

EXCERPTS FROM PRESS ABOUT THE CLAUDIA QUINTET'S PREVIOUS RELEASE:

The Claudia Quintet

I, Claudia

Cuneiform 2004

"...these adventurous musicians are pushing the edge of what jazz is, remaking the "is" part with influences taken from Frank Zappa, Steve Gadd, Astor Piazzolla... Playful and exotic, moody and dark, *I, Claudia* will excite those ready for jazz beyond major label narrow-mindedness... At its peak *I, Claudia* is exhilarating as in "Opening," where a head bobbing...rhythms is massaged smooth by accordion and clarinet. ...A gifted drummer with a lucid style and a spicy sound whose compositions draw on everything from chamber jazz to funk to the avant classical of Steve Reich, John Hollenbeck leads the group through his dreamy drone world. That the Quintet spends as much time brooding over sleepy sounds as slipping and sliding over Hollenbeck's elastically sharp groove makes for a thick stew of the unexpected. ...the Claudia Quintet make serious heavy mental."

– Ken Micallef, *Launch/Yahoo Music*, www.music.yahoo.com

"The Claudia Quintet creates a fresh, distinctive sound while it obliterates barriers between jazz, classical and progressive rock. ...This unusually configured quintet challenges listeners with layered arrangements that undergo almost continuous transformations. "Arabic" kicks off with a rhythmic groove that features Matt Moran's pulsating vibes and suggests the sound of a Steve Reich ensemble. After an intricate Chris Speed clarinet solo, the quintet shifts gears into a jazzy, mid-tempo rhythm, stoked by Drew Gress' bass, then downshifts into a quiet space for vibes, accordion and clarinet. Though unpredictable, Hollenbeck's transitions sound unforced and natural. The versatility of the quintet accommodates Hollenbeck's shape-shifting pieces. Additive structures, such as "Just Like Him," recall dub productions as soloists surface, then submerge into the mix. ...Moran's vibes give the music an icy shimmer, and free Hollenbeck to add new patterns and accents....**4 stars**"

– Jon Andrews, *DownBeat*, May 2004, v. 71,#5

"Drummer John Hollenbeck often has been quoted as saying his music "sounds like everything." ...if "I, Claudia" is any indication, "everything" in Hollenbeck's book apparently encompasses chamber jazz sonorities, free haze interplay, electronica-like atmospheres, post-rock funk rhythms, Sanskrit chants, West African beats, Balkan dances, plus echoes of Steve Reich, Astor Piazzolla and Jimmy Giuffre. Mind you, that's the short list. ...in keeping with the spirit of its title, the music on "I, Claudia" comes across as witty and playful rather than cerebral and self-consciously cutting edge. ...the quintet is composed of seasoned jazz musicians who venture beyond genre borders with a light-hearted curiosity that keeps the music from devolving into avant-garde noisemaking. ...Hollenbeck has composed a string of fanciful and oddly orchestrated/improvised pieces – sonic vignettes inspired by "everything" from soured love affairs...and west African funeral music...to Olympic odes...and the real or imagined connections between Joni Mitchell and classical composer Morton Feldman...the band frequently creates motifs that provide enough structure to keep their performances from sounding random, and its distinctive palette and quick-witted interplay often produce waves of refreshing color and energy."

– Mike Joyce, *The Washington Post*, Feb 4, 2005

"John Hollenbeck's pieces are all rhythm and tone: the former from drums and vibes, the latter from accordion and clarinet, all pastel-colored instruments that tend to blend together. ...The pieces build up from basic patterns, evolve, and mutate: From such simple rules strange complexities emerge. **A-**"

– Tom Hull, *The Village Voice*, April 4, 2005

"... a satisfying stroll among multiple musical genres. Drummer John Hollenbeck is the group's composer, and his clever pieces move effortlessly from funky chamber jazz to minimalism (both rhythmic and ambient), with some African elements and "new music" vocabulary thrown in...The Claudia Quintet has been compared favorably to Tortoise, and it's an apt analogy...but The Quintet brings a different mix to the table, with a stronger jazz presence, more musical intellect, and a bit less of the slacker/ stoner vibe embraced by the post-rock crowd. Jazz credentials aside, Claudia's supple rhythmic patterns...form a link with the witty, "invented ethnic" music of the Penguin Café Orchestra, although their minimalist tendencies also draw upon Feldman or early Steve Reich. ...Hollenbeck's compositions are so deft and fluid that any movements towards the fringes are integrated into a broader musical palette that beguiles and seduces rather than throwing a thorny musical challenge at the listener. As a consequence, the Claudia Quintet manages to produce music that is mellow, easy on the ears, but also creative and intellectually stimulating. **4 stars**"

