



*Gleam*  
**Miguel Frasconi/Denman Maroney (Porter)**  
 by Ken Waxman

Creative improvising has been produced on instruments ranging from the church organ and bassoon to comb-and-tissue paper and suitcase drums, so why not glass objects? Composer/performer Miguel Frasconi proves it can be done on this notable CD.

Frasconi's decades of experience using a collection of found and specially tuned glass objects that are bowed, struck and stroked creates polyphonic textures that reference bells, marimbas and even brass and reed timbres. Upping the ante, his performing partner here is Denman Maroney, who transforms a grand piano into a hyperpiano by removing the internal damper and plate to bow, slide, stop and strum the exposed strings with objects such as copper bars, bowls, rubber blocks and CD and cassette cases. The resulting textures engage both the strings and their extensions, allowing him to play in several tempos and harmonies. It's as if he's sounding several stringed instruments simultaneously.

Frasconi's common ground with Maroney - who usually plays with improvisers such as reedist Ned Rothenberg and bassist Mark Dresser - is to concentrate on the musicality of their chosen instruments, rather than their supposed novelty. During the six inventions here metronomic piano chords share space with internal strings pumps and rattles as quivering, near-human whines and strident aviary-like trills resonate from the glass menagerie.

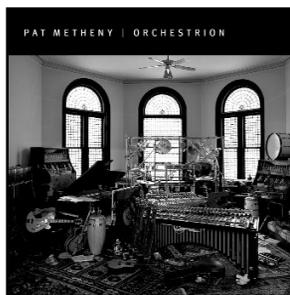
The centerpiece is the almost-25 minute "Glass". Evolving in double counterpoint, caressed glass textures and crystal bowl-like pings reach an almost baroque-like resonance as they intersect with frenetic keyboard pumping and restaurant kitchen-like clatter from the piano innards. Eventually the quivering, yet highly rhythmic, interface coalesces to such an extent that whether a particular broken octave or altissimo shrill originates from a curved or strung surface becomes irrelevant.

With this CD, Frasconi and Maroney have created a sound world unique in taking full advantage of the inimitable timbres of their self-created instruments. Yet in invention and sonic excitement, it fits comfortably among the best improvised music.

For more information, visit [porterrecords.com](http://porterrecords.com). Maroney is at I-Beam Jul. 23rd. See Calendar.



*One Quiet Night*



*Orchestrion*

**Pat Metheny (Nonesuch)**  
 by Tom Greenland

*One Quiet Night* (recorded in 2001 and 2003 and reissued with a bonus track) and the newer *Orchestrion* provide contrary and complementary portraits of guitarist Pat Metheny as a 'solo' artist. The former is a moody, restrained set rendered on acoustic baritone

guitar (pitched down a perfect fifth) in 'Nashville tuning' (the two middle strings raised an octave). Deep rich bass tones anchor the steady stream of flowing chords, mixing ringing open notes with close-voiced harmonies for a meditative effect. Most of the tunes are originals, supplemented by a beautiful version of the Norah Jones hit "Don't Know Why" plus Keith Jarrett's "My Song" and Gerry Marsden's "Ferry Cross the Mersey". "Song For the Boys" and "Over On 4th Street" contain the guitarist's trademark strumming style, but most of the tunes are folksy ruminations in guitar-friendly keys like C Major with atonal and polytonal embellishments that thin then thicken the texture, superimposing increasingly disjunct and angular sonorities over pedal tones in dissonant yet lyrical stream-of-consciousness narratives.

*Orchestrion*, in contrast, is a radical downsizing of the jazz band as we know it or a radical expansion of an individual's ability to sound like a group, whichever you prefer. With pneumatic and solenoid linkages and midi-sequencing, Metheny has created a leviathan instrument of keyboards, wind-blown bottles, vibes, marimba, robotic guitars, basses and a potpourri of drums and percussion, all triggered live. For the album, he programmed complex song-forms that fully exploit the contraption's potential, often aping the sound of the Pat Metheny Group in full force. While the machine has limited ability to render subtle dynamic contrasts (the conga lacks a satisfying slap, the bass a percussive attack) or interactive comping, this is no stiff-armed Frankenstein but a seemingly human mechanical musician, replicating the nuances of Metheny's idiosyncratic touch with relative finesse. When you add charismatic real-time blowing over top, lyric solos of grace, complexity and passion, the end result transcends its predetermined elements.

