



Bio information: **JONATHAN BADGER**

Title: **VERSE** (Cuneiform Rune 394) Format: CD / LP / 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)

www.cuneiformrecords.com

**FILE UNDER: ROCK / ELECTRONIC / EXPERIMENTAL**

**Musical Alchemist Jonathan Badger Turns His Guitar into an Orchestra,  
and Translates his Writing on Ancient Tragic Poetry into Modern Musical Form  
on *Verse*, his new Album on Cuneiform Records**

When is a guitar not a guitar? When it's played by the inimitable **Jonathan Badger**. Not that he doesn't have a solid grounding in the six-string essentials -- Badger's been playing guitar since age 5, and has studied under none other than **King Crimson** mastermind **Robert Fripp**. But his astonishing approach to the guitar is so unlike anyone else's that he might almost as well be playing an entirely different instrument. (In a way, he is, as you'll learn in a moment.) On his stunning third studio album (and first for **Cuneiform**), *Verse*, Badger proves that if you want to make the kind of music no one's ever heard before, you've got to invent your own world from the ground up. Nourished by Baltimore's vibrant experimental music scene, Badger has created an artistic universe that is technologically unprecedented, radically multidisciplinary, conceptually fascinating, and musically captivating. The music on *Verse*, says Badger, "flows in the post-rock and minimalist veins of contemporary music," while the concepts that fertilize it derive from ancient philosophical and poetic tracts that he had explored in his recently published book.

If you want a little peek behind the wizard's cape, Badger's basic approach involves sending two signals out of his guitar -- one is a standard analog signal that generates relatively conventional guitar tones, but the other is a digital feed that runs through a computer system he programmed himself (naturally) to trigger samples from a broad array of orchestral instruments.

That's the setup that powers *Verse*. His rig has evolved a lot since 2006's *Metasonic* (on his own **High Horse** label) and 2010's *Unsung Stories from Lily's Days as a Solar Astronaut* (MT6 Records), not to mention his live releases, *Taps* (2007) and *Summer Electra* (2011), both on High Horse. But for *Verse*, Badger expanded his sonic universe. While his own unique system's bewitching (and at times even bewildering) bounty of sonic sources dominates the album, he also employs other players to augment his musical palette further still, bringing in brass, strings, and even a beatboxer.

Badger's fondness for inserting himself into surprising circumstances goes all the way back to his college days, during which he was commissioned to compose both a ballet (*On Wings of Angels*, premiered in Berlin and performed in Dallas and Atlanta) and an opera (*Dance of the Spiders*, at Boston's **Emerson College**). Soon after college, Badger began formal study of philosophy and earned his PhD in political philosophy from **Fordham University**. His dissertation was on Nietzsche's interpretation of Plato. In the middle of that work, he returned to music in an academic setting, and studied at the graduate level at Duke University with **Steven Jaffe**, **Scott Lindroth** and **John Harbison**.

But it was after he began working as a professor at St. John's College in Annapolis, MD that Badger's path took a turn that profoundly informed his artistic vision. He became intensely involved in the **Guitar Craft** school founded by Robert Fripp. Over a seven-year period, Badger eagerly assimilated Guitar Craft's combination of musical and philosophical principles, while taking a number of courses with Fripp himself, in the U.S., Argentina, and Italy.

Not only did this experience turn his head around aesthetically, on a more pragmatic level it led him to working with his fellow Guitar Craft students in various groups in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. area. But it wasn't long before he found his own voice -- one so daringly individual that it led him to work in a strictly solo format... until now.

Badger published a book, *Sophocles and the Politics of Tragedy: Cities and Transcendence* (2012: Routledge Press) that explored his ideas about the interaction of artistic and philosophical ideas. But *Verse* takes that intersection to a new level. Discussing the concept, he explains, "The idea of verse points beyond poetry and philosophy to that which stands in unity behind their apparent separateness."

"This album is a musical version of the ideas I worked through in the book," says Badger. He describes *Verse* as both "emblematic of mortality" and possessing "rich layers of dark and light." Even the track titles on the mostly instrumental album illustrate Badger's knack for juxtaposition, such as the combination of hominess and horror inherent in the tune "It came down from the night and stood on the porch until I invited it in for tea," a cut where unearthly explosions of sound share space with meditative drones and angular but almost endearingly clunky piano splashes.

[press release continued on verso]

In a similar manner, musing on "The Bear," Badger suggests that "Bears are cuddly but also extremely deadly," adding mordantly, "Children like to sleep with them." Taking the contrasting-concepts theme even further, Badger brings the inhuman and the humane together on this track through the unlikely device of the banjo. "The banjo on 'Bear' is in duet with the computer," he reveals. "The computer mimics the banjo waveform, producing a jaunty electronic burble."

