored. After a rippling opening by Merega, tenor and guitar join for a chamber-ish trio, which only becomes animated with the addition of Nazary. Energy levels subside into a sparse soundscape, allowing Morris to step forward briefly with maze-like single note runs, before languid tenor moves back into the spotlight. Elsewhere the drummer sets up a rocky tattoo on "Rat Man", inspiring Kaplan to his most boppish outpouring, which culminates in an exchange of slithery phrases with the guitarist. An understated set that remains opaque and enigmatic.

For more information, visit [hathut.com](http://hathut.com). Kaplan's quartet is at Douglass Street Music Collective Feb. 3rd. See Calendar.

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- Benoit Delbecq & François Houle - *Because She Hoped* (Songlines)
- Guilhem Flouzat - *One Way...* (Onze Heures Onze)
- Tineke Postma - *The Dawn of Light* (Challenge)
- Matt Wilson's Arts & Crafts - *An Attitude for Gratitude* (Palmetto)
- David Adler, New York@Night Columnist**
- Juhani Aaltonen/Heikki Sarmanto - *Conversations* (TUM)
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- Fred Ho & Quincy Saul - *Present the Music of Cal Massey: A Tribute* (Mutable/Big Red Media)
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