

*What the press has said about:*

**The Claudia Quintet**

*September*

**CUNEIFORM**

**2013**

**“The interplay of the Claudias has been magical for a few years now, but the eye-opener here is the intrepid nature of Hollenbeck’s compositional sense. It is simultaneously more refined and more far-reaching on these pieces, and it’s the main reason the disc is so enchanting as a whole. 4 stars”** – Jim Macnie, “The Hot Box,” *Downbeat*, January 2014

**“Even when this superb accordion-and vibes-laced quintet is chattering in Morse code or obsessing. Steve Reich-style, over asymmetric chunks of melody, a shimmering spiritual warmth swells up around leader Hollenbeck’s inspired, orchestral drumming. ... 4 stars”** – Paul de Barros, “The Hot Box,” *Downbeat*, January 2014

**“...the music is impressionistic, intellectually vexing and emotionally rather evasive. Its elusiveness is part of its charm and frustration. 3 stars”** – John McDonough, “The Hot Box,” *Downbeat*, January 2014

**“John Hollenbeck’s Claudia Quintet has a signature sound. Rhythmic modulation, trick times, chamber-y textures, cyclical minimalist devices mix with open and structured improvisation, virtually always hewing to a strong pulse. ... You’d never mistake Claudia for anyone else.**

**When the beat briefly breaks down or evaporates...miraculous little sonic universes open up...everything has a pristine quality, sometimes cool and calculated. ...also an underlying, countervailing warmth, a deep humanity...**

**... Hollenbeck has depth as a conjurer of unclassifiable melodies. 4 stars”**

- John Corbett, “The Hot Box,” *Downbeat*, January 2014

**“September,”** the group’s inspired new album, gets its name from his custom of composing new work...during that month; each of its 10 pieces bears a date, indicating either a moment of inception or completion.

**That sounds schematic, but it’s really a loose framework, a way of organizing thoughts and ideas.** The instrumentation of the Claudia Quintet has remained constant...so **Mr. Hollenbeck knows the palette he’s working with...**

**The oldest and most gorgeously melancholy theme here is “12th Coping Song,”** a secular hymn inspired by Sept. 11, 2001, that closes the album. At the other end of the spectrum is the opener, “20th Soterius Lakshmi,”...

**... the bouquet of timbres that Claudia Quintet presents hasn’t lost its freshness:** the slow dawn of “25th Somber Blanket,” with accordion and clarinet prominent in the mix, represents a proven strategy for the band...

**... there’s a perversely arresting track called “29th, 1936 ‘Me Warn You,’ ”** which samples the main passage of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “smooth evasion” speech — a gem of withering sarcasm, at the expense of his opposing party — and redraws it in Cubist fashion. ...” - Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, September 24, 2013

**“John Hollenbeck and Company’s latest collection of jazz-inflected chamber music is another winner from start to finish.**

**...inspiration shows in this set of tunes named for various days of the month, with some of the most creative and unusual arrangements yet for this consistently interesting ensemble. ... One of the most attention-grabbing pieces is “29<sup>th</sup>: 1936 ‘Me Warn You’”,** which takes a recording of a Franklin D. Roosevelt speech and extracts the rhythms and melodic tones of his voice as a melody, which the other instruments then use as material for their playing. **It is both a brilliant intellectual achievement and an eminently entertaining experience. ...this group has carved out a niche with their distinctive instrumentation using the diverse acoustic properties to great effect...** Hollenbeck’s drumming is outstanding as always... *September* is simply one of 2013’s best releases, and would be a standout in any year.” – Jon Davis, *Exposé*, August 1, 2014

**“... September** is The Claudia Quintet's seventh-release as **the celebrated ensemble reaffirms its domain as an extraordinarily hip and unique entity.** ...focus... includes minimalistic oeuvres amid tightly-woven and penetrating rhythmic motifs...

The musicians also venture into avant impressionistic formats... on the cleverly patterned "29th 1936 Me Warn You,".. FDR's words are occasionally looped as the band shades and mimic his oration into a thematic incursion that rings like a pseudo- documentary...

