



PLAYLIST | Nate Chinen

Making Mischief Along With the Melodies



HIROYUKI ITO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Paul Motian, Chris Potter, and Jason Moran

So much about jazz, at its higher levels, has to do with an end run around erudition. There's not much art in methodology, not inherently, so a great soloist works past it without quite letting it go. The drummer Paul Motian is a genius when it comes to nudging band mates out on that tightrope; he has the Zen touch and a mischief maker's nerve. About a year ago he played a week at the Village Vanguard with the tenor saxophonist Chris Potter and the pianist Jason Moran, younger musicians of steady intellect and acute perception. He made them both sound wakeful and unknowing, in the best possible way. "Lost in a Dream" (ECM), due out on March 9, features music from that run — some old songs and some new ones, all but one by Mr. Motian — and its patient, earnest undertone feels free of pretense. Melody is at the heart of everything on this album; it brings out a contemplative glow

in Mr. Moran, who has freely demonstrated that side in his own work, and an openhearted tenderness in Mr. Potter, who generally hasn't. Mr. Motian keeps things stirring, as much on his supple ballads ("Casino," "Cathedral Song") as on his tripping-

over-your-shoelace tunes ("Drum Music," "Ten"). He's in his element at the Vanguard — in which he and Mr. Moran will set up shop again, with another exciting saxophonist, Greg Osby, from March 16 to 21 (villagevanguard.com).

Freeway and Jake One

A corrective infusion for a foundering system: that's what the Philadelphia rapper Freeway apparently had in mind when he mapped out his new album, "The Stimulus Package" (Rhymesayers). Made with Jake One, a producer of classic-soul proclivity and G-Unit pedigree, it's a sumptuous vessel with room for redundancy. So the quiet-storm simmer of "Freekin' the Beat" melts into the urbane saunter of "Money." And both tracks share DNA with "She Makes Me Feel Alright," a carnal testimonial built on a Rick James sample.

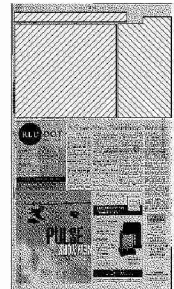
Freeway, a former Beanie Sigel protégé, is deep in his element here, spinning yarns, spouting warnings and flaunting skills, all in the hoarsely urgent bark of a guy struggling to be heard at a party. (He gets especially emphatic in the company of guests like Young Chris, who raps a verse on "Microphone Killah," and Bun B, who turns up on "Sho Nuff.") But because he's also prone to embarrassing turns of phrase — "Instead of Hooked on Phonics/I got everybody hooked on me," he sputters in "The Product" — this album also underscores Freeway's stalled progress in the hip-hop mainstream. To that end "The Stimulus Package" reflects a blunt purpose: economic recovery scaled back to a single career.

Xiu Xiu

The title track of this art-rock band's new album, "Dear God, I



Above left, the jazz drummer Paul Motian; left, the group Good for Cows; right, the art-rock band Xiu Xiu; far right, the Philadelphia rapper Freeway.



"Hate Myself" (Kill Rock Stars), comes on like a coughing fit, with five laser blasts produced by a hand-held game console. The song then calms, coalescing around the bedroom-dramatic vocals of Jamie Stewart. "Despair will hold a place in my heart," he sings, "A bigger one than you do (do, do)." Against synth drums and acoustic guitar, he adds: "And I will always be nicer to the cat/Than I am to you



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(you, you)." Leave it to Mr. Stewart, Xiu Xiu's chief instigator, to make a crisis of faith seem both grandiose and bitchy. This album, which he produced with the drummer Greg Saunier of Deerhoof, shudders with the tension of opposing ideals: folksiness and futurism, clarity and ambiguity. (Also sadism and masochism; a video for "Dear God, I Hate Myself" has Angela Seo, Mr. Stewart's only full-time band mate, inducing herself to vomit. On him, we're led to believe.) The lyrical and musical details add up to a pop saga in the key of anguish. But when Mr. Stewart prayerfully cries, "I will never feel nor-



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mal," is that a complaint? Or a statement of intent?

Good for Cows

Among the musicians in Xiu Xiu's core rotation is Ches Smith, a drummer with one foot in experimental jazz. Good for Cows is his instrumental duo with the bassist Devin Hoff, who served his own stint in Xiu Xiu not long ago; "Audumla" (Web of Mimicry), their fifth album together, revolves around a tangle of shared interests, most of them dark and dense. Since forming in 1999, Good for Cows has been an acoustic band, if an unusually noisy one. Here, though, Mr. Hoff plays electric bass guitar, making the aggression all the more explicit. A track called "Secret Hobbies" lurches and then lunges through a haze of distorted overtones; on "Legion" the glacial crush of doom metal gives way to something sweaty and spasmodic. It's all good punishment, and to their credit, Mr. Hoff and Mr. Smith rarely leave you longing for a foreground. The murk is the music.

Original source material contains defects

Page 2 of 2