

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT:

COSMOLOGIC

EYES IN THE BACK OF MY HEAD

CUNEIFORM [RUNE 263]

2008

[Line-up: **Jason Robinson** (tenor saxophone) - **Michael Dessen** (trombone) - **Scott Walton** (bass) - **Nathan Hubbard** (drums)]

“Where does one find one's muse? ... Cosmologic, found it in jazz, in improvised music, in classical tangents, and in their own palpitating imaginations. They...have forged a strong bond... Their perspicacity and ability to capture the unusual gives their music a rather exceptional focus.

Cosmologic weaves jazz harmonies in the freer atmosphere of improvisation. It is a seamless passage, but the road is strewn with a welter of bristling ideas. “The Rumpus” is a lively opener, with...a rousing intro... The saxophonist comes on bold and brawny in his solo outing, turning his notes up and over, then stinging with short blasts. It's a performance of staggering proportions...

...the band works to give the music a masterful touch. Dessen and Robinson set up a symmetrical linear movement and then diverge...their disparate movements...create an electrifying atmosphere. After the punch comes the calm with...a classical wit; the horns cool and the bass setting up a deep arco. Then it's back to whirling lines, the air now heady with spiraling motifs.

Cosmologic does not let the written note be the guiding light. Their sense of juxtaposition dictates the course. Flow and chaos are consonants in constant flight that are navigated by surprise, and the band documents this consummately, making *Eyes in the Back of My Head* a stirring listening experience.”

– Jerry D'Souza, *All About Jazz*, July 23, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...longstanding working bands are growing increasingly uncommon. Cosmologic is a splendid example of such a rarefied entity. Honing their tightly knit sound for almost a decade...

Though Cosmologic shares aesthetic similarities with adventurous contemporaries like Tim Berne and Ken Vandermark, they also look to the past for inspiration.

...“Face in the Crowd” invokes late period Coltrane with a miasma of fervent lyricism while the title track...channeling the menacing theatricality of classic Archie Shepp.

The two horn front line exudes the telepathic empathy enjoyed by such famous pairs as Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry or Steve Lacy and Roswell Rudd.

...Robinson's muscular phrasing unveils a stout tone informed by...the late sixties New Thing. The flutter tongue trills and multiphonic smears of “Code View” embody the searching quality of Pharoah Sanders in his prime, while the plangent glisses of “Dreams of an Alternate Future/Remembering the Past” convey the emotional resonance of Coltrane. Michael Dessen is an effusive and lyrical player...

... Scott Walton's sinewy tone on upright is bolstered by robust arco playing... A tuneful percussionist in the Ed Blackwell mode, Nathan Hubbard's colorful palette fuels a kaleidoscopic battery on the title track...

Gracefully modulating from serene introspection to contrapuntal vigor, the quartet transitions seamlessly from open-ended explorations to taut ensemble charts... As a true collective, individually authored tunes are cooperatively finalized in practice sessions that lend a natural, organic sensibility to their intricate arrangements. ...

Eyes in the Back of My Head is a richly rewarding statement from a group whose time for greater exposure is long overdue. Accessible yet forward thinking, this is contemporary West Coast jazz at its most heartfelt and adventurous.”

– Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, July 4, 2008

“... “The Rumpus” is martial free-bop with a knotty tripartite theme, Robinson tracing burnished lines and frantic squeals atop an insistent beat. As Dessen enters with a chortling mouthful, rhythmic knots are briefly untied into strands of gongs and bass tug, the foursome then building a rousing unity a la Rudd and saxophonist Archie Shepp towards the final bars. Perhaps spurred on by Robinson's earthiness, Dessen is a bit more extroverted here, or at least they complement one another well as a front line, as Walton and Hubbard knit a web of constant metric subversion around them. ...

The line between the written and collective “arrival” at the material is fairly blurry, though *Eyes in the Back of My Head* isn't necessarily a modular suite. Clearly, time spent in a regularly working unit—rare these days—has served the writing and the playing of Cosmologic and its members very well.”

– Clifford Allen, *All About Jazz*, July 25, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

“This jazz foursome are still together after more than a decade... they consistently make some of the most vital and exciting music around. Abundant skills, ethereal communication, wild flights of chaos and sustained moments of fleeting beauty comprise this work of art that takes cues from the approach most often known as free jazz. There is hardly an audience for it, but I'm right the fuck in the middle of it.”

