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lineage between the modal nature of traditional Middle Eastern music and modern pop and jazz by inserting brief references to the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" and Miles' "All Blues" into the brooding "Without You, What Will I Do?"; he infuses "Surely, You Don't Say That You Also Cry?" with playful high-treble filips and a propulsive, contemporary-sounding drive.

On the trio outings, Donelian relaxes his timbre and his tempo to ease into an unforced yet sturdy swing. "My Sweet Harp," by the 20th-century Armenian composer Khachatur Avetisyan (the only non Sayat-Nova offering here), references Brubeck in both its time signature and its theme. "As Long As I Draw Breath," befitting both its title and the trajectory of the composer's life (as well as Donelian's own approach toward, and realization of, Sayat-Nova's vision) is imbued with a feeling of steadfast determination, expressed with gentleness and grace. **DAVID WHITEIS**

## JOHN ELLIS & ANDY BRAGEN

**MOBRO** (Parade Light)



Saxophonist John Ellis' *Mobro*, a concept album in collaboration with librettist Andy Bragen, is a radical departure from his previous release, the contemporary postbop date *It's You I Like*, but it never veers too far into avant-garde territory; it's too melodically centered and plaintively lyrical, with personnel including vocalist Becca Stevens, trumpeter Shane Endsley and guitarist Mike Moreno straddling downtown, folk and straight-ahead sub-genres. Though it is a dense recording—by the third track, "Storm," vocalist Miles Griffith unleashes ferocious, glottal vocal fry, and Ellis' orchestration tilts towards Maria Schneider at her most discordant—it is often mellow. Ellis' brand of chamber jazz stems more from narrative structure than third-stream polytonality.

The album's dynamic ebb and flow was inspired by the journey of the *Mobro 4000*, a barge that made headlines in 1987 when it hauled more than 3,000 tons of garbage down the Eastern Seaboard, unable to dispose of its sizable load. Ellis' compositional devices reflect the titular vessel's journey. The opener, "Anticipation," leads off with a Copland-esque textured brass chorale that gradually escalates in tempo and dissonance, resolving into the ethereal voicings and cymbal play of "Sailing," which introduces Bragen's stirring lyrics. In contrast to the frenetic brass modulations and Ellis' angular playing on "Mutiny/Rebellion," the subdued "Doldrums" consists almost entirely of furtive whispers and atmospheric sound design by Roberto Carlos Lange that seems to reverberate from the hull of a ship. At journey's end, the dirge-like solemnity of the loping midtempo ballad "Mourning" pairs guitarists Moreno and Ryan Scott with Stevens' sea-battered vibrato and a keening rejoinder from Ellis. Finally, the exuberant trad-jazz closer, "Celebration," a return to the tonic, proves that more than a quarter-century later, one man's trash is another's sonic treasure. **AIDAN LEVY**

## JOHN ESCREET

**SOUND, SPACE AND STRUCTURES** (Sunnyside)



U.K.-born pianist and composer John Escreet has always demonstrated a knack for the adventurous: When he arrived on the New York City jazz scene in 2006, his formidable improvisations resembled those of Jason Moran and Vijay Iyer—searching and explorative yet melodic. This