

NWCR2002

# No Images

John Hollenbeck



1. *Bluegreenyellow* ..... (10:01)  
David Liebman, tenor saxophone; *Blue* Ellery  
Eskelin, tenor saxophone; *Green* Rick Dimuzio,  
tenor saxophone; *Yellow* John Hollenbeck,  
drums/laughter samples
2. *Without Morning* ..... (4:21)  
Theo Bleckmann, voice; Ben Monder, guitar;  
John Hollenbeck, percussion
3. Liebman/Hollenbeck *Vignettes* ..... (6:33)  
(Six improvised duos) David Liebman, tenor  
saxophone; John Hollenbeck, drums/percussion
4. *The Drum Major Instinct* ..... (24:59)  
Ray Anderson, David Taylor, Tim Sessions,  
trombones; John Hollenbeck, drums/percussion;  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., voice on tape
5. Eskelin/Hollenbeck *Vignettes* ..... (6:57)