– D.A. Kolodenco, “The Great Demo Review 2009,” *CityBeat San Diego*, Mar 03, 2009, www.sdcitybeat.com

“...Cosmologic...have created a unique style few stable or working groups have attained. ...they've taken the harmelodic theories of Ornette Coleman to heart, producing a sound that ranges from free bop to relaxed associative and written music tailored to blur bar lines and conventional phrasings. ...front line of tenor saxophonist Jason Robinson and trombonist Michael Dessen...explores lower registers and tonal timbres. ...a band that sounds completely fresh, original, and now. ...the liberated “Code View” emphasizes the central aspect of this band in their ability to expertly jam with loose and tight written associations, and extrapolate upon them. ... The fearless attitude that this group exhibits in taking chances, yet remaining quite listenable, is a rare thing. Another aspect of Cosmologic is that they can play to younger audiences in the midst of discovery, while also appealing to the 50s-and-older set that craves both the “new wave” of the '60s and an updated non-electronic sound. Bravo to Cosmologic for making no compromises, playing some truly fascinating upper echelon progressive jazz music.”

– Michael G. Nastos, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

“...together for almost 10 years... That experience together shows in the extra fine post-Bop they play so well. ...there are many fine duets and ensemble passages here, as Cosmologic seems to be about the groups and not the soloists. This doesn't mean there aren't strong solos...Robinson favors the mid range and shoots for melody...while Dessen's trombone is rich and fat, with an expansive sense of harmony... Still, it is their great group sound and cohesiveness that recommends Cosmologic.”

– Phillip McNally, *Cadence*, Jan-Feb-Mar 2009

“...Cosmologic favor an energized shape-shifting upbeat grooving jazz hybrid that smokes and steams and churns out chugging hot chunks of jerky protoplasmic murk and gurgle. Quite supple and mutable too...”

– George Parsons, *Dream Magazine*, #9, www.dreamage.com

“... Here, the musicians mold a singular mindset...starkly inventive and superfine progressive-jazz statement.

As a tight-knit and largely expressive unit, they come at you from all angles. It's a highly-disciplined group, where they also specialize in loose-groove like expansions. Sparked by youthful vigor and a continual reengineering methodology, they fuse unorthodox time signatures with spirited soloing jaunts... One of the distinct pleasures of the album lies within the quartet's acute ability to keep the listener off-guard. ...

On “Code View,” tenor saxophonist Jason Robinson shoots bullets atop trombonist Michael Dessen's weepy wah-wah lines, to consummate a verbose sequence of exchanges. ...the rhythm section coyly executes a perimeter of sorts, during the sublime moments. ... No doubt, this is a band for the new age of jazz. Their charismatic and rather impudent mode of delivery bears the mark of distinction. (Heartily recommended!)”

– Glenn Astarita, *Jazzreview.com*

“Free-jazz upstarts from San Diego strike a balance between complex form and forceful abandon... The provocative quartet is propelled by the intuitive hookup between drummer Nathan Hubbard and bassist Scott Walton while trombonist Michael Dessen and tenor saxophonist Jason Robinson... alternately blend on sublime harmonies and freelance above the fray. Thoughtful writing and bold instincts make this a compelling listen” – Bill Milkowski, *JazzTimes*, Dec. 2008, vol. 38, #10

“One of the key sleights of hand of Charles Mingus' small groups was that they sounded like orchestras. ...Cosmologic have duly managed to inflate their sound, pump up its bigness through cunning manipulation of their resources. ...the tenor sax-trombone combination imparts a quite mighty presence to the bass register... Moreover,

Michael Dessen has a round, bulbous note quality that occasionally approaches a high tuba...to suggest that there are two brass instruments rather than one... bassist Scott Walton and drummer Nathan Hubbard push its kinetic energy, buoyancy and sense of sustained movement through an astute clatter of marching band beats, a click-clacking procession that shuttles sideways through odd accents around the pulse... The result is articulate, precise orchestration distilled into riff-like explosiveness, a real small group emerging from an imaginary big band. ... the subtle integration of pop culture elements... take Cosmologic somewhere near the territory explored by Sex Mob and several of the other groups led by the important and very underrated Steve Bernstein. What Cosmologic have succeeded in doing is create a precisely arranged group sound that excitingly keeps open the possibility of groove or swing, harmonic or free playing at all moments, a vehicle that can negotiate any area of the jazz landscape and invest it with a bold, rousing energy. [4 stars]"

– Kevin Le Gendre, *Jazzwise*, October 2008, Issue 124

"Possessed of an adventurousness to make Yoko Ono look staid...the San Diego experimental jazz combo Cosmologic has released another CD to mark a decade together. ... But for all the out-there blowing, the band can also rein it in... Cosmologic doesn't play around...too often... Which is too bad, because the sounds on this disc are worth every bit of the effort needed to listen to them."

