



**Salem 1692**  
**John Zorn (Tzadik)**  
by John Pietaro

Insurrection is the instrumental quartet most likely to sport John Zorn out front, but the saxophonist's role is purely composer/arranger and producer. The music, in the best gut-wrenching style, is played by guitarists Julian Lage and Matt Hollenberg, bassist Trevor Dunn and drummer Kenny Grohowski. This second album by the group, considerably harsher than its eponymous 2018 release, brandishes its caustic soundscape with intent. Lage and Hollenberg cast a sound war over the ten pieces comprising Zorn's suite of 17th century Salem, turbulently driven by Dunn and Grohowski.

The brutal misogyny, classism, racism, xenophobia and scapegoating that terrorized Massachusetts villagers three centuries back didn't occur in a vacuum: like the Inquisition that earlier tore Europe apart, the Salem witch trials were a perversion of religious teachings when faced with outsiders and the potential loss of power. The stain left by this purposeful reign of paranoia was the perfect metaphor during the '50s Red Scare, most powerfully symbolized in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. And while Zorn offers no specific political commentary here (though he did name a 2008 album *The Crucible*), the analogy appears all too obvious in today's orchestrated fear of the 'other'. In this regard, *Salem 1692* couldn't be more timely.

The selections are full-throttle Zorn, but even where the volume recedes ("Spectral Evidence", "Dark of the Moon", "Sarah Good"), the mood remains ominous. High-powered chromatic runs, stinging diminished fifths, throbbing basslines and generous use of reverb speak well to the hysteria. "Tituba", named for a slave falsely accused of conspiring with the devil, mixes in unison lines, burning drum breaks and a killer 7/8 section, the result of which sounds something like James "Blood" Ulmer and John McLaughlin jamming with 1981-era King Crimson... Downtown. Several pieces bear resemblance to classic fusion, albeit, via the darkest spectrum. "Malleus Maleficarum" is the climax of the work, filled with jarring aural explosions. And why not? It's named for the vile guidebook witch hunters used to elicit confessions.

For more information, visit [tzadik.com](http://tzadik.com). Zorn is at *Village Vanguard Jun. 9th*. See Calendar.



**Bäbi**  
**Milford Graves (IPS-Corbett vs. Dempsey)**  
by Pierre Crépon

Currently, the Merriam-Webster definition of "square root" is illustrated by a quote from a *New York Times* piece promoting a documentary about drummer Milford Graves, a film successfully making the rounds in cinema festivals around the world.

This casual instance of mainstream visibility

would have been hard to foresee in 1976, when Graves taped *Bäbi* live, or on the release of the album by IPS, Graves and drummer Andrew Cyrille's independently-operated label, the next year. When the unreleased material heard on the second CD of this reissue was recorded in 1969, Graves' name was more likely to be found in the Harlem-based *Amsterdam News*; he identified as a cultural nationalist and wrote about black revolutionary music free of Western thought.

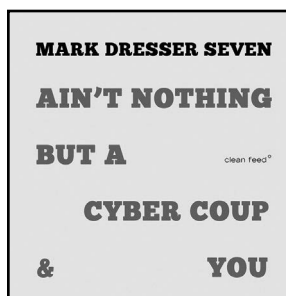
On the two sessions, the drums constitute a pulsating center of gravity, flanked by Arthur Doyle and Hugh Glover's reeds. Occasional mainstream visibility doesn't mean this music will become a commodity anytime soon. The saxophonists' point of departure is the most paroxysmal part of the free jazz solo, areas of pure sound production uncovered by previous avant garde players, used here as a continuous mode of expression through modulation and repetition.

Graves' kit is uniquely configured around removed bottom heads for maximal sound projection and a move away from the snare in favor of heavy tom use. His playing is equally unique, using the free-flowing approach of the avant garde while still sounding extremely rhythmical. Graves also makes frequent use of vocalizations.

The sound quality of the 1969 tape is precarious (it likely could not see a stand-alone release), but it does add something important to Graves' discography, sparse and devoid of leader material for that period after a 1965 debut for ESP-Disk' and a pair of self-released 1966 albums documenting the Yale University concert with Don Pullen on SRP: a glimpse at the beginnings of this long-standing trio, initiated that year and still playing only privately at that point. Paired with *Bäbi*, the 1969 session creates an arc that provides interesting historical food for thought, given the radical nature of the approach in the era's larger context.

The notion of 'classic' doesn't have much currency in avant garde jazz, but certain records inherit the status for the unique music they document. With its compact 30 minutes, *Bäbi* is one of them.

For more information, visit [corbettvsdempsey.com](http://corbettvsdempsey.com). Graves is at *Roulette Jun. 11th* as part of the *Vision Festival* and *Gavin Brown's Enterprise Jun. 27th*. See Calendar.



**Ain't Nothing But a Cyber Coup You**  
**Mark Dresser Seven (Clean Feed)**  
by Robert Bush

This is the second release from bassist Mark Dresser's septet on Clean Feed and could just be the most accessible and thrilling document in his large and creative discography. It combines elements of his previous ensembles with the focus on voluptuous melodic input from Michael Dessen (trombone), Nicole Mitchell (flutes), Keir GoGwilt (violin), Marty Ehrlich (reeds), Joshua White (piano) and Jim Black (drums). This is an album that manages to celebrate the jazz tradition (especially the groundbreaking music of Charles Mingus) while pushing that same tradition to its freest extremes.

It opens and closes with dedications to important musicians from Dresser's history who have passed on. "Black Arthur's Bounce" (for Arthur Blythe, with whom Dresser played in Stanley Crouch's early '70s Black Music Infinity) leaps out of the speakers with a brisk, Ornette Coleman-ish theme and quick kaleidoscopic snippets from every member of the band

before settling into a showcase for flute, trombone, piano and especially pungent alto saxophone.

The achingly beautiful "Gloaming" begins with the resonant sound of bowed bass, which seems to penetrate straight into the listener's chest, before plaintive violin and the rest of the group enter with fragments of the enticing melody equally distributed among the instruments. This piece highlights Dresser's fondness for pieces utilizing metric modulation.

"Let Them Eat Paper Towels" features Dresser's remarkable bi-tonal two-handed tapping before the full band enters with lots of extended techniques; the mournfully reflective theme references "Que Bonita Bandera", the unofficial anthem of Puerto Rico. Dreamy solos from Mitchell, Ehrlich and Dessen (whose long association with the bassist borders on the telepathic) seem to complete the piece until a sudden and violent duet between piccolo and vituperative drums veer off into uncharted territory. It's a wonderfully exciting moment.

Piano explodes with the danger of a guy juggling hand-grenades on a high wire to introduce the title track, which seems to contain a cell from Dizzy Gillespie's "Salt Peanuts" and goes on to feature most of the soloists in absolute top form.

The album's benediction comes in the form of another dedication to a fallen comrade, in this case, pianist Butch Lacy, who died in April 2018. "Butch's Balm" is as elegiac as "Black Arthur's Bounce" is ebullient. It features the haunting sound of bow in sweeping motion across bass strings while piano crawls forward under breathy contributions from Dessen and Mitchell. It's another highlight moment.

For more information, visit [cleanfeed-records.com](http://cleanfeed-records.com). Dresser is at *The Stone at The New School Jun. 12th*. See Calendar.

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