As a thinking man's guitar anti-hero, Badger could be seen as the latest link in a chain that reaches back to forward-looking six-string iconoclasts like **Frank Zappa**, **Richard Pinhas**, and Badger's old teacher, Robert Fripp. But anyone who has absorbed the fractal electronic visions of electronica pioneers like **Aphex Twin** and **Squarepusher**, or been bowled over by the eclectic post-rock sound constructions of **Tortoise** or **Godspeed You! Black Emperor** should be able to find their way into Badger's bewitching world.

And throughout *Verse*, the musical DNA of Badger's guitar recombines in a constant, kaleidoscopic fashion, melding the organic and the electronic in ever-shifting dynamics. At the same time, Badger's own efforts intertwine with the interjections of his guests on trumpet, sax, violin, cello, and more. The sound all these elements make together bears elements of everything from post-rock to avant-garde experimentalism and contemporary classical composition, but for all these seeming disparities, *Verse* undeniably offers up a journey.

"The first part of the record is naive and blithe-minded," says Badger, "but gives way to somber recognition," much like the trip we take through life itself. For the trip to be a memorable one, though, you need a unique guide, and it's abundantly clear that the sonic Sherpa leading you through *Verse* is about as uncommon as they come.

*For more information on Jonathan Badger:*

[www.jonathanbadger.com](http://www.jonathanbadger.com) – [www.facebook.com/jonathan.badger.music.page](https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.badger.music.page) – [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)

### **PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available for download on the Jonathan Badger artist page @ [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)



### **JONATHAN BADGER: BIOGRAPHY**

Baltimore-based musician and scholar **Jonathan Badger** describes his life as "multitracked;" professionally alternating between philosophy and music, he often finds himself working at the intersection of the two. He began playing guitar at age five and trained formally in classical guitar from ages 11-18. As an undergraduate at the **University of South Carolina**, he studied music theory and composition, receiving a BS. He also arranged and composed music for theater and dance while a student, and was commissioned to write a ballet from **Atlanta's Several Dancers** and an opera for **Emerson College** in Boston.

Badger began his philosophy studies as a graduate student, and received a PhD in political philosophy from **Fordham University**. While writing his PhD dissertation on **Nietzsche's** interpretation of **Plato**, he resumed studying music at **Duke University** and eventually earned a multidisciplinary master's degree from **North Carolina State University**, for which he composed a suite of pieces for piano quintet with soprano and computer, that set philosophical texts (from **Kant**, **Nietzsche**, and the **Book of Job**) to music.

In 1996, Badger began teaching music and philosophy at **St. John's College** in Annapolis, a liberal arts college renowned for its interdisciplinary curriculum and emphasis on the Classics. In 2000, he began studying within **Robert Fripp's (King Crimson) Guitar Craft**, attending courses with Fripp in the US and overseas, and commencing a 7-year daily practice of guitar exercises and meditation in the **Bennet** line of the **Gurdjieff Work**. Badger began working with other local Guitar Craft students, performing in small groups in the Washington DC and Baltimore areas. Eventually, he began performing and recording solo guitar music. In 2006, Badger self-released (on **High Horse**, his production company) his first studio album, *Metasonic*. His second studio recording, *Unsung Stories from Lily's Days as a Solar Astronaut*, came out on **MT6 Records** in 2010. Badger also self-released several live albums, including *Summer Electra* (2007) and *Taps* (2011). Touring along the East Coast to support his albums, Badger developed a unique, musicalized video production system to accompany his live performances. He's shared the stage with **Dustin Wong (Thrill Jockey)**, **The DeathSet (Dim Mac)**, **Jamie Branche's Bomb Shelter**, **Delicate Steve (Luaka Bop)**, **Janel & Anthony (Cuneiform)**, and **Wendel Patrick**.

In addition to teaching and creating music, Badger writes for various scholarly publications. In 2012, his book *Sophocles and the Politics of Tragedy: Cities and Transcendence* was published by Routledge Press. Ideas about philosophy and tragic poetry from that book would later manifest themselves sonically on *Verse*, his first album on DC-based Cuneiform Records. *Verse* was released in September 2014 in both CD and LP formats, as well as being available at Badger's live shows on dropcards (business-style cards with a download code). Following *Verse's* release, Badger will do a solo US East Coast tour, performing in 6 cities.

