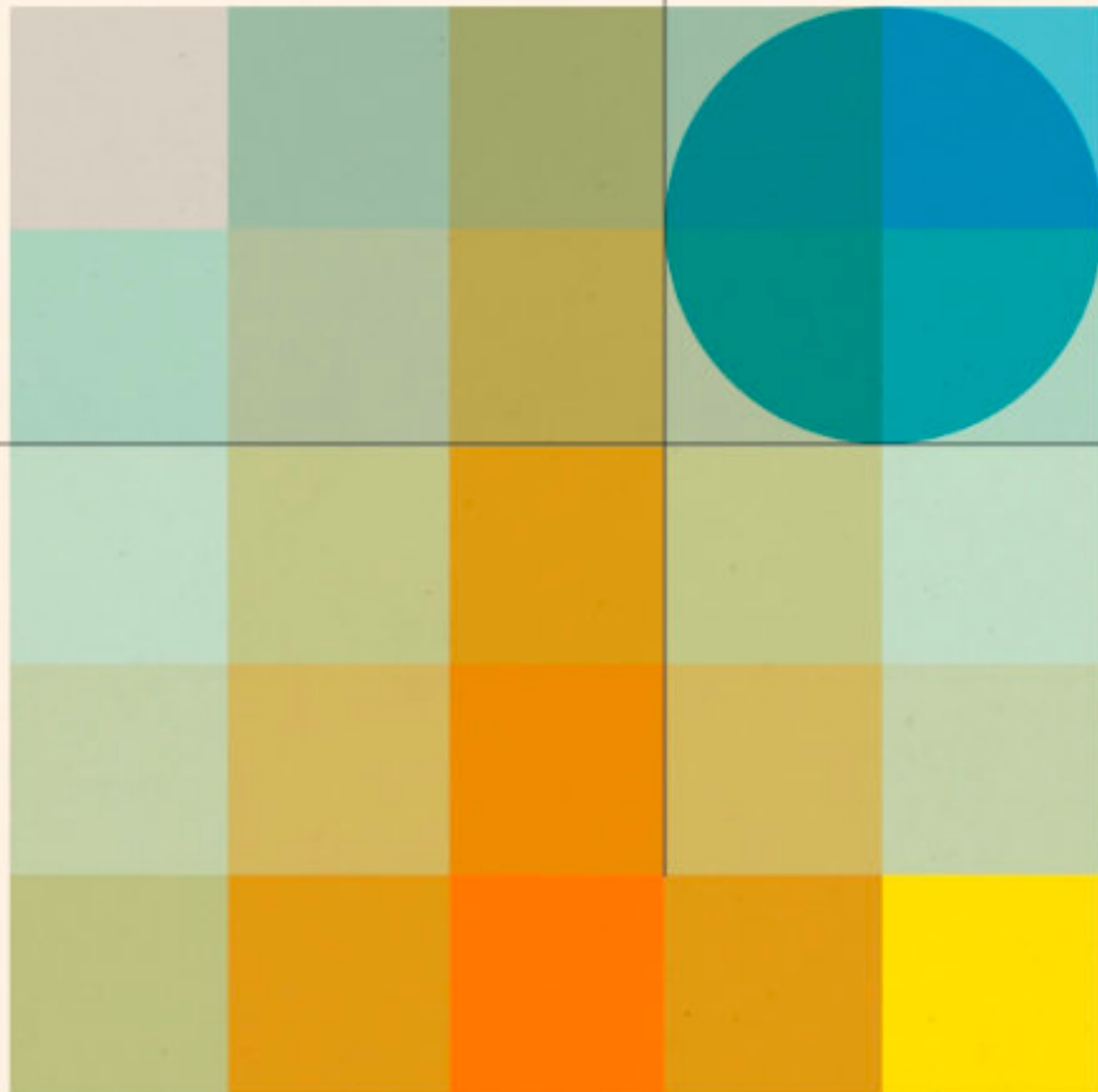


COACTION

ORBITS TRIO + 3



A GRANT RICHARDS PROJECT

Artists like Paul Motian and Andrew Hill never found much pleasure in predictability. Actively roaming the elaborate tapestries of improvisational music, they crafted brilliant careers by being artistic chameleons, adapting to a variety of genres while simultaneously helping to reinvent every art form they touched. Their recordings were crisp, lean, quizzical, intriguing and never boring. Pretty much exactly what you can expect from pianist Grant Richards and *Coaction*, his latest musical quest with his Orbits Trio +3 group supported by a generous grant from the Cafe Royal Cultural Foundation.

