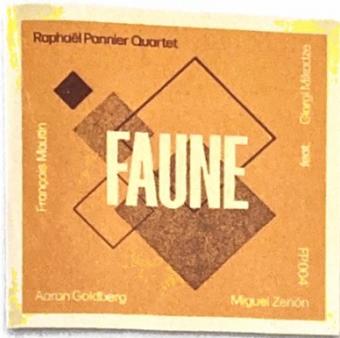


JAZZ


RAPHAËL PONNIER
Faune

Ponnier, drums; Miguel Zenón, alto sax; Aaron Goldberg or Giorgi Mikadze, piano; Francois Moutin, bass.
 French Paradox/L'Autre Distribution (CD).
 Pannier & Zenón, prods.; Mike Marciano, eng.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

On paper, *Faune*, the debut album by drummer-composer Raphaël Ponnier, might sound twee: a slowed-down cover of Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman," a frenzied zigzag through Wayne Shorter's "E.S.P.," one piece each by Ravel, Messiaen, and Brazilian bandolinist Hamilton de Holanda, and a handful of originals by the leader. The thing is, it works, in its individual tracks and as a moody, sensuous whole. Ponnier, just 30, born in Paris, schooled at Berklee, living in Harlem, has roots in the French classics and American jazz standards. His fusions run deep; there's nothing rickety—neither "chamber jazz" nor "jazzed-up classics"—about this.

The Ornette cover, with Miguel Zenón blowing as lyrically as I've heard him, truly captures a lonely woman, different from Ornette's, more harmonically spare, but authentic and moving. The Shorter swings in its own, clipped way. The classical pieces, where Giorgi Mikadze takes over from Aaron Goldberg on piano, are idiomatically classical but with drums carrying the rhythm: Ponnier proves himself a colorist on percussion. The music floats and sways.

A big part of this sensation comes from Mike Marciano's work at the board. He recorded the session in 24/96 using a Neve console, a stereo pair of AKG 460 mikes over the drums, and two mikes on Zenón's sax—a vintage Neumann U87 and John Coltrane's personal RCA 77 ribbon (borrowed from his friend, Ravi Coltrane, John's son). The sound is spacious and romantic without getting too ambient or lush.—Fred Kaplan

ROCK/POP


SAUNDEUR JURRIAANS
Beasts

Decca (16-bit/44.1 kHz streaming on Qobuz). 2020.
 Saundeur Jurriaans, prod.; D. James Goodwin, eng.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

While Saundeur Jurriaans was writing his solo debut, he became a sought-after soundtrack composer with musical partner Danny Bensi. They helped create the grim, ethereal moods of *Ozark*, *The OA*, and *Fear the Walking Dead*. With *Beasts*, Jurriaans soundscapes his own story. The result is engrossing.

The album journeys from chaos into a greater understanding, with musical timbres as the storytelling language. The opening track moves toward a destination with its lumbering guitar

pattern and many percussive sounds. As the strings, played by Bensi, swell to a climax, they're cut through and deflated by Jurriaans's lonely guitar.

That sense of unwelcome solitude continues in the piano-and-string-quartet texture of "A Different Shade of the Same," which finds Jurriaans singing "I'm falling faster than light, faster than I can scream," in a halting rhythm. The songwriter's interest in meditation and Eastern philosophy comes across in the introspective "All the King's Men," accompanied by repeated mantra-like guitar patterns.

The rainbow of inventive tone colors broadens in "Last Man Standing," Jurriaans providing a clarinet obbligato and adding layers of vocals and bright percussive slaps. "Brittle Bones" is a haunting homage to the Spanish guitar tradition, displaying Jurriaans's skill, while in "The Three of Me," Bensi's weirdly dissonant violin emphasizes the vulnerability in Jurriaans's voice.

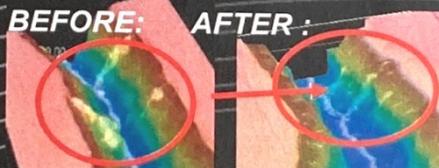
The album closes with "Miles to Go," a rumbling acceptance of life's trials. The overall effect is terrifying and hopeful at once, a dichotomy that speaks to anyone who has tried to grow beyond suffering.—Anne E. Johnson

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