– Bill Tilland, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

"The unusual front line combination gives the music a very light, airy quality which keeps their interlocking syncopations nice and clear. ...their music is drawn to chamber scale, but moves in expanding ellipses instead of locked circles and spirals. The moments when the Quintet's jazz impulses break through the careful mosaic are brilliant...a transcendent peak in an otherwise effectively restrained performance."

– James Beaudreau, *Signal To Noise*, Spring 2004, Issue #33

"*I, Claudia* follows up the Claudia Quintet's self-titled debut release and repeats the magic of that 2001 session. ...Hollenbeck's compositions are beyond jazz, inching up on chamber music but informed by ethnic, rock, and modern composition as well. "Opening," with Gress tapping his bow on his strings, could easily have been a power piece by Radiohead. That is until Hollenbeck pauses and begins blowing into a tube. ...Hollenbeck's music is all about reflection: the simple note, breath and gesture. ...simple separation of notes and musicians speak louder than the volume of combined playing. Hollenbeck lays such a casual groove he lets your mind fill the gaps with imagination. ... a band with the hippest groove in music today."

– Mark Corroto, *All About Jazz*, Feb 2004, www.allaboutjazz.com

"On the Claudia Quintet's second latest, *I, Claudia* (Cuneiform) drummer and bandleader John Hollenbeck incorporates James Brown-influenced "Funky Drummer" backbeats and invigorating second-line grooves into the fabric of his not-easily-categorizable compositions. Is it ambient? Is it avant-garde? Is it minimalist? Is it Downtown? What the hell is it? ...Hollenbeck is an adventurous new-music composer and conceptualist who follows the courage of his convictions. ...heady, post-Steve Reich stuff."

– Bill Milkowski, *Jazz Times*, May 2004, v. 34, #4

"There's something here to alienate just about every top-40 fan: new-music minimalism, Tortoise-style soundtrack dreaming, radical jazz soloing, and Canterbury-variety prog rock. No surprise, then, that it all sounds so right, and so fresh. Drummer-composer John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet is a great unknown band just waiting to be discovered."

– Alex Varty, *Georgia Straight*, straight.com, Dec. 16, 2004

“...the band adeptly maneuvers the leader’s quirky, odd-metered compositions, making them feel natural. From African-inspired polyrhythms and sheets of sound to funk grooves, modern classical nods, and free improvisations, Hollenbeck expresses his diverse influences and keeps the changes constant, switching between tight ensemble lines, flowing passages and improvisation.... *I, Claudia* is at once challenging and fun – full of surprises with, and great performances by all.”
– Sean Fitzell, *All About Jazz/ AAJ-NY*, Feb 2004, www.allaboutjazz.com

“The appeal of the Claudia Quintet’s second CD comes in the sonorities conjured by drummer/composer John Hollenbeck: the deep woody tones of Chris Speed’s clarinet against the wheezing delicacy of Ted Reichman’s accordion and Matt Moran’s vibes. The opening “Just Like Him” sets up the template: Hollenbeck’s motoric drum’n’ bass patter of snare, kick, and hi-hat, then Speed’s slow-moving, long-toned lines, then a spare vibes line set against the clarinet, then yet another line, like spaced channel markers... in the transparent current, from bassist Drew Gress...It goes along like that, melodic counterlines weaving around each other in a kind of contrary motion. ...Those cyclical rhythms contribute to the music’s seductiveness, as they do in minimalists like Glass and Reich.”
– Jon Garelick, *The Boston Phoenix*, May 6, 2004

“John Hollenbeck is a drummer and composer who seems to be making all the right moves. ...This, the second album...reveals evidence of artistic growth, not only on the part of Hollenbeck who writes for the band, but in terms of how the band members seem more conscious of working within an ensemble... Often, Hollenbeck’s writing seems flavored by Balinese Gamelan music as they artfully work towards their goal.”
– Stuart Nicholson, *Jazzwise*, April 2004

