

**\*\*\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE: JOHN KLOPOTOWSKI QUARTET NEW CD\*\*\*\*\***  
***San Francisco Concert, Remembering Lennie Tristano 1919-1978***

**Oakland guitarist John Klopotoski Celebrates the Life and Legacy of the Overlooked but Visionary and Pervasively Influential Pianist/Teacher with *San Francisco Concert: Remembering Lennie Tristano***

**- Andrew Gilbert**

The year 1919 saw the birth of several bona fide jazz legends, but the centennial of pianist, teacher and pioneering modernist Lennie Tristano has passed mostly unremarked. Which is all the more reason to marvel at John Klopotoski's *Remembering Lennie Tristano*, an album that in conception, content and lineage embodies everything that made Tristano such a potent and enduring yet overlooked creative force. Released in August 2019, the album forges a new link in a chain that runs directly from Tristano (1919-1978) through his ingenious disciple, tenor saxophonist Warne Marsh (1927-1987), to Klopotoski (b. 1955), the author of *A Jazz Life*, a well-regarded book about his experiences studying and performing with Marsh throughout the 1980s ([www.johnklopotoski.com/book-preview](http://www.johnklopotoski.com/book-preview)).

Documenting a concert held in San Francisco, the project brings together a superlative cast of improvisers including prolific drum maestro **Akira Tana**, ace bassist **John Wiitala**, and rising alto saxophonist **Jacob Zimmerman**. Delving deeply into a treasure trove of material either composed by Tristano or directly connected to him, the quartet plays with extraordinary subtlety, dynamic control, and beautifully calibrated lyricism. "The group is improvising all the time, even when accompanying," Klopotoski says.

Highly regarded by fellow visionaries such as Charlie Parker, Aaron Copland, Miles Davis and Anthony Braxton, Tristano pioneered several techniques and strategies in jazz, including free improvisation and atonality. Blind from childhood, he was an active presence on the New York scene in the 1940s and 50s.

The album opens with Klopotoski's "Child's Play," a gracefully swinging piece based on "My Melancholy Baby" that builds from Wiitala's confidently walking bass line to a passage of trading fours. The tune introduces the ensemble's signature sound: lithe, translucent, uncluttered. While brimming with musical ideals, the group's approach is marked by a spaciousness that flows from Tristano's linear improvisational concept.

Listen to the way the quartet plunges into the long, serpentine theme "Subconscious Lee," maintaining a steady low simmer fueled by Tana's exquisite brush work. Tristano had assigned Konitz to write a contrafact on a standard, and the altoist used the chord changes for Cole Porter's "What Is This Thing Called Love?" for the first of his numerous punningly titled compositions.

The quartet explores two of Tristano's best-known contrafacts with a shimmering version of "317 East 32nd" (based on Johnny Green's "Out of Nowhere") and the steepchase "Lennie's Pennies." It's a breathtaking, gravity-defying performance that seems to levitate three feet off the stage.

Another highlight is Klopotoski's ravishing duet with Zimmerman on "Stardust," inspired by a Warne Marsh performance that he witnessed with piano great Hank Jones. Despite the song's ubiquity in previous decades, it's hardly over-exposed these days, and the duo wrings every drop of beauty from Hoagy Carmichael's sumptuous melody.

No piece on the program better illustrates the intellectual playfulness that Tristano's school engendered than "Fishin' Around," a tune directly inspired by Lester Young's solo on the Count Basie Orchestra's classic recording of "I Never Knew." Like his sensei Tristano, Marsh was deeply inspired by Young's gracefully sinuous lines.

The album closes with a closely coiled romp through Charlie Parker's blues "Billie's Bounce" (note that Klopotoski's son, JD Klopotoski, takes over the drum chair and handles trap set duties with aplomb) and features Zimmerman and Klopotoski recreating Parker's original four-chorus solo, inspired by Konitz-Marsh performances of the piece.

Klopotoski's path to this recording dates back to 1980 when he befriended veteran bassist Sonny Dallas. It was through Dallas, who had played and studied with Tristano, that he connected with Marsh in 1982. In many ways, that sojourn has taken him to this project, which depended upon finding supremely accomplished and sensitive collaborators.

A Bay Area native, **drummer Akira Tana** is a seasoned veteran who spent two decades on the New York scene through the mid-90s touring and recording with many of the music's greatest improvisers, including saxophonists Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz, Jimmy Heath, and Warne Marsh. He established himself as a bandleader with TanaReid, a group he founded with bassist Rufus Reid. During the course of the 1990s the band toured internationally, releasing six CDs.

Alameda **bassist John Wiitala** has thrived as one of the Bay Area's first-call accompanists for more than three decades. He's recorded with masters such as Scott Hamilton, Jessica Williams, and Mark Levine, and has performed with Joe Henderson, Junior Cook, Charlie Rouse, James Moody, Bud Shank, and Cecil Payne.

A couple decades younger than his three band mates, Seattle-based **alto saxophonist Jacob Zimmerman** has honed a palette deeply informed by pioneering altoists Johnny Hodges, Benny Carter and Willie Smith, while also embracing the expressive approach of Anthony Braxton. A graduate of the New England Conservatory, he's performed in groups led by artists such as Bob Brookmeyer, Jim McNeely, Dave Holland, and Roscoe Mitchell.

Consider *Remembering Lennie Tristano* a calling card from an artist who's been under wraps for too long. It's telling and appropriate that in revealing his own gifts Klopotoski offers thanks for the priceless offerings bestowed on him by Tristano, Dallas and Marsh: "This album is really an expression of love and gratitude for everything Warne and Sonny gave me."