



Bio information: **THE CLAUDIA QUINTET**

Title: **SEPTEMBER** (Cuneiform Rune 377) Format: CD / DIGITAL

Cuneiform promotion dept: (301) 589-8894 / fax (301) 589-1819

email: joyce [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (Press & world radio); radio [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (North American & world radio)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / POST-JAZZ

Led by Acclaimed Drummer-Composer John Hollenbeck, The Group Offers Brilliant New Pieces Written During & Inspired By The Month of September

Drummer-percussionist and three-time Grammy nominee **John Hollenbeck**, one of the most distinctive and respected composers in jazz and new music, has created an estimable body of work since the late '90s with his **Claudia Quintet**. Hailed by Nate Chinen of the *New York Times* for their "clockwork intricacy and crisp premeditation ... [striking an] accord between the factions of progressive jazz, classical Minimalism and low-glare experimental rock," the Claudia Quintet tackles Hollenbeck's highly demanding works with a wry improvising spirit and a backbone of surging, mesmerizing rhythm.

Following up earlier celebrated albums including *What Is The Beautiful?*, *Royal Toast*, *FOR*, *Semi-Formal*, and *I, Claudia* – all on **Cuneiform Records** – and a self-titled debut on **Blueshift CRI**, the Claudia Quintet returns with *September*, its newest Cuneiform release. In the lineup are two newer players: accordionist **Red Wierenga**, like Hollenbeck an alum of the Eastman School of Music; and (on four tracks) bassist **Chris Tordini**, a frequent sub for Claudia's original bassist **Drew Gress**. Hugely in-demand as a sideman and an inspired bandleader in his own right, Gress appears on six of the 10 tracks that make up *September*.

Clarinetist/tenor saxophonist **Chris Speed** and vibraphonist **Matt Moran**, both Claudia members from the start, play with stirring virtuosity and give Hollenbeck's writing a sonorous warmth, balancing its more technical and rocking side. Unorthodox textures, fragmented beats and "bright tones filled with folky allusions and plaintive undercurrents" (Siddhartha Mitter, *Boston Globe*) continue to define the Claudia Quintet's unclassifiable output.

The new album, *September*, pays homage to a time of year when Hollenbeck seeks the isolation and creative focus of artist residencies. In the last dozen years — often in September — he's spent invaluable time at retreats in places as far afield as Italy, New Mexico and upstate New York. Writes Hollenbeck in the liner notes: "September is a wonderful month and, for me, the equivalent of Thursday, my favorite day of the week which I celebrated in song on the first Claudia Quintet CD!"

Each piece on *September* has a date followed by a title, and the oldest of them, "**12th: Coping Song**," harks back to the nightmarish events of **9/11/2001**. The experience "has stuck with me," writes Hollenbeck, "so much so that I realized I cannot think or see or write down a date in September without those memories coming back to me." It took years but Hollenbeck finally got the idea "to write music that was somehow tied to other days in September in the hope of trying to rework and transform the traumatic residue through composition. I am especially interested in how, through the simple non-violent act of composition, one can help oneself become a better person, deepen one's connection to humanity, and create work that can soothe and heal."

September marks another departure in that Hollenbeck chose "to create music for the Claudia Quintet that could be communicated and performed without the use of written music." The fact that Hollenbeck taught these labyrinthine pieces to the band largely by ear makes the polish and cohesion all the more astonishing.

About the spirited opener "**20th: Soterius Lakshmi**" — a reference to WNYC morning reporter **Soterius Johnson** and NPR midday reporter **Lakshmi Singh** — Hollenbeck says: "It started out as a rhythm piece, and it sounded to me a little like 1010 WINS (AM New York news radio) or other news themes." Following that, "**9th: Wayne Phases**" is named for **Wayne Shorter**, and inspired initially by "those beautiful short phrases that Wayne plays on **Joni Mitchell** albums and others, then some of his later abstract tunes," Hollenbeck explains. "It started out as 'Wayne Phrases,' and then thinking of 'wane' it became 'Wane Phases,' and then it evolved recently to 'Wayne Phases.'" In the end I don't want the music to sound anything like Wayne [Shorter]."

One particular surprise on *September* is "**29th: 1936 'Me Warn You**," with music written to follow the voice patterns of **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** as he delivers a historic speech on partisan trickery in Washington. "The FDR speech was passed on to me in September," says Hollenbeck, "and I immediately loved the message and then the melody. I transcribed it and only later even thought about writing a piece for it. In the end it's sometimes a setting of the speech and sometimes it uses the speech as part of the band." Hollenbeck employs the human voice a few tracks later as well, in very different form, on "**17th: Loop Piece**." Hollenbeck's political and aesthetic aim on "**Me Warn You**" harks back to one of his most compelling early works, the title track on his 2000 debut album: "**The Drum Major Instinct**," a piece inspired by and incorporating **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**'s speech, and intended to be performed in complete darkness.

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The group enters a quieter, contemplative space on pieces like “**22nd: Love Is Its Own Eternity**,” which Hollenbeck explains as “the end of a long **Krishnamurti** statement that I found written in a phone booth at the **Blue Mountain Center**. The tune came from this vibe.” In contrast, with “**24th: Interval Dig**” we hear the Claudia Quintet firing on every possible cylinder, giving ample room for Wierenga, Moran and Gress to work out as soloists. “The piece was originally called ‘Interval DiG,’” Hollenbeck says. “Using a combo of capital and lowercase letters is something Drew does a lot, and this piece is a feature for him. It’s a written-out feature that is meant to sound like an improvised feature.”

John Hollenbeck maintains many other projects in addition to the Claudia Quintet, including the innovative **John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble** that has garnered **Grammy** nominations for its albums *eternal interlude* (2009, **Sunnyside Records**) and *A Blessing* (2005, **OmniTone**). Hollenbeck also received a Grammy nomination as a composer for the piece “**Falling Men**,” which appeared on 2010’s *Shut Up and Dance*, a two-disc collaboration with the Paris-based **Orchestre National de Jazz** released on **BEEJAZZ**. Hollenbeck took part as a drummer on two other Grammy-nominated albums as well: his mentor **Bob Brookmeyer**’s *Spirit Music* (2006) and pianist/composer **Jim McNeely**’s *Group Therapy* (2001). Hollenbeck’s 2009 release *Rainbow Jimmies* (GPE) a marvelous and varied collection of chamber music, features **Matt Moran** and the entire Claudia Quintet as well, plus guests.

For more information on The Claudia Quintet, see:

www.johnhollenbeck.com - www.claudiaquintet.com - www.cuneiformrecords.com

BIOGRAPHY

Brief John Hollenbeck Bio

A native of Binghamton in central New York State, Hollenbeck has served since 2005 as a professor of jazz drums and improvisation at **Jazz Institute Berlin** in Germany. He received degrees in percussion and jazz composition from the **Eastman School of Music** before moving to New York in the early 1990s. There he quickly struck up relationships with some of the leading lights of jazz (**Fred Hersch**, **Tony Malaby**, **Kenny Wheeler**) and new music (singer **Theo Bleckmann**, composer/choreographer **Meredith Monk**, for whose works “**Magic Frequencies**,” “**Mercy**,” and “**The Impermanence Project**” he composed and performed percussion scores). His numerous awards and recognitions include a 2007 **Guggenheim Fellowship**, the 2010 **ASCAP Jazz Vanguard Award**, winning the top spot as **Rising Star Arranger** (2012, 2013) and **Rising Star Big Band** (2011) in the **Down Beat Magazine International Critics Poll** and a 2012 **Doris Duke Performing Artist Award**.

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