“...Claudia Quintet is both comfortable with fusion and allergic to orthodoxies. But despite Claudia’s electricity-free instrumentation...*I, Claudia*...is...rockcentric. ...credit that to John Hollenbeck: The first sound on the record is the composer/ leader/ drummer’s half-funk, half-postpunk breakbeat, which remains in an off-kilter holding pattern throughout the entirety of the lead-off track... Hollenbeck calls Claudia Quintet “party music for smart people” – which isn’t that far off the mark.
...if the point is creating something more pop-accessible than the typical trot-out-the-chops blowing set, then Hollenbeck & Co. have done it. ...this is hardly jazz as usual plus hip beats. Aside from clarinetist and saxophonist Chris Speed... Claudia is basically all rhythm section. And it sounds like it, too: Bassist Drew Gress offers up big, chewy globs of throb; vibraphonist Matt Moran grooves his way through diced-up, sideways arpeggios; and accordion player Ted Reichman taps his keys as anxiously as a telegraph operator under the gun. ...”...Can You Get Through This Life With a Good Heart?” is the disc’s only exception to the percussive gush, a track that doesn’t sound much like jazz or rock, ...the cut becomes an odd yet cool fusion of 20th-century classical and low-rider funk.
Hollenbeck’s compositions are at their best moments like this, when he’s trying out musical combinations that maybe haven’t been tried before. ...to connect the quintet to the postrock movement...as rockist as the quintet is...that tag just doesn’t fit. Neither do most others: Claudia is too idiomatically ambiguous, too open to influence. But let’s call the group jazz anyway – it’s got the right instrumentation, after all. And jazz, more than most genres, needs a band like Claudia.”
– Brent Burton, “The Quiet Revolution: *I, Claudia*,” *Washington City Paper*, v. 24, No. 6, Feb 13-19, 2004

“The Claudia Quintet’s *I, Claudia* is one of the best of the albums of the slowly blossoming New Year. ... Everything about their presentation is crisply ordered. There is virtually no reverb or distortion on *I, Claudia*... The rhythms behind their songs are imbued with a succinct clarity. There is not chaos in them, though there is complexity. Hollenbeck is a percussionist, and The Claudia Quintet is driven by the delicate paring of his drums with Matt Moran’s vibraphone. ...Like Tortoise, the Claudias use the vibraphone to bridge the gap between melody and rhythms. But where Tortoise use melody to accent strong rhythms, The Claudia Quintet use rhythms to accent churning melodies.
The Claudia Quintet *swings*, Hollenbeck leaning into the grooves to give them momentum, and The Claudia Quintet *breathes*. Literally. It’s amazing how much humanity two air-driven instruments – Chris Speed’s clarinet and Ted Reichman’s accordion – lend the band. It is this latter quality that makes The Claudia Quintet special on songs like “Opening” which pulse steadily via Hollenbeck, but inhale and exhale easily from Speed and Reichman. ...
I, Claudia is delightfully challenging. ...despite its overt complexities, it is never a difficult listen. Like the gorgeously modernistic green-on-white abstractions of the liner notes, the music shapes itself on the canvas with an alluring simplicity. It is neither the past, present, nor future of anything. It is a statement that exists boldly for itself – hey, its confidence is there in its own name, *I, Claudia* – and stands proud.”
– Jesse Jarnow, *JamBands.com*, 1/27/04

“...John Hollenbeck claims that his New York-based alt-jazz group appeals to the booty and brain in equal measure. And, even though ...2004’s *I, Claudia*, ain’t exactly crunk, it is indeed heavily rhythmic. ...this groovecentricity manifests itself in a post-everything mash-up of cool jazz, street funk, and minimalist-classical that ends up sounding less like jazz qua jazz than future-now rock.”
– Brent Burton, “Citylights [Picks]”, *Washington City Paper*, Feb 4-10, 2005

