



## John Beasley Presents MONK'estra, Vol. 2

MACK AVENUE 125

★★★★½

In the Monastic One's centennial year, pianist John Beasley hits us dead center with studio-smart takes on Monk's deep book. His new album features rapid-fire surprises, spiky asides and a quirky sense of truthful swing.

Beasley has also engineered some headliner cameos. Violinist Regina Carter sidles enticingly through "Crepuscule With Nellie" and Dianne Reeves demurely sings "Dear Ruby" (aka "Ruby, My Dear"), both to a nuanced reed backdrop. Pedrito Martinez rattles dazzling bata and conga on "Crisis Cross," firing through thickets of brass, and flextime rhythm boosts guest solos from tenor saxophonist Kamasi Washington and trombonist Conrad Herwig, who gaily quotes "I Want To Be Happy."

A straight-up "Played Twice" showcasing reedmaster Bob Sheppard's soprano is the date's meatiest solo; his alto later summons Johnny Hodges amid Ellington-esque reeds framing "Light Blue," with Beasley's weird keening synth. Brian Swartz contributes the funk-driven arrangement and trumpet solo for "I Mean You" with nods for Danny Janklow's alto and Adam Schroeder's bari between backbeats, repeats and stop-time brass. Trombonist Francisco Torres is in the tantalizingly bipolar "Ugly Beauty/Pannonica," with its Latin reed coda, and Ryan Dragon's staunch task on "Work." More Monkery for his centennial (Tadd and Dizzy, too)? Bring 'em on!

—Fred Bouchard

**Presents MONK'estra, Vol. 2:** Brake's Sake; Played Twice; Crepuscule With Nellie; Evidence; Ugly Beauty/Pannonica; I Mean You; Light Blue; Dear Ruby; Crisis Cross; Work. (58:20)

**Personnel:** John Beasley, piano, synthesizer, arranger, conductor; Bijon Watson, Jamie Hovorka, James Ford, Brian Swartz (1–3, 5–7, 9–10), Brandyn Phillips (4, 8), trumpets; Bob Sheppard, Danny Janklow, Tom Luer (1–3, 5–7, 9–10), Thomas Peterson, Adam Schroeder, Alex Budman (4, 8), woodwinds; Francisco Torres (2–6, 8–10), Wendell Kelly, Ryan Dragon, Steve Hughes, Ido Meshulam (1, 7), trombones; Ben Shepherd, bass; Terreon Gully, Gene Coye (7), drums; Dontae Winslow, trumpet, rap vocal (1); Regina Carter, violin (3); Kamasi Washington, tenor saxophone (4); Conrad Herwig, trombone (4); Dianne Reeves, vocal (8); Pedrito Martinez, conga, bata (9).

Ordering info: [mackavenue.com](http://mackavenue.com)

## Kevin Hays & Lionel Loueke

### Hope

NEWVELLE RECORDS 008

★★★★

One of the beauties of music is to connect musicians whose background couldn't be more different. Indeed, what could a pianist from Connecticut have in common with a guitarist from Benin, a small, French-speaking Western African country? Kevin Hays and Lionel Loueke bring some answers to this question on their first duo album.

The title track was written by Loueke and provides the thematic element that runs through the album. Even when the songs draw from painful experiences, personal or not, rays of optimism manage to shine through.

The compositions are neither jazz nor world music. They offer freedom to these two musicians, who both seem to be on an exploration toward personal fulfillment. In their search, they blur lines and give voice to their inner sensibilities. Piano and guitar are often supplemented by wordless vocals—even mouth noises—to flesh out the songs and give them a singular and intriguing touch. Loueke at times adds off-kilter and creative flourishes, which prevent them from falling into overbearing sentimentality.

Throughout, Hays and Loueke pay tribute



to various influences. Chilean singer and activist Violeta Parra is the inspiration for the Latin-tinted and uplifting "Violeta." The celebratory "Milton" is dedicated to Milton Nascimento, the famed Brazilian singer-songwriter. "Feuilles-O" is a haunting traditional Haitian tune and a Hays favorite—he sings it in Creole.

Hope is a heartfelt and unpretentious statement by two artists who do not ignore their own cultural roots but seek ways to connect them to other experiences or to find common threads.

—Alain Drouot

**Hope:** Violeta; Hope; Aziza Dance; Feuilles-O; Milton; Twins; Veuve Malienne; All I Have. (61:53)

**Personnel:** Kevin Hays, piano, vocals; Lionel Loueke, guitar, vocals.

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