

Ro Sham Beaux

Year: 2012

Style: Rock/Indie/Jazz

Label: Red Piano Records

Musicians: Zac Shaiman - saxophones & effects; Luke Marantz - keyboard; Oliver Watkinson - bass; Jacob Cole - drums & glockenspiel.

Review: After one listen to Boston's **Ro Sham Beaux**, I was entreated to concede, unambiguously, on two counts from the experience, that the person who described RSB as having "*honed a compelling book of original tunes that embraces pop's concision, indie rock's textural resourcefulness and jazz's improvisational imperative*," definitely knew his RSB onions, and further that, "*Rather than serving as a launching pad for extended solos, RSB tunes are vehicles for jaw-dropping group interplay and quicksilver shifts in tempo, texture and momentum. Above all, RSB infuses their music with a sense of unabashed joy, as if exalting in each other's company.*" My other concession derives from this cogent observation of the band's pianist/keyboardist, **Luke Marantz**: "*We thrive in the spaces between order and chaos.*"



Ro Sham Beaux
L - R Oliver Watkinson (bass)
Jacob Cole (drums)
Zac Shaiman (saxophone)
Luke Marantz (keyboard)

Well, as the 'spinning' of the CD progressed, I made a discovery of my own, which more or less, corroborates the aforementioned morsels of sagacity, that: **Ro Sham Beaux's** saxophonist **Zac Shaiman** plays with a full-length, liquid intonation that is unforgettably distinguishable, and presents an inviting, accommodating foil to the untamed, jazz indie rock rhythms surging like molten, musical lava, out of the combo behind him.

Ro Sham Beaux is not a group of rock jocks out of a jamming garage that found a way to put together a record date. These players are the real deal; highly trained; experienced and rigorously steeped in the jazz tradition. Saxophonist **Zac Shaiman**, started in his teens at **Don Braden's** NJPAC jazz program, and has performed with drummer **Billy Hart**, pianist **Geri Allen** and saxophonist **Jashua Redman**. Pianist **Luke Marantz** earned several national jazz awards before graduating from Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, Texas. Bassist **Oliver Watkinson** studied jazz bass at the New England Conservatory Preparatory School, and has gone on to undergraduate studies. Drummer **Jacob Cole**, after early mentoring from master drummers **Rick Lotter** and **Eddie Marshall**, went on to the Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico, where he studied jazz and Afro-Caribbean styles and rhythms.

There is a wonderfully engaging mixture of styles, tempo and rhythm seasoned into the eleven tracks on the date, starting with **Zac Shaiman's** melodic, flared-nostril, galloping saxophone sound (*BEARBLADE*). Distinctly discernible is the Caribbean influenced, sauntering bass line of Oliver Watkinson, that carries with it a subtly attracting reggae flavor. Shaiman's voice is especially suited to the tunes with a flowing melodic lines (*Town*), with its picturesque, lilting, liquid, waltz tempo, that draws an extended bass solo from Watkinson. **Jacob Cole's** brush work is impeccable, his time keeping precise, and he shows great maturity with his balanced approach.

The band collectively weaves a magic web of pungent rock and cool jazz (*Meatballs are the Way to a Woman's Heart*). Shaiman's gives the tune an instrumental pop/R&B sound, reminiscent of the playing style of the influential 80s saxophonist **David Sanborn**. It is probably to most danceable and memorable tune of the date and features solid, curvaceous bass figures from Watkinson. The other selection that matches it for glue-like cohesiveness and acrid rhythm (*Tejas Drive*), where Keyboardist Luke Marantz and drummer Jacob Cole collaborate to come as close to chaos, as the mood and feeling would allow. Marantz lays down some of his most rhythmic passages, and also shows a great ear with his brush work.

That these are extremely versatile musicians, goes without saying. They jump all over the indie rock pop (*Slave and the Cube*), nailing it in place with an above the rim lyricism that places it squarely in the category of "order." Then they take (*Soul Crusher*), make your eyes water with it opening lament, change its tempo to resemble a theme from a TV dramatic series, and then faultlessly reverses the mood with Shaiman's saxophone crying to the end. Turning next to the (*Dreamulator*), Marantz's keyboard seems to get stuck in a world of fantasy, starting with its spooky toy piano intro, and proceeding to draw Shaiman's sax into jagged unevenness, however it is Marantz's excellent brush work again that maintains a sense of balanced reality.

There is chaos. Chaos has a penchant for getting underway in fits and starts, but once it sets in, it nourishes only havoc, carnage, and murderous obliteration. So it is with **Ro Sham Beaux**. It starts marginally (*keut str8 boiz*), like the denizens described in the title. Then breaks out like a virus on Marantz's keyboard, and Cole's drums, in jagged grooves (*Joga [Bjork]*). It becomes a high-pitched, banal, monotonous lament (*High Society*) again heard out of Marantz's keyboard. Shaiman's saxophone attempts to restore order, but is overwhelmed by the irrational rhetoric between order and chaos, and finally succumbs to the tumult. Chaos becomes full-blown (*Anthem*), it stretches from 'a remote farm' through the bass, drums and saxophones of life, to the obliteration of house, home, fortune and life by voracious, uncaring, rampaging, '**bulls**' and '**bears**' up and down "**The Street**"; inviting the question: "*Now what is it you want?*" It pauses like a dying sound from Marantz's earnest keyboard: Then it returns in cacophonous overdrive, with havoc, ritualistic carnage and morbid death throes before its final dying breath. This is the *chaos* of **Ro Sham Beaux**. It is total. There is no in between!

Ro Sham Beaux is a band of excellent, gifted musicians. They have put together a dynamite CD that has the excitement, suspense, gripping plot and mind-blowing *denouement* of a good novel, that once started, can't be put down. Those who are attracted to these pleasures in art, will find this date to their liking.

Track Listing: *BEARBLADE; Slave to the Cube; keut str8 boiz; Town; Soul Crusher; Tejas Drive; Meatballs are the Way to a Woman's Heart; Joga (Bjork); Dreamulator; High Society; Anthem.*