Live at Town Hall (May 21st), Metheny stood alone on stage, surrounded by a wall of semi-shrouded instruments. He began with a piece on acoustic baritone, followed by another on a 42-string Picasso harp guitar, producing koto-like melodies with windmill strums. The *Orchestrion* was fully revealed with a dramatic removal of the drapes and Metheny kicked off (literally, with his footswitch) "Bright Size Life" and on into most of the *Orchestrion* suite, causing jaw-drops and chuckles as the gawgawed audience sat transfixed at the impressive spectacle. Although some of the numbers seemed to drag on a bit and the machine, for all its perfection, lent a certain 'second-hand' quality to the performance, Metheny made his moments, especially towards the end when he covered Ornette Coleman or, during a second encore, when he improvised a layered groove, triggered instrument by instrument, that, in spite of its assembly-line production, honed a sharp edge with Metheny's searing guitar-synth solo.

For more information, visit [nonesuch.com](http://nonesuch.com)



*Eponymous* The Universal Quartet (Blackout Music)  
*Towards the Unknown*

**Yusef Lateef/Adam Rudolph (Meta)**  
**Yèyí: A Wordless Psalm of Prototypical Vibrations**  
**Adam Rudolph/Ralph Jones (Meta)**

by John Sharpe

How does it feel to be a founding father? Ask master percussionist Adam Rudolph when you hear him. He

was in at the beginning of the burgeoning world music scene, meeting Gambian kora player Foday Musa Suso in 1977 and with him forming the Mandingo Griot Society: the first band to blend ancestral African sounds with R&B and jazz. Another career defining encounter came in 1988 when Rudolph began his association with the legendary Yusef Lateef, who has similarly nurtured non-Western credentials since the early '60s.

On *The Universal Quartet* Rudolph and the 91-year old Lateef team up with the Danish duo of drummer Kresten Osgood and trumpeter Kasper Tranberg for a wide-ranging studio session mixing evocative ethnic excursions with more conventional offerings, which nonetheless betray a diaspora of influences from North Africa, via the Delta to jazz. Much of the album's best has a spare conversational quality borne from the musicians taking their time to get to where they want to go. Lateef in particular impresses with his sinewy tenor saxophone solo over rumbling drums on "Clustronics". There is a winning out of focus aspect to his blowing: like broad smears of paint freely applied to the canvas rather than finely inscribed lines. Rudolph's sintir (a sort of African bass lute) sets up a relaxed loping rhythm on "47th Street Breakdown" above which Lateef intones in a deep soulful voice, with an attractive blues texture, accentuated by Tranberg's muted obligatos. Two spacious duos make up the bulk of "Before Until After" after a sorrowful falling horn unison while the lilting lullaby of the concluding "Sky Magenta" revels in casual interplay between trumpet and tenor, in a satisfying conclusion.

On *Towards the Unknown* the American pair perform with orchestral accompaniment. Rudolph's "Concerto for Brother Yusef" marries orchestra with soloist most successfully, aided by the fact that the Go: Organic Orchestra Strings are themselves improvisers, able to breathe life into Rudolph's writing and conduction. To start a rolling sintir ostinato backed by swelling strings forms a timeless backdrop for Lateef's impromptu primal blues. But at the center is a wonderful, unhurried tenor saxophone exposition replete with gruff lyricism, initially with a frame drum groove, but then suddenly keening anxiously in an unfamiliar terrain of swirling strings and resonating cymbal. Only a final arch recitation atop another bluesy strum doesn't stand repeated spins. By contrast, Lateef's "Percussion Concerto (for Adam Rudolph)" seems through-composed, apart from spaces for Rudolph's hand drums. The sweeping orchestral backing evokes a contemporary classical ethos though permeated by a melodic sensibility. But there is sometimes a sense of procession along separate courses, which coalesce only where the rhythmic momentum bleeds into the ensemble charts.

Finally on *Yèyí* Rudolph joins reedman Ralph Jones for an unbroken live date demarcated into ten tracks. Jones has also been part of the percussionist's Moving Pictures and Go: Organic Orchestra and the two share a profound bond. Both recycle an arsenal of instruments and draw on a variety of approaches influenced by African and Indian cultures, as well as more traditional forms, such as "Motherless Child" purveyed by Jones on the Middle Eastern ney flute, accompanied by Rudolph's ringing cup gongs. Though subtitled "A wordless psalm of prototypical vibrations", this is more meditation than psalm. That's not to say that it is somnambulant, but that there is a paradoxical stillness to the improvised flow, albeit with some notable exceptions, such as the lengthy "Celestial Space" for Jones' incantatory tenor saxophone and Rudolph's cantering percussion and the closing "Thankfulness and Joy", which provides a fitting finale to an intimate duet.

For more information, visit [blackoutmusic.dk](http://blackoutmusic.dk) and [metarecords.com](http://metarecords.com). Rudolph's *Go: Organic Percussion* is at *The Stone Jul. 17th*. See Calendar.