Having explored straight ahead, Latin jazz, fusion, and vocal themes in previous projects, with *Coaction* Richards leans into chamber music by incorporating violin, cello and tenor saxophone in subtle ways. "I love assimilating melodies, ideas, and odd structures into my songs," Richards says. "I have a process of really digging into music that I find interesting - that's the biggest throughline of my work." Throughline indeed as *Coaction* incorporates compelling melodies, elements of raw spontaneity, improvisation, and the challenge of condensing complicated artistic forms into elegant musical story-telling.

And this is exactly where artistic chameleons thrive. Blending in while absorbing a variety of musical styles, they process the mechanics of convention before crafting an alternative understanding of what jazz can sound like. For Richards, this has meant absorbing the work of heroes like Chick Corea, Eddie Palmieri, Herbie Hancock and Fred Hirsch while honoring the improvisational qualities of Latin jazz, funk, neo-soul and chamber music. If anything, Richards'

artistic ingenuity is informed by a heightened understanding of the elastic quality of composing and arranging. "For me composing is meditative and cathartic. I'll leave a voice recorder going while trying to capture lightning in the bottle or just figuring out how the puzzle pieces of a tune fit together."

Tilt (hope and heartbreak) opens Richards' foray into exploring the album's overarching theme of "coaction of various emotional states of mind." Ever the music theory nerd, here he finds an inquisitive way to blend all twelve augmented major 7 chords (yeah, all twelve) into a composition that curiously lurches along before ending with a searing solo by cellist Agustin Uriburu. *Highlands Swing (joy and unity)* was composed during Richards' time as the musical director for the 2019 Jacob's Pillow's Tap Dance program in Becket, Massachusetts. Sounding like McCoy Tyner channeling a new found fascination for Irish folk music, Richards creates a gracious foundation for the distinctive musical voice of violinist Alex Hargreaves before ending the song with an elegant solo himself.

The album's *First Interlude* incorporates one of many small improvisational pieces structured only by specific prompts Richards offered to the band. Basic suggestions of how to manage the sonic energy, density of interplay or specific chords to incorporate into the music, set the tone for each interlude on the album. As untraditional ballads go, *Pathos (empathy and sorrow)* exquisitely captures the complicated emotional landscape Richards' has experienced while living in New York City. Long notes from Hargreaves and cellist Agustin Uriburu frame the somber melody as Sims solo

takes center stage before the song comes to a graceful close. Diligence and perseverance shape the musicality of *Pieces Come Together (patience and fulfillment)* with Hargreaves and saxophonist Julieta Eugenio gliding through chord changes accenting the harmony's uplifting message of hope.

Short for "free-trio," *Frio* finds Richards balancing the spinning plates of improvisation, instrumental chemistry and just enough structure to keep the composition from running aground. Totally swinging, punctuated with rhythmic kicks, *Ka-Pow* sets the table for Richards, Hargreaves, Eugenio and drummer Roberto Glaquinto to groove in style before Sims and Hargreaves cap the song with their striking improvisational ending. Uriburu's cello signals the beginning of *Belly Of The Beast (adversity and perseverance)*, Richards' oddly menacing anthem of overcoming hardship. Minor chord progressions paired with Glaquinto's rhythmic intensity become the composition's storm which dissipates as mysteriously as it begins.

Bassist John Sims *Tricks* and Wayne Shorter's classic *Orbits* act as the only non-Richards compositions on the album. *Tricks* unfolds as a gorgeous melodic vehicle for the trio while *Orbits* takes on a slightly slower pace, featuring Eugenio's lush tone on saxophone while showcasing Shorter's enduring legacy of one of jazz's most prolific composers. As poignant as the musical poetic form it emulates, *Kamata, a haiku (balance and peace)* speaks to the Tokyo neighborhood where Richards once lived while playing in Japan. True to form, the bar structure and melody of the song are based on the five-seven-five numeric format of haiku. Honoring the influence of musical scholar Nicolas Slonimsky, whose book *Thesaurus Of Scales And Melodic Patterns* factored into saxophonist

John Coltrane's expansive musical dexterity, *Minolsky* allows Richards and his trio to graciously close the album on their own persuasive musical terms.

Coaction coordinates its magnetic ebb and flow through the unique alchemy Richards applies to developing small ideas into larger conceptual frameworks. "When I compose, I often take a germ of an idea and stretch it into an entire long form piece of music," Richards shared, "so that my compositions can have a distinctive weight and impact on people." At two volumes and fourteen songs, *Coaction* offers many "Mad Libs" like experiences where Richards' compositions provide delightful spaces for listeners to insert their own emotional meaning. Unconventional, clearly informed by but not beholden to the traditional scripts of hard bop, swing or avant garde music, *Coaction* acts like fusion cuisine, exhilarating your musical palate while experiencing a new kind of sonic umami you won't forget anytime soon.