**...September... imparts another testament to their enduring resilience and idiosyncratic representation of the jazz vernacular. (Passionately recommended...)**” - Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, October 5, 2013, [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com)

**“... September,** the album, reflects those times when creativity flourishes and the air alternates between warm and chilly, but also when events alter lives forever. Recording largely without written scores, Claudia’s lineup of Hollenbeck, reedman Chris Speed, Drew Gress or Chris Tordini on bass, accordionist Red Wierenga...and vibraphonist Matt Moran... is ideally suited to capturing the tones and timbres that the month signifies. “25<sup>th</sup>: Somber Blanket” (each track begins with a composition related date) is **calming in its measured pace of bass and accordion, crystalline in its clarity of vibes and clarinet,** as **Hollenbeck’s** drum patter rains into the mix before all the **band members coalesce into one of the album’s loveliest buildups.** ...Hollenbeck’s marriage of jazz and experimentalism is most fully realized in “29<sup>th</sup>: 1936: ‘Me Warn You.’” The track’s music is structured around repetitive sampled bits of **Franklin D. Roosevelt’s** 1936 Democratic Convention speech... in which the campaigning president railed against the Republican Party’s maliciousness...the cadences of music and voice fully integrate, **seeming to carry FDR’s message emphatically into 2013.** Manifesting **Hollenbeck’s** belief in the power of music to lift and heal, the day-after rumination “12<sup>th</sup>: Coping Song” concludes September with both remembrance and a foward gaze. ...**4 out of 5 stars.”** Dave Lynch, *All Music*, [allmusic.com](http://allmusic.com)

**“...the best jazz is usually produced by groups of musicians who stay together long enough to develop a group sound.**

**...A decade and seven albums later, The Claudia Quintet have carved out their own defiantly androgynous niche in**

**contemporary improvised music. Some call it post jazz,... Whatever you want to call it, this is music that pushes traditional instruments and conventional jazz forms into new territory - aesthetically, sonically, and socially.**

...For *September*... Each tune is given a date in September when it was “written,” with further enigmatic descriptors...

There are jagged grooves from Hollenbeck and bassist Drew Gress, multi-layered harmonies from vibraphonist Matt Moran and accordionist Red Wierenga, and sinuous melodies from saxophonist Chris Speed. **But in the end, it's the freshness of the ensemble sound that sets The Claudia Quintet apart. It's as if this is what music will sound like 100 years from now. 4/5 stars**"

-Cormac Larkin, [The Irish Times](#), November 29 2013, irishtimes.com

“...The Claudia Quintet has explored the permeable boundaries between genres with single-minded dedication. ...

...The album title is a subtle reminder of the tragic events of September 11, 2001...Hollenbeck drew inspiration from other dates associated with the titular month...**the ensuing works present as diverse an aural landscape as Hollenbeck has ever envisioned for his flagship group.**

... one of the key differences between *September* and the band's previous releases is Hollenbeck's decision to formulate structures that the members could easily navigate from memory, without sheet music... **The result is their loosest performance to date, and easily the best demonstration of the group's adroit interplay on record.**

Another dissimilarity... is the sequencing... This time only two numbers clock in under three minutes, with the longest exceeding ten. These **lengthier compositions** allow individual members to develop their solos in a more egalitarian fashion...

**Unclassifiable by any standard, The Claudia Quintet continues to forge ahead into uncharted territory, drawing on multiple genres and styles for their mellifluous melodies, stately harmonies and captivating grooves,** with *September* one of their most engaging releases.” - Troy Collins, [Point of Departure](#), #44, Sept. 2013, pointofdeparture.org

**“Sensing the tipping point where improvisation undermines a composer's intentions, or composition imprisons good improvisers, is the challenge for musicians who like giving equal weight to both – and the US outfit Claudia Quintet are frontrunners at this tricky game.** ... Moonlit-landscape passages proceed with solemn, frosty deliberation, a 1936 recording of a Franklin D Roosevelt speech is cut, pasted and duplicated over clarinet swoops from Chris Speed, and there are softly ecstatic love themes for high reeds, accordion chords and Drew Gress's wonderful double bass. **The group's unusual instrumentation offers textures few current jazz-based quintets have, and Hollenbeck makes drumming a unique cornerstone to the art of composition. 4 stars.**” – John Fordham, *The Guardian*, January 9, 2014

“The Claudia Quintet...combines jazz improvisation with thoughtful composition and a myriad of influences that range from pop music to contemporary classical... ‘September 20<sup>th</sup> Soterius Lakshmi’ is an excellent opening to the album, developing a great percussive feel that pulls everyone along in its wake. This sensibility continues and is expanded... The band slows down on some of the more emotional material like ‘September 25<sup>th</sup> Somber Blanket’ and the 9/11 prayer for peace ‘September 12 Coping Song’... **This is multi-faceted music that often deviates from the expected and is filled with the personalities of its creators making for compelling listening.**” - Tim Niland, [Music and More](#), November 19 2013 jazzandblues.blogspot.com

“Jeff Dayton-Johnson's Best Releases Of 2013... These are the records I kept listening to all year... **Listen to them...and you'll be as sanguine as I am about the vibrancy of the scene – or scenes.** ...The Claudia Quintet, *September* (Cuneiform)”

-Jeff Dayton-Johnson, *All About Jazz* December 22 2013

“Here are...albums that'll be filed in the ‘jazz’ section yet both challenge (and enrich) the idea(s) of what a jazz album can be. ...

