



**Musicians:**

- Michael Formanek - bass
- Tomas Fujiwara – drums
- Mary Halvorson – guitar

“Made up of three highly distinctive voices in the world of jazz and avant-garde music, Thumbscrew should probably collapse under the weight of its own star power but Tomas Fujiwara (drums), Mary Halvorson (electric guitar) and Michael Formanek (acoustic bass) are just too aware of the potential of this supertrio to let that happen.”

- S. Victor Aaron, Something Else!

**Thumbscrew** demonstrates their unique collective musical vision in contrasting but complementary ways on two exciting new CDs. *Ours* and *Theirs* are the first to be released on a newly revamped **Cuneiform Records**, just returning from a hiatus. Comprised of longtime collaborators **Michael Formanek**, **Tomas Fujiwara**, and **Mary Halvorson**, Thumbscrew is a true collaborative effort with all three members contributing at an equal rate both in terms of composition and improvisation.

Born out of a residency at Pittsburgh’s **City of Asylum** where Thumbscrew created their striking second album **Convallaria**, *Ours* and *Theirs* showcase Thumbscrew in two different contexts performing all originals on *Ours* and all covers on *Theirs*. Both albums present a meticulous and intuitive original sound that could only be crafted during focused and intensive time as a collective in a place like City of Asylum. “When we arrived at City of Asylum for our second residency in June 2017, we immediately said, ‘we’re home!’” says Fujiwara, “The feelings we get when being at City of Asylum, around the people that make it such a unique place doing great work, in the Northside/ Mexican War Streets neighborhood of Pittsburgh are of creativity and community. It’s an excellent place to work on our music as a collective, to spend time together not just rehearsing and recording music, but exploring the neighborhood, meeting people, visiting museums, and attending events at City of Asylum. All of this contributes to a creative process that’s open and inclusive and experimental.” This cohesion, experimental nature, and sense of “home” is ever present throughout *Ours* and *Theirs* as Thumbscrew provides ample evidence to the validity of a true collective ensemble.

Tomas, Michael, and Mary are no strangers to each other’s work, having performed in a multitude of projects together, including Michael Formanek’s **Ensemble Kolossus**, Tomas Fujiwara and the Hook Up’s **After All is Said**, and most recently, in Mary Halvorson’s critically-acclaimed **Code Girl**. “The bond is so strong that it carries over and contributes to any other ensemble we’re a part of. There will be a different book of music, additional musicians, a different ensemble approach to composition and improvisation, but the connection we have as a trio hopefully adds a great deal to the overall sound,” says Fujiwara. This long-term relationship has produced a nuanced understanding of their individual styles, with each member’s compositions coming together to form a unique whole on *Ours*, and performing jointly chosen pieces to create a similar sense of unity on *Theirs*. “We conceived of and worked through both books of music simultaneously, and recorded everything as part of the same recording session, therefore it felt natural to release both albums at the same time,” says Halvorson, “Although they are starkly different conceptually, enjoyed blurring the line where the two albums intersect. I feel there is much more common ground than expected between Thumbscrew doing originals and Thumbscrew doing covers. Presenting them

## Tracks:

### *Ours*

1. Snarling Joys (Halvorson)
2. Saturn Way (Fujiwara)
3. Cruel Heartless Bastards (Formanek)
4. Smoketree (Halvorson)
5. Thumbprint (Halvorson)
6. One Day (Fujiwara)
7. Rising Snow (Fujiwara)
8. Words that Rhyme with Spangle (angle bangle dangle jangle mangle strangle tangle wangle wrangle) (Formanek)
9. Unconditional (Formanek)

### *Theirs*

1. Stablemates (Benny Golson)
2. Benzinho (Jacob Do Bandolim)
3. House Party Starting (Herbie Nichols)
4. The Peacocks (Jimmy Rowles)
5. East of the Sun (Brooks Bowman)
6. Scarlet Ribbons (For Her Hair) (Evelyn Danzig)
7. Buen Amigo (Julio De Caro)
8. Dance Cadaverous (Wayne Shorter)
9. Effi (Stanley Cowell)
10. Weer is een dag voorbij (Misha Mengelberg)

separately but simultaneously gives listeners a chance to explore that overlap as well.”