– Jim Trageser, *North County Times*, August 28, 2008

"...this Cuneiform release means significantly more exposure for a band that definitely warrants it. ... While the group's strongest antecedents are in free jazz, the composerly emphasis gives it a distinctive character, the pieces often favoring punchy ensembles and contrasting them with unusual moods and textures, including extended techniques. Dessen's "Code View" makes extensive use of Robinson's multiphonics...the saxophonist's "Dreams of..." begins The band's handling of these compositions is anything but static, making use of turbulent collective improvisations and intensive free blowing in order to both explore and break through the primary moods. It's well-designed and well-executed music that opens in a variety of directions."

– Stuart Broomer, *Signal to Noise*, Issue #51, Fall 2008

"this is an archetypal specimen of technically complex Cuneiform project: the instrumental rank to which the act belongs is far above the ground, the boundary between the members firm. Robinson is an efficient reedist, his parallel actions with Dessen's trombone engendering ever-remarkable, often unanticipated contrapuntal juxtapositions halfway through atonalism and chamber music. Percussionist Hubbard and bassist-cum-piano Walton preserve the right equilibrium of instant resourcefulness and sharp moderation, acting as robust branches for dozens of thematic ideas to mature on."

... this is a sleeper destined to grow with every listen; a methodologically prominent record, indubitably rewarding for educated ears."

– Massimo Ricci, *Touching Extremes*, January 1, 2009

"For all the improvised and willfully discordant music this 10-year old West Coast quartet is capable of producing, and reveling in, Cosmologic produces a sound so rich in mood-shifting maneuvers and sophisticated interplay that it defies labeling."

"Eyes in the Back of My Head," ... is intriguing enough to keep you guessing from start to finish. ...two of the recording's sharply contrasting highlights surface: "Dreams of an Alternate Future/Remembering the Past," a soulful interlude that initially brings to mind Jonny Greenwood's thrumming film score for "There Will Be Blood," and "Theme for Darfur," a post-bop-ish anthem that swings hard and fast..."

...the album...says as much about Cosmologic's discipline and cohesiveness as it does about its freewheeling spirit."

– Mike Joyce, *The Washington Post*, February 20, 2009

"Between them, the four members of San Diego's Cosmologic have performed with such cutting-edge jazz and New Music luminaries as George Lewis, Anthony Davis, Yusef Lateef and Wilco guitarist Nels Cline. The quartet's fourth and newest album, "Eyes in the Back of My Head" (Cuneiform), is the group's most accomplished and satisfying yet, full of incisive instrumental interplay that is brainy, brawny and soulful."

– *San Diego Union-Tribune*, November 17, 2008

"... Cosmologic's own music champions freewheeling jazz with a heavy improvisational emphasis. But the group's members count among their former collaborators such stylistically varied artists as Jamaica's Eek a Mouse and Toots & The Maytalls, Wilco guitarist Nels Cline, Moe!, former Frank Zappa "stunt guitarist" Mike Keneally, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, George Lewis and Quincy Troupe."

... The new album is the quartet's first on Cuneiform, the Maryland-based indie label whose roster includes such envelope-shredding artists – past and present – as Curlew, Henry Kaiser, Happy The Man, Radio Massacre International, Robert Wyatt, and The Hosemobile. ..."

– George Varga, *SignOnSanDiego.com*, May 2, 2008

"Cosmologic...fit in well with the rest of Cuneiform's jazz output: stuff that is very recognizably coming from within the jazz tradition, but pushes boundaries in any number of subtle ways. Not really free jazz and certainly not unrestrained collective improv, but honest-to-goodness grooving tunes with noticeable tendencies towards experimentation. (The Vandermark 5 might be a good, if more aggressive, example of a band that straddle that line in a somewhat similar way.) ..."

– Brandon Wu, *Washington City Paper's Black Plastic Blog*, February 19, 2009

"... To celebrate 25 years in the music business, Cuneiform is bringing San Diego-based improvisational four-piece band Cosmologic — the label's latest signing — to Silver Spring art space Pyramid Atlantic this weekend. Cosmologic is perhaps the quintessential Cuneiform group: virtually unknown but gifted with limitless musical potential (and improvisational expertise)."

– Johnathan Rickman, "Music's Future? It's in the Stars," *The Washington Post's Express*