...Speaking of classical chamber styles, The Claudia Quintet has some of that goin' on along with the smooth sophistication of a large jazz group, albeit scaled-down... **Drummer John Hollenbeck's compositions feature deliberate and involving compositions with nods to Philip Glass/John Adams minimalism, the cinematic sound-scapes of eclectic rockers Tortoise, and the lyrical modernism of...Shorter, Carla Bley, and Charles Mingus... No matter how ‘oblique’ Hollenbeck's compositions might (initially) seem, there's always persuasive engaging rhythms buoying things along... The Claudia Quintet's palette is luxuriously full...this is fascinating music with heart. 4 ½/5 stars**” – Mark Keresman, *Icon*, April 2014

**“Trafficking in a mixture of chamber music, intricate post-rock and jazz, the Claudia Quintet has carved out a distinctive niche...** (even if it's a challenge to define...).

...in the best music there's a sense that someone is talking to you...

Though the 10 pieces are the result of Hollenbeck (for the first time) communicating them to the band without writing them down, **each bears the group's tightly composed signature.** "September 18: Lemons" begins as a cyclical, minimalist-leaning dialogue between Matt Moran's vibraphone and accordionist Red Wierenga (yes, there's an accordion here -- but set your polka prejudices aside) that gracefully fades into an atmospheric midsection before gathering into a menacing churn that becomes a jumping-off point for saxophonist Chris Speed... **the conversation goes on.**” -Chris Barton, [The Los Angeles Times](#), 10 October 2013, latimes.com

**“A drummer/composer/conceptualist continues to astonish with his innovative scope...**John Hollenbeck draws on jazz, classical minimalism, impressionism, and avant-garde rock...Employing the unlikely palette of drums, reeds, vibraphone, and bass, Hollenbeck superimposes the hyperkinetic atop the serene, creating fascinating textures and surprising transformations. **Employing everything from James Brown-inspired grooves to free and orchestral touches, Hollenbeck's expressive drumming ties it all together. Disorienting yet strangely beautiful, Hollenbeck's ensembles sound like no one else's (Cuneiform).**”

- Jeff Potter, *Modern Drummer*, February 2014, p. 82

**“John Hollenbeck has fashioned his share of attention-grabbing tunes, but few as compelling as ‘September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1936: Me Warn You,’ a highlight of the Claudia Quintet’s shiveringly good new album.** A mash-up of reflective music and sonically sliced and diced excerpts from a Franklin D. Roosevelt speech, it basks in the president’s sarcasm in blowing off the opposition for pretending to back his New Deal programs.... through its coiled minimalism and the lucid counter-voices of Matt Moran’s vibes and Chris Speed’s saxophone, **the music wins us over by powerfully claiming the human voice as an instrument of its own...Hollenbeck’s subtle absorption of ethnic sounds including Indian and Brazilian further adds to the stylistic depth of the album, which for all its artful texture is one of his most forceful and immediate efforts.”**

- Lloyd Sachs, *Jazz Times*, November 2013

**“Drummer and percussionist John Hollenbeck has proven a master of nuance and flow in many diverse musical contexts, none more so than with his Claudia Quintet,** a group that’s also notable for the interplay of longtime members reedman Chris Speed and vibraphonist Matt Moran. Here, **Hollenbeck upped his ante with pieces that...he taught the group by ear, without written music: Considering the complexity of and detail of the group’s previous releases, that should have been a challenge.”**

- *Blouin Art Info*, August 2013, [blogs.artinfo.com/blunotes](http://blogs.artinfo.com/blunotes)

**“...the Claudia Quintet plays as I write this and I remember why... I was attracted to music, why I play it, listen to it, why I’ve been doing these reviews so long... It’s progressive jazz, compositional jazz, jazz that has a sound very much its own, a touch of rock... This is ensemble music of a high sort. It is important music. It is not in any way expected music.... I put it to you, as an example of something that’s excellent about the time we live in.”**

– Grego Applegate Edwards, *GappleGate Guitar and Bass Blog*, February 3, 2014

**“...just listen to the marvelous tones on “September 12<sup>th</sup>: Coping Song” to get a taste of how intriguing this quintet can be.** It was the vibrant interaction and high energy on “September 18<sup>th</sup>: Lemons” that got my vote for personal favorite... **Intense from the first note all the way through... I give the quintet a MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED, with an “EQ” (energy quotient) rating of 4.98.”** – Dick Metcalf, *Improvjazzation Nation*

“...some music embraces the silence on which it is painted... Silence is a regular term: it can mean a sense of air around the notes...and in this regards certain instruments are more telling than others.