*Ours*, as its namesake suggests, is an album of original compositions with Fujiwara, Formanek and Halvorson contributing three works apiece. Opening with Halvorson’s striking “**Snarling Joys**,” *Ours* begins with delicate (and ever so slightly warped) ensemble figures that very naturally develop into an urgent and tense thrill-ride of a track, with a brilliant bass solo from Formanek. Fujiwara’s “**Saturn Way**” shows the ensemble bouncing off of each other’s rhythmic framework with Fujiwara anchoring the group through a pummeling rolling tom figure that slowly descends into a spacious and attentive group improvisation. Later, on Formanek’s punk-thru-the-wormhole style “**Cruel Heartless Bastards**” the ensemble shifts metric pulse in total lockstep on the turn of a dime while a teasing 4/4 figure creates a sense of gravity for the entire composition. Halvorson takes the track to the stratosphere with a dizzying guitar pedal laden solo after the group snakes their way through Formanek’s labyrinth.

On the flipside, *Theirs* features covers penned by venerable composers, from North American jazz legends **Benny Golson** and **Wayne Shorter**, to South American composers **Julio De Caro** (Argentina) and **Jacob Do Bandolim** (Brazil), to songwriter **Evelyn Danzig** and Dutch avant-gardist **Misha Mengelberg**. Thumbscrew covers considerable ground in bringing their unique arrangements and ensemble sensibility to this transfixing set of other composers’ music. On the selection of covers, Fujiwara says, “Each of us brought in a number of covers--more than double what we ended up releasing--that we were curious for Thumbscrew to try. We played through each composition many times, trying different arrangements, and slowly started to focus in on which ones felt right for the group.” Formanek states that “for me it was mostly a matter of which tunes I thought would have strong enough bones to sustain a Thumbscrew interpretation. It was also a matter of imagining how certain pieces would work with Mary, Tomas, and my approaches that wouldn’t sound like just another version.”

On **Herbie Nichols’ “House Party Starting”** the group uses the original to showcase a heavily swung and deliciously loose solo from Fujiwara and glorious ensemble interplay. On Wayne Shorter’s “**Dance Cadaverous**” the ensemble shatters the original into a compact and tense free improvisation with the collective presenting unique textual variations on Shorter’s classic theme. The band shows its delicate side on Evelyn Danzig’s classic standard “**Scarlet Ribbons (for Her Hair)**” which features a stunningly beautiful solo from Halvorson. On the contrast between the two records, Halvorson says, “The approach to presenting a unique and personal take on a composition is the same whether it’s one of *Ours* or one of *Theirs*. The difference is that with the covers we’re aware of trying to honor the composer’s vision, and in many cases, classic versions of the song which serve as inspirations.” Formanek says “I’ve always loved playing other people’s music, whether it’s Cole Porter, Thelonious Monk, or Tim Berne. I’ve always believed that one should try and make a personal statement

every time you play, and whether it’s an original or someone else’s you should find the things that are unique to that piece and that resonate the most with your own ideas. I don’t think that any of us made much of a distinction between our own music and the ‘covers’ in terms of how we approach them. We try and give them all the same respect and thoughtfulness, and to create versions that are personal but still strongly connected to the original composition.”

*Ours* and *Theirs* both present a band at the height of their creativity, performing unique music to powerful effect, and solidifying their status as one of the most important ensembles in creative music today. Thumbscrew will tour throughout the United States, Canada, South America and Europe in 2018, in addition a weeklong residency at the esteemed **Village Vanguard** in New York City from July 17th through 22nd. With two bold new releases, Thumbscrew embodies the value of a working collective in the truest sense.