*Cuneiform interviewed Jonathan Badger about his third studio album, Verse. Here's what he said:*

***Why Verse? What does your album's name mean to you?***

**Verse.** There are two primary expressions of the deepest human experiences of the world: poetry and philosophy. Traditionally we think of these two as competitors; they rival each other for claims to the deepest insights. Music is naturally associated with poetry, especially insofar as vocalized lyrics are explicitly poetic in mode and aspect. On the other hand, **Plato's Socrates** claimed to have dedicated his life to "making music and working at it." Socratic philosophy is music. So, given both these perspectives, we might say that music is the overlap of poetry and philosophy. Further, the term "verse" indicates the verbal component of music, but it also suggests a recurring situation or context: an episode or vignette. Verse is both lyrical and discursive.

This new record is largely instrumental, but the music also contains vocal passages that suggest the verbal while pushing against it. The idea of verse points beyond poetry and philosophy to that which stands in unity behind their apparent separateness. This album is a musical version of the ideas I worked through in a book I wrote about tragic poetry, entitled ***Sophocles and the Politics of Tragedy: Cities and Transcendence*** (New York: Routledge, 2012).

In addition to the ideas mentioned above, verse also connotes period, cycle, coming into being and passing away. A song may have many verses. Each verse has a meaning that is illuminated by and supportive of the song, as well as a personality that makes it distinct from everything else in the song. The verse is unique and fleeting. It gives way. In this sense it is emblematic of mortality. The tracks on the album are oriented in a manner that gradually conjures an image of death. The first part of the record is naive and blythe-minded, but gives way to sombre recognition. On several tracks there are simple harmonic structures that break apart as foreboding noise percolates to the surface. Seething interior elements arise and become exterior and explicit. The last few tracks are ponderous meditations culminating in a threnody.

***What do you want listeners to remember about this album; what impression do you want them to walk away with?***

Rich layers of dark and light.

***How did you determine the titles for each track?***

The titles of the tracks came from images and ideas that sprang to mind as I recorded them. They also reference poetry that addresses the themes of death and renewal. "**St. Lucy's Day**" is a reference to the **John Donne** poem, "**A Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy's Day.**" St Lucy's Day is a holy day in the dead of winter, when the sap of the trees has been drawn back down into the earth.

"**It came down from the night and stood on the porch until I invited it in for tea**" is a homey confrontation with the horror. One makes one's peace with these things.

"**The Bear**" -- Bears are cuddly, but they are also extremely deadly. Children like to sleep with them.

"**The Valley Of the Shadow**" -- **Psalm 23** -- "Nay though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

"**Limbec**," the first song on side B of the vinyl, is a reference to the same John Donne poem mentioned above, which started off side A. Love's limbec is an image of death in that poem. The limbec is an alchemist's vessel for slowly cooking fluid.

"**Erbarmen**" is a plea for mercy in the face of suffering and death. It is a reference to the "**Erbarm es Gott**" from **Bach's St. Matthew Passion**.

"**Sickle's Compass Come**" is a phrase from **Shakespeare's Sonnet 116** in which we confront the nexus of love and death.

***Any interesting events happen while you were making/recording this album?***

My primary focus is live performance, and all the tracks on this record were conceived in that context. Some of them, however, took on a life of their own once I sat down to make preliminary recordings, and they became more thoroughly composed pieces, for which I brought in other players to help the pieces become themselves. My live rig includes a computer that stores a big library of samples I've made of orchestral instruments -- violin, viola, cello, flute, soprano, and piano. I've recorded multiple samples of every note on these instruments, played in many different ways. I use a MAX/MSP system that I've programmed myself. There's a digital pickup on my guitars that sends a signal into the computer. Notes I play on the guitar are analyzed for pitch and attack as well as other aspects of the notes that have recently been played, in order for the system to choose which sampled note to trigger. The result is a variable pallet of sound that feels very expressive and musical, even though it often sounds not at all like guitar music. Many of the tracks on the album are based on live-in-the-studio performances using this system.

Other tracks, however, called for more traditional acoustic performances. For these I brought in a number of great players from the Baltimore jazz and experimental music communities. **Patrick McMinn (Dan Deacon, Impatience Machine)** plays trumpet; New York/Baltimore-based composer **Ruby Fulton (Rhymes with Opera)** plays flugelhorn; and **Tiffany DeFoe (Lafayette Gilchrist and the New Volcanoes, Belvederes, Gunwife Gone)** plays tenor and baritone sax. I also brought in a number of my advanced students for violin, cello and vocals. Human beatboxer **Shodekeh** laid down the beats for "The Valley Of the Shadow."

***How is this album different than and similar to your previous work?***

Different in that it makes use of other players and was recorded to tape, both of which gives it a richer and deeper sound than my previous records. Same in that it is primarily guitar music, even when it doesn't sound like guitar. Another difference on this album is that I branched out in my playing: I play banjo and piano on this record. The banjo on "The Bear" is in duet with computer. The computer mimics the banjo waveform, producing a jaunty electronic burble. Also, on "Sickle's Compass Come" I play my parent's upright piano, the one I grew up with. It's recorded through my laptop's built-in mic and doubles the studio grand piano, which is in the foreground. The old detuned upright hovers like a memory woven into the music.