**Vibraphone is king, its every note seeming to have air swishing around it. Accordion and clarinet are others, and these three colours are central to the aerated sound of the Claudia Quintet, the New York band that realises the unique sonic dreams of drummer John Hollenbeck.**

**...Hollenbeck writes cosmopolitan melodies that are by turns charming and wistful, sometimes underpinning them with surprisingly knotty rhythms,** given that the end music is seldom dense. Clarinetist Chris Speed can play storming tenor saxophone when required, and the bass of either Drew Gress or Chris Tordini completes the line-up with accordionist Red Wierenga and vibraphonist Matt Moran. **Have a listen. It is like a breath of fresh air.”** - John Shand, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, [smh.com.au](http://smh.com.au)

“The Claudia Quintet...a distinctly unique sound that blends elements of free jazz and post-rock which is further underpinned by the instrumentation which includes vibes and accordion. ...**September is an album that boldly ventures into musical territories that few others dare to explore...an album that warrants repeated listens.”** - Sean Smith, *Tokyo Jazz Notes*, 23 February 2014, [tokyojazznotes.blogspot.com](http://tokyojazznotes.blogspot.com)

**“September faithfully follows and builds upon The Claudia Quintet’s past explorations into minimalism, freethinking improvisation, challenging rhythms, and deeply deliberate, intertextual musings. ...**

**...the culminating track, ‘12<sup>th</sup>: Coping Song’...seeks to unify and express Hollenbeck’s personal memories of and feelings associated with the September 11 attacks. It’s haunting, moving and beautifully executed and, like most tunes on this album, reminds us why The Claudia Quintet is still one of the most exciting groups on the scene today.”**

- Sam Spokony, *The New York City Jazz Record*, October 2013

**“...this is an ensemble that bucks the commonplace assumptions of jazz... There is an enormous degree of invention and imagination in play here...creative choices that rigorously discount the usual limitations and boundaries of jazz compositions.** There is a lot of probing improvisation from a band of extremely accomplished musicians, but there is an equal (or greater) amount of structured ensemble writing, and although much of the material is quite challenging to the ear, its radical force does not rob it of aesthetic appeal. Both **fiercely intelligent and empathically beautiful, September** is an album that can only have resulted from a sustained and intensive feat of concentration, with not a single lazy gesture or idiomatic cliché from start to finish. **Extraordinary compositions, brilliantly performed.”** - [Olive Arditi](http://OliveArditi.com), March 26, 2014. [OliveArditi.com](http://OliveArditi.com)

“The music of drummer and compose John Hollenbeck omnivorously draws from jazz, post-rock and contemporary classical traditions.” *WQXR*, October 2 2013

**“...John Hollenbeck has been able to keep his Claudia Quintet viable long after its original formation in the late 90s by continually tossing new challenges at it...**

*September* returns the band back to a true quintet, but Hollenbeck made changes...Red Wierenga is the accordion player...the other test...was to introduce his already-knotted, tightly wound compositions to the group not through documentation but mostly by ear... **Hollenbeck’s usual genius is very much present... He devises not just complex rhythms but threads of rhythms interwoven together...For “September 24<sup>th</sup> Interval Dig” he comes up with inventive beats, interwoven with the harmony impossibly tight.**

**Ironically this is his most straightforward song, and yet there's little conventional about it...**

"September 29th 1936 'Me Warn You'" stands as the most amazing performance on *September*. ... From the recorded words of FDR springs forth the melodic elements... It's a real revelation in that Hollenbeck's songs often do sound like this, resembling human speech in their flow.