“Acoustonika. A blurb says this group’s inspiration is “electronica”...something dreamy or hypnotic keeps coming to the fore in Claudia Quintet performances. With the establishment of a distinctive drum rhythm, the vibist moves into something of a jazz solo. ...The music isn’t, however, jazz, or necessarily all that jazz influenced or jazz-like. It’s more a case of extremely well-developed jazz techniques being turned to ends of contemporary modern classical music. ...a group of players each very concerned with the expressive and tonal capacities of his specific instrument. ...
The strong rhythmic component of the music brings to mind the African drum ensemble, and the approach to melody is minimalist. In fact, as the music becomes more familiar its basis in the short, finite, even end-stopped phrase becomes plain. There’s no shortage of ideas other than of melody or linear development. ...The effect is of chilly atmospherics, and playing phrases that stop and are separated by silence...does establish a feeling of detachment. The bass and drums move in the direction of a jazz accompaniment behind a shifting but cumulative development of orchestral texture.
There is also a tendency to defy expectations. ...It’s all lapidary, stone after stone shaped or encountered in a circular movement. A radiant monotony seems to be one intention, the musicians all seriously accomplished. ...The conclusion is silence, and it is possible that – although I put the CD in its jewel-case more than a day before...that silence might be playing still... The music sounds uncommonly stylized, at most straddling a line between music qua music and the use of musical elements in ceremony or meditation. ...an interesting, very musical surprise.”
– Robert R. Calder, *Pop Matters*, May 7, 2004, www.popmatters.com

“...John Hollenbeck...moves in New music, jazz and improv circles and his music and sidefolk reflect those parameters. ...which means that even if a piece such as “Adowa” is supposed to be programmatic enough to echo West African funeral sound, the bouncy drums, bass and vibe rhythms suggest a funkier Modern Jazz Quartet...Meanwhile, the countermelody from the accordion slides from Parisian music hall to Balkan country dances in the space of a couple of minutes. ...Most other tunes are based on the shared harmonies available when mouth reeds and manipulated reeds are voiced together, with the end products individually encompassing bleak, reverberating (Morton) Feldman space, organ-like ecclesiastical suggestions that border on plain song and ringing repeated note patterns.”
– Ken Waxman, *Jazz Weekly*, jazzweekly.com

“Top Ten of 2004: #1. Claudia Quintet, “I, Claudia” - Cuneiform Records: one touch of minimalism, two touches of jazz, eight touches of great compositions, add clarinet, vibes and accordion, and you have a recipe for my favourite album of the year.”

– DJ Emanuel Ferritis (Kwame Nkruma Jazz Party), WPRB, Princeton NJ

“... John Hollenbeck’s method of jazz drumming is unequal parts exactitude, and wit, enhanced by a polyrhythmic composure. However, he supplants these attributes with a spunky and rather spirited compositionally minded disposition. On this truly wonderful outing, the drummer’s cleverly performed grooves provide a clearly definable spark for the soloists’ various maneuvers. ...The musicians’ inject charm and wit into these cyclically generated works. It’s like clockwork! ...Hollenbeck’s lighthearted compositional style suggests a trance-like state that moves through an aggregation of linearly devised ebbs and flows. However, the one constant during this production is how the music proceeds in such a delicate, and largely inauspicious manner. One of the year’s very best! (Feverishly recommended...)”
– Glenn Astarita, *Jazz Review*, jazzreview.com

“The music itself still works the furrow between the “downtown” improvising, post-rock propulsion, and New Music minimalism (in the Glass/Reich sense). The minimalist influence is no joke, and Hollenbeck has even performed with Meredith Monk. But it certainly doesn’t constrain the relaxed enthusiasm of these intricately woven pieces, in which Hollenbeck is as likely to join the vibraphone on his marimba as he is to kick out the jams.

Quirky polymeters and syncopations abound, and though Hollenbeck likes to bring the funk, there’s plenty to stimulate the ol’ noggin here as well. His composer’s knack for structure generally leads him to set up ear-catching ideas – “accessible,” in other words – but which reveal considerable nuance during performance. Hollenbeck and Gress create an ever-changing rhythmic polymorphousness, shifting accents, playing with phrasing, and gleefully reshaping the general bounce. Speed, Moran, and/or Reichman perform dense counterlines amid a forest of textural and atmospheric effects....

There are all kinds of details throughout the disc...that reveal themselves on repeated listens. ...it’s rare to find a band that can actually strike a balance between cerebral challenge and relaxed accessibility.”

– Jason Bivins, *Dusted*, www.dustedmagazine.com, March 29, 2004