***Can you write a brief description of Verse?***

The guitar and percussion tracks of *Verse* were recorded to half-inch tape, after which I brought in a number of Baltimore musicians to help orchestrate the pieces with wind, brass, voice, reeds and strings. The album begins with simple guitar textures that slowly devolve and descend into vast subterranean scapes. The music works from a fairly straight-sounding electric guitar pallet for a while, but then transmutes and reassembles into an autistic acoustic drama. The second half of the album shifts into ponderous chamber music, thick with breath and mallet. Naive harmonies dissolve as chthonic torpors bubble up from below. Dueling mezzo sopranos weave light into sparse, cavernous structures. A guitar finds its way alongside a piano. Choirs of trumpets and flugelhorn warn us, but we don't listen.

**WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT JONATHAN BADGER'S PREVIOUS RELEASES:**

<b>Jonathan Badger</b>	<b><i>Unsung Stories from Lilly's Days as a Solar Astronaut</i></b>	<b>MT6</b>	<b>2010</b>
------------------------	---	------------	-------------

"The first thing you notice about *Unsung Stories from Lilly's Days as a Solar Astronaut* is its distinctive packaging, a cryptic collage overlaying a backdrop the color of faded parchment... If your guess is that *Unsung* wouldn't be all sweetness and light-that its aching, emotional longing runs deep-award yourself a gold star. This melancholic, mosaic record-the second from Baltimore-based aural alchemist **Jonathan Badger** shuffles nimbly between extremes of darkness and light... a suite of fluid, involving instrumentals that draws from disparate genres to arrive at a sort of post-ambient survey course... *Unsung* is at its best when Badger really gets his Siberian-winder-of-our-discontent on. "**His Face Like Glass to the Touch**"-a modernist tone poem for piano, Mellotron, and guitar... paints a spellbinding portrait of baroque/prog unease, and "vocals" ...drained of all humanity lend the piece an operatic cast."

-Raymond Cummings, *Baltimore City Paper*, March 9 2010

"Aside from having one of the best titles in recent memory, Jonathan Badger's *Unsung Stories from Lilly's Days as a Solar Astronaut* is a challenging but ultimately rewarding disc that slams together an avant-rock mindset equipped with weapons-grade guitar bursts, an intriguing electronic setup and a compositional sensibility that's largely improvisation-based. Badger has developed a system that augments his live guitar structures with laptop-selected sound samples and loops triggered not just by what he's playing, but *how* it's being played. Mellotron tape loops are also controlled by the guitar's MIDI output... Badger manages to maintain the structural familiarity of that rock feel while crashing it at speed into the forward-thinking subversion of a compositional approach unfettered by convention. Throughout the disc, Badger uses that subversion to unseat the comfort we take in a melody by twisting and roughening it. It makes us stop listening passively and start looking actively at what's being done... Listen to the way an established rhythm breaks down, regroups and rebuilds over and over in "**Beat 1**" as fingerboarded guitar squares off against a chipset-like riff that mimics it... Badger's complexity makes me want to listen deeper to more fully take in the experience."

-John Shanahan, *Hypnagogue*, August 10 2010

<b>Jonathan Badger</b>	<b><i>Metasonic</i></b>	<b>High Horse Productions</b>	<b>2006</b>
------------------------	-------------------------	-------------------------------	-------------

"Badger's equipment setup does Frippertronics proud; his guitar is a guitar as well as a synthesizer, loop generator, and sample trigger... Badger frequently composes pieces... that are beeping, rotating, floating rock'n'roll satellites, merging the tapped notes and chords of the late Michael Hedges with the technical arsenal behind Vernon Reid's six-string screams and whispers... The interlude "**Old Spiders**" may be Badger's technological zenith, an angular piece that evokes a large modern orchestra... Badger's work is too pleasing and... polished to ignore."

-(AB) *eli magazine*

"Experimental guitar work, implementing a diverse palette with focus on temporal and rhythmic elements... The music can be considered as Ambient, but not the classical full of sounds ambient we are used to. This music is calm and balanced, very clear and pure, simple as much as possible. That is the powerful combination that makes this work so nice! Listening to this CD your consciousness becomes still and relaxed."

-RadioPower.net

"Jonathan Badger... has created beautiful and rich ambient tones, infused with rhythms by using subtle pulses... which create an amazing soundscape that drives at a calm pace... a really wonderful and unique piece of art."

-The Speed of Silence