

*Into the Labyrinth*, the third studio recording from Groove Apparatus, features ten new compositions and marks the group's first recording with guitarist Vic Juris.

The band bursts out of the gate with "Noodle," dedicated to Avidon's newborn son, Leo. With its infectious melody and propulsive rhythmic drive, this relentless shuffle is classic Groove Apparatus. Avidon's muscular saxophone sound, Juris's prodigious harmonic vocabulary, and Swanson's unrelenting intensity are on full display. The solos culminate in an elaborate soli chorus, in which the saxophone and guitar—in unison—trade eights with the drums.

"Morpheus," which takes its name from ancient mythology—the Greek god of dreams—is written exclusively in the medieval Phrygian mode. The harmonically static A-section presents an expansive lyrical saxophone melody that floats over a bass ostinato. In contrast, the B-section moves through a series of chords that accompany a Phrygian melody with an ever-changing modal center. Adding to the dream-like character of the tune is Juris, who creates an esoteric tapestry of nuanced harmonies, and Taylor, whose kaleidoscopic arsenal of cymbals and chimes adds additional color to the proceedings. Juris and Avidon each take well-crafted solos, and Avidon's evocative use of multiphonics complements Juris's guitar effects to create an otherworldly sonic realm.

"When All Else Fails" illustrates how Taylor's post-tonal, twelve-tone logic has increasingly influenced and penetrated his jazz compositions. This through-composed, 24-bar tune is a compendium of minor seventh chords, with all twelve chord-roots utilized and arranged in an intricate web of two complementary whole-tone collections. The chords of the first collection are arranged in chromatic mediant relationships; the latter collection explores the parallel, chord planing technique. One can make a strong case that this composition's underlying harmonic theory is more indebted to Debussy than to any jazz composer; nonetheless, Avidon and Juris navigate the labyrinth of harmonies with deftness and creativity in their respective improvisations. The title of this buoyant, up-tempo tune refers to the philosophical notion espoused by two of Taylor's mentors—William Fielder and Ted Dunbar—bearing witness to the life-affirming power of music, "in life, when all else fails...the music remains."

Swanson's "[026] Blues" was inspired by the great American composer Milton Babbitt and the principles of set theory. A cursory listen indicates that this is a straight-ahead 12-bar blues. However, a closer inspection reveals a sophisticated composition whose melody, played in unison by guitar and saxophone, is constructed of a single three-note melodic cell, a [026] trichord, which is transformed through transposition and inversion over the span of the composition. Another integral dimension of this melody is its rhythmic-metric organization. Set against an accompaniment in quadruple meter, the melody is organized primarily in three-beat groupings creating an intricate polymeter.

“Leo’s Lullaby” is a poignant ballad written for Avidon’s son. This 32-bar AABA tune presents a melody in the A-section that is transposed to a different tonality for each subsequent statement. The overall harmonic plan of the tune ascends in minor thirds, ending a minor third below where it began. The ensuing chorus thus completes the ascent through the octave, bringing the composition full circle. On this performance Avidon, Swanson, and Juris—taking a turn on the acoustic guitar—contribute beautifully evocative solos.

“Runaway Trane” is an up-tempo juggernaut. Avidon pays homage to John Coltrane and his penchant for exotic scales by basing this composition on the hexatonic, or augmented scale. Cast in an AAB form, the composition begins with an eight-bar melody constructed from this symmetrical scale and then restates it a whole step lower; the two hexatonic collections are complementary, completing the twelve-tone aggregate. The contrasting B-section, accompanied by a change in feel, is composed in the Dorian mode. A coda rounds off the piece by returning to a hexatonic scale a minor second below the original, an amalgam of the two previous collections composed of three notes from each.

Taylor’s enigmatic composition “The Crescent Moon” conjures up images of the mystical night sky with its haunting melody and veiled harmonies. The delicate counterpoint between bass, saxophone, and guitar; the non-functional harmonies; shimmering cymbal rolls; and unconventional metric organization all contribute to the evocative nature of the work.

“Southern Comfort” is just good-old down-home Southern groove. Swanson sets the tone on this one, laying down an infectious ostinato with his huge, solid tone. Juris and Avidon contribute powerful solos.

“Equilibrium” is a 20-bar through-composed work whose title partly refers to the tune’s carefully balanced melodic construction. The initial phrase inhabits a confined ambitus, but as the melody unfolds it expands in both directions away from its axis, creating a wedge, reaching its apogee just prior to the final cadence, wherein the melody returns to its axial position. The seven structurally significant pitches that emerge over the course of the melody are all members of the Lydian diminished, or harmonic major scale, and forge an intrinsic link between melody and harmony at the work’s macro-level.

“All Things Considered” is a veritable *tour de force*, replete with chromatically ascending tonal centers, multiple changes of feel, polymeters, metric modulations, and recurring pitch-class sets, the seeds of which are all sown at the outset of this extended composition. The unaccompanied saxophone launches into the work’s seminal motive, derived from a [0136] tetrachord. The second phrase introduces one of the composition’s most notable features, the chromatically ascending tonal center. The chromatic ascent is featured prominently later in the work: during the solos in which each chorus modulates up a half step and then during the drum solo

where the underlying ostinato, derived from the aforementioned [0136] tetrachord, ascends through all twelve tonal regions.

Next, a sudden change of feel to Latin—initiated by the bass and drums in the ninth measure—is a seemingly mercurial diversion, yet it is here that the source of the ensuing protracted Latin sections is revealed. Later, the use of polymeters and metric modulations serve to bring the work full circle, and the composition ends where it began, in the same swing feel and tempo, accompanied by a return of the original tonal center. The work concludes with a restatement of the primary motive, which gives way to a thrilling saxophone cadenza, again derived from the [0136] tetrachord. While many of the compositional devices employed in this organic work are more common to contemporary “classical” music, their function here serves as a means of codification, a means of uniting *all things* within the composition.