...*September* continues their ability to amaze in new ways. When both composing and musicianship are always at the highest level, it's hard not to." -S. Victor Aaron, [Something Else!](#), 20 September 2013, somethingelserreviews.com

#### The 2013 NPR Music Jazz Critics Poll:

##### 8th Annual Jazz Critics Poll: 2013,

<http://hullworks.net/jazzpoll/13/totals-new.php>

#75. · Claudia Quintet, *September (Cuneiform)* 23 (5)

Bob Blumenthal (freelance)

NEW RELEASES

6. Claudia Quintet, *September (Cuneiform)*

David Fricke (Rolling Stone)

NEW RELEASES

6. Claudia Quintet, *September (Cuneiform)*

Richard Gehr (Village Voice, eMusic)

NEW RELEASES

8. Claudia Quintet, *September (Cuneiform)*

Sergio Piccirilli (El Instruso)

NEW RELEASES

4. Claudia Quintet, *September (Cuneiform)*

Gene Seymour

NEW RELEASES

8. Claudia Quintet, *September (Cuneiform)*" *Jazz Critics Poll*, 2013

"Song of the Day, 13 Feb 2014... '**September 12<sup>th</sup>: Coping Song**' by the Claudia Quintet... Today's pick is an intriguing piece of music by one of the most progressive and influential jazz groups around today."

- [Next Jazz](#), 13 February 2014 nextjazz.com

"It was the vibrant interaction and high energy on "[September 18th: Lemons](#)" that got my vote for personal favorite... **intense from the first note and all the way through to the 10:35 conclusion**. I give the quintet a MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED, with an "EQ" (energy quotient) rating of 4.98." Dick Metcalf, [Improvijazzation Nation](#), rotcodzzaj.com

"...Wierenga's accordion intones the tune of the ten-minute *Wayne Phases*, quickly followed by Moran's vibraphone. Clearly, Hollenbeck wants to leverage the harmony and contrast of the timbres of these two instruments. Appropriately, when Speed's saxophone jumps in, the music, that was so lively, implodes. ...the cubistic vignette of *Loop Piece* (penned by anarchic percussion) and the contrabass-led Brazilian-tinged *Interval Dig*...broaden Hollenbeck's already gigantic palette."

-Piero Scaruffi, [Scaruffi](#), scaruffi.com

"...I was piped aboard this vessel by... 'September 29th, 1936: 'Me Warn You', in which the voice of FDR, sarcastically chiding his Republican fat-cat opposition for their empty promises of out-dealing the New Deal, is carved up, sampled, mixed, mimicked and harmonized with throughout by this eclectic chamber ensemble led by percussionist John Hollenbeck... Once you get past the wonder of hearing instrumental correlatives to Roosevelt's memorable pipes and recognize the sly contemporary references... about seven minutes in... the group, collectively and individually, starts laying down its own cheeky variations on the president's joke. **This open-ended interplay typifies the rest of the album – a series of sound mosaics and tone poems devoted to the month that Hollenbeck prefers to use as time for reflection and contemplation.** There's a witty birthday salute to the unavoidable Mr.

Shorter...ballad...and, inevitably, a 9/11 piece...that closes the disc on with introspection that never becomes maudlin. **It's taken me longer than it probably should to have climbed aboard Claudia's bandwagon...** But I plan to check back with them."

-Gene Seymour, *That Gene Seymour*, 6 December 2013

#### Features/Interviews:

**John Hollenbeck's September Songs**" by Jeff Dayton-Johnson, [All About Jazz](#), October 7, 2013

**"John Hollenbeck's productivity would be astonishing in its own right, but the uniformly high quality of this high output places the drummer among the top tier of jazz (and not only jazz) musicians...** As befits a 21st century drummer, he is rhythmically complex but the music is underlain with a deep groove. He borrows ecumenically from a diversity of musical (including the rhythms of the spoken word) sources and manages to synthesize those varied resources into a coherent creative expression. Hollenbeck's flagship project is the Claudia Quintet... With *September (Cuneiform, 2013)*, the quintet's output rises to "7. 3 albums"..."

**"I, Claudia: John Hollenbeck talks to marlbank about writing music that could be learned by rote or memorised, his biggest influence as a drummer...**

**What would you say are the most distinctive features of Claudia Quintet's new record, September?...**

For us the process was very different. I tried to write some music that could be learned by rote or memorized... my direction tends toward music that would be difficult to learn with paper. Also, there are 1.5 new members on this record. Red Wierenga has taken

over from Ted Reichman, and Red brings quite a different aesthetic. Also, on half of the tracks Chris Tordini is filling in for Drew Gress... Overall, I would say it is looser than previous records.

*Is this "post-jazz" label attached to the Claudia Quintet helpful...?*

**... for people who like and know what post-rock is, I think it could be helpful.** What it means to me, is that **we play jazz, we can play jazz, we love jazz but we also choose to not make music that we would call jazz.** About the label issue: since I was young, I always thought jazz was the next thing, the thing that does not have a label yet. Once it is called something and has been codified, then for me it WAS jazz but is not any more. I'm sure a lot of people would disagree with that, but that is my natural feeling. ...” --

[Marlbank](http://marlbank.net), 23 November 2013 marlbank.net