



**VEER Quartet**  
Sarah Bernstein (New Focus)  
by Thomas Conrad

There have been a few well-known jazz violinists over the years and jazz recordings “with strings” have been around forever. But historically, string sections have been used mostly in backgrounds for soloists, as ‘sweetening’. In the last 10 or 15 years, many jazz musicians have become interested in writing for strings, integrating violins and violas and cellos into their ensembles as full foreground participants.

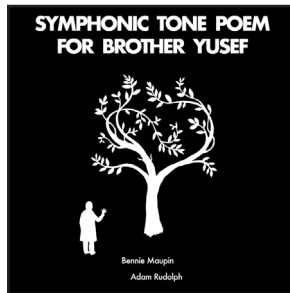
Sarah Bernstein takes this development to its next logical step. *VEER Quartet* is not an album that incorporates strings into an existing jazz band. The jazz band *is* a string quartet. To be sure, it is a jazz band equally capable of executing erudite classical chamber music, should the moment—or a Bernstein arrangement—call for it. Violinists Bernstein and Sana Nagano, violist Leonor Falcón and cellist Nick Jozwiak represent a new generation enabling new roles for their instruments in jazz. They can read like classical experts and wail like badass jazz improvisers.

Bernstein’s six meticulously detailed compositions demonstrate uncommon skill in manipulating four instruments. She treats her quartet like an orchestra. Two players may split off and become a plucked rhythm

section. Two duos may exchange calls and responses. Three players may weave intricate counterpoint while a fourth solos. Bernstein’s sophistication in managing all the moving parts is not an end in itself. It serves a larger purpose. She writes intriguing melodies. Then her band takes them through elaborate permutations. The centerpiece, at almost 13 minutes, is “Clay Myth”. Each member of the quartet is given space to reflect spontaneously on the stately, resonant melody while the remaining three provide provocative accompaniment.

Those not ready to relinquish familiar jazz instrumentation and dynamics may find this album a bridge too far. But for those open to the stylistic relativity now blurring the borders of the jazz art form, *VEER Quartet* will be technically impressive and imaginatively liberating.

For more information, visit [newfocusrecordings.com](http://newfocusrecordings.com). Bernstein is at Roulette Sep. 9th with Vinny Golia and Central Park Summerstage Sep. 10th with Adam Rudolph. See Calendar.



**Symphonic Tone Poem for Brother Yusef**  
Bennie Maupin/Adam Rudolph (Strut)  
by Andrey Henkin

When this reviewer was just a jazz fetus, he heard Miles Davis’ *Bitches Brew* for the first time and fortune

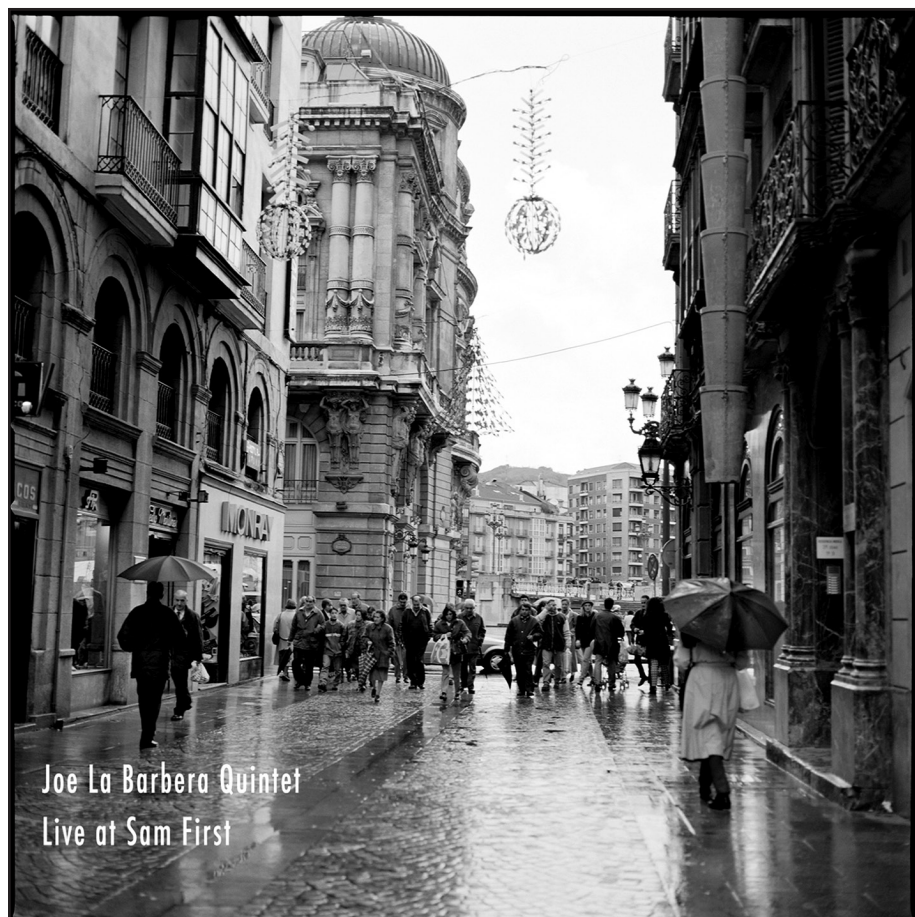
had it that he started with the wrong cassette. Running through “Spanish Key”’s opening salvo of drums, throbbing bass, spiky guitar and stabbing keyboard was something as elusive to young ears as dark energy is to cosmologists. Amid the thicket of three electric pianos, two electric bassists and paired drummers and percussionists was Bennie Maupin’s bass clarinet, often felt rather than heard.

Over 50 years later after *Bitches Brew*, that bass clarinet still has the same impact, but now in an album both very different than *Bitches Brew* in that it is a duet but also similar in that it envelops a listener in a fog of reeds and percussion, electronics and chanted vocals. Decades of jazz reviewing does not help to pierce the mystery of this musical universe.

Maupin, who also plays soprano saxophone and a panoply of flutes is paired with Adam Rudolph, credited with keyboards, myriad percussion instruments and idiophones, plus selya flute, mbuti harp, drum machine and thumb pianos. The latter is a veteran of the groups of Yusef Lateef, whose centennial was the impetus for this project at the 2020 Angel City Jazz Festival.

Across five movements and just over 40 minutes, Maupin and Rudolph operate in a restrained, almost minimalistic approach, sedate on the surface like a still pond but teeming with life just below, as various instruments dart and float through one another. The individual sections are not extricable, the complexity growing as more attention is paid, details requiring a new skill: peripheral hearing. Those listeners with patience will be greatly rewarded.

For more information, visit [strut.k7store.com](http://strut.k7store.com). Rudolph is at Central Park Summerstage Sep. 10th and The Jazz Gallery Sep. 15th. See Calendar.



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