



**The Meridian Suite**  
**Antonio Sanchez & Migration (CAM Jazz)**  
**Three Times Three**  
**Antonio Sanchez (CAM Jazz)**  
 by George Kanzler

As the soloist heard throughout *Birdman*, the Academy Award Best Picture of 2014, Antonio Sanchez, who composed the solo drum/percussion score, has become the most heard jazz drummer of his generation, the film's popularity surpassing even that of guitarist Pat Metheny's various groups Sanchez has anchored for the last eight years. He has followed up the *Birdman* score with a pair of his own albums, amply displaying his talents as both a musician who works well with others and as a leader-composer.

In that latter role he presents the ambitious *The Meridian Suite*, consisting of five multi-faceted parts ranging in length from under 4 to over 21 minutes. It is played by Migration, a quartet with Seamus Blake (tenor saxophone and EWI), John Escreet (piano and fender Rhodes) and Matt Brewer (acoustic and electric basses). Added guests are vocalist Thana Alexa and guitarist Adam Rogers. Besides drumming, Sanchez also adds his keyboards and vocals to the mix.

Sanchez views this suite as a long-form composition wherein he didn't "worry about time or style constraints." In some ways this leads to a work balancing on the precipice of pretentiousness, like the art rock and jazz-fusion of the '70s, but it is saved from that fate by the variety and verve of the performances, especially Sanchez' virtuosic, diverse drumming, Escreet's always surprisingly original soloing, whether on piano or electric keyboard, and Blake's sinewy, down-to-earth tenor passages, some of them truly stunning. The suite ranges from modal-tinged jazz to a jazz-rock undoubtedly influenced by Sanchez' time with Metheny (solidly when Rogers' guitar is added), plus some captivating, 'spiritual' meditative sections, the mood enhanced by Alexa's haunting voice, whether chanting wordlessly or intoning her own lyrics.

On *Three Times Three*, Sanchez brings us three trio projects, only one clocking in over a half hour. Further amplifying the title theme, each trio is featured on three tracks and one of each three is a jazz standard, the others Sanchez originals.

The first CD is devoted to the trio of Sanchez, pianist Brad Mehldau and Brewer. Mehldau has always seemed less self-conscious as a sideman, shedding the Bill Evans-like angst that can hang over his own projects. Here he is at his very best, creating spritely bebop lines—sometimes two, from left and right hand independently—on "Nar-this", a reimagining of Miles Davis' "Nardis". He's equally impressive on the leader's cascading "Constellations", with its rolling rhythms, and "Big Dreams", where he can exploit his most romantic, rhapsodic tendencies.

The second CD is divided between trios featuring guitarist John Scofield and bassist (electric and acoustic) Christian McBride and tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano with (acoustic) bassist John Patitucci. Scofield is predictably spacey on the mysterious harmonies of Wayne Shorter's "Fall", the trio reminiscent of the Metheny one with McBride and Sanchez. The leader changes up the groove with "Nooks and Crannies", featuring a funky backbeat, fuzz-tone guitar and electric bass, while the final offering is the vampy, postbop racer "Rooney and Vinski". Lovano and Patitucci sidle into Sanchez' "Leviathan", a slow piece that gathers momentum with rolling, multi-grooving rhythms, tenor saxophone all gruff and meaty.

"Firenze", a Sanchez ballad with double-time sections, invokes Lovano's plaintive side. But this trio's triumph is Monk's "I Mean You", the stately theme emerging out of an opening squall, divided into slow A-sections and an accelerated bridge, Lovano's solo toying with the riffy theme, then engaging in an intense duologue with Sanchez to take it out.

For more information, visit [camjazz.com](http://camjazz.com). Migration is at Dizzy's Club Oct. 6th-7th. See Calendar.



**Our Lady of the Flowers**  
**Matthew Shipp Quartet/Declared Enemy**  
 (Rogue Art)  
 Live at Okuden  
**The Uppercut | Matthew Shipp/Mat Walerian**  
 (ESP-Disk')  
**Themes 4 Transmutation**  
**Bobby Kapp (s/r)**  
 by Ken Waxman

Pianist Matthew Shipp continues to defy conventions by trying out various formulas and partnerships. For example, *Our Lady of the Flowers* is an extended meditation on nine of the keyboardist's compositions by Shipp, bassist William Parker, tenor saxophonist/clarinetist Sabir Mateen and drummer Gerald Cleaver, all with whom he has collaborated in the past. A sharp left turn, *Live at Okuden* is a first meeting of minds between Shipp and Polish reedplayer Mat Walerian. Finally, *Themes 4 Transmutation* is a rare sideman turn by Shipp joining two other younger players to work with veteran drummer Bobby Kapp.

Formed for a 2006 concert honoring French writer Jean Genet (1910-86), whose first novel was *Our Lady of the Flowers*, *Declared Enemy* doesn't approximate Genet's specialized world, but instead focuses on state-of-the-art improv.

The title track offers rhapsodic excitement as the players' individual output bolts into place like parts of a craftsman's construction. Thematically based around sour vibrations from Mateen's clarinet, Shipp adds the sweetening with stealthy contrapuntal jabs while both float on a cushion consisting of Parker's broad bass-string-stopping and Cleaver's cymbal punctuation. The latter's innate tastefulness keeps the beat cemented, especially when the band tackles balladic material like "A Different Plane" and "From the Beyond". Stressing a Monk-ish keyboard economy on the former, Shipp sympathetically draws out Mateen's ingrained emotionalism, allowing him to craft a solo that thrusts Coleman Hawkins-style breathiness into the avant garde with the occasional slurp and sigh. The latter is even more plaintive, although the sluicing bassline and drum pounding may suggest otherwise. Mateen's strangled cries and altissimo screeches don't hide the romanticism his tone—and Genet's writing—sometimes reveals. Despite its title, "Cosmic Joke" is the most ambitious composition, unrolling in several sections. Opening with inner piano string reverb, the piece quickly turns staccato as saxophone screeches color and spur Shipp's pedal-point variations. The variations arrive with rugged emphasis until the theme returns with blunt conviction. "New Tension", a Shipp-Mateen duet, is characterized by jagged clarinet linearity coupled with keyboard detours and discursions.

In comparison, disparate definitions of tension and release define *Live at Okuden*. Sophisticated enough to adopt individual playing strategies for each of his horns (alto saxophone, bass clarinet, soprano clarinet and flute), Walerian's multiple identities encourage the pianist to vary his keyboard guises.

With chameleon-like color shifts, pieces such as "Free Bop Statement One" and "Free Bop Statement Two" bring out a clipped Chopin-esque formalism in the pianist with mazurka-like flourishes imbued with jazz feelings, the better to meet the alto saxophonist's Benny Carter-like sweetness. Skipping forward a century but backwards in jazz chronology, Walerian's rangy clarinet lines on "Blues for Acid Cold" appear primitivist enough to come from Johnny Dodds. Shipp's response is updated Jelly Roll Morton, with the strummed melody thoroughly modern, but with a touch of '20s blues. Meanwhile "It's Sick out There", like the former tune composed by Walerian, plunges the two into a complicated and mercurial conversation. Smearing and spitting split tones with wild animal abandon, the saxophonist's stretched sound is as atonal here as it was wistful on "Blues for Acid Cold" while the pianist's splashing interpolations of multiple cadenzas doesn't prevent the two from gliding to a heart-beat-linked ending. Detailing is etched into "Black Rain", the album's most representative track. Both conventional and free, the nearly 17-minute excursion is reminiscent of a garment being created by flighty designers. No sooner is another detail added to the simple structure than an additional flounce or bow is sewn on as well. Initial keyboard dusting and unaccented air breaths are swiftly ornamented by skipping piano melodies plus a near-smothering blanket of clarinet glissandi. By the time alluring apparel has been created, supplementary sonic trim is added via flute puffs and lyrical keyboard and inner string detailing. The garb is striking, but much altered from its initial pattern.

Like a movie star making an uncredited appearance in an indie film, Shipp's playing is by necessity anonymous on *Themes 4 Transmutation*. Kapp, whose initial LP appearance was alto saxophonist Marion Brown's 1967 LP *Three For Shepp* (Impulse), when Shipp was seven, also worked during the era with tenor saxophonist Gato Barbieri and pianist Dave Burrell. The drummer spent many years in Mexico following The New Thing's heyday, has recorded as a vocalist and is also part of a mainstream trio with pianist Richard Wyands and bassist Gene Perla.

Perhaps the most minimalist percussionist of his era, Kapp's penchant for understatement remains. His few solos on the four tracks are breaks rather than fully developed statements and with bassist Tyler Mitchell wedded mostly to time-keeping, thematic interest comes from the pianist and free jazz standard bearer Ras Moshe playing tenor and soprano saxophones and flute. So committed to the verisimilitude of the session is Shipp that his limpid keyboard conception are most reminiscent of Dave Burrell and McCoy Tyner's styles of the time. For instance, his keyboard architecture mirrors that of Tyner heard behind John Coltrane and Shepp among Mitchell's string pops and Kapp's restrained rolls on "Excitement into Inspiration". Moshe's clear toned overblowing on this track and elsewhere are appropriately Trane-like as well as fuelled by startling, revved-up Shepp-like growls. The saxophonist shows a command of altissimo, spicing his high pitches with as many scream variations as James Brown. The CD climaxes with "Romance into Love", soft flute embellishments and inner-piano-string plucks decorating the sparkling theme and confirming the ongoing links between the past and present jazz traditions.

Having reached piano master status, Shipp's many projects show he's still evolving. Not only does he score in new formats here, but he isn't averse to supporting pioneering players regain their proper place on the jazz scene.

For more information, visit [roguart.com](http://roguart.com), [espdisk.com](http://espdisk.com) and [bobbykappjazz.com](http://bobbykappjazz.com). Shipp is at Roulette Oct. 7th as part of an *Evolver Records* showcase and *The Stone* Oct. 23rd with Nate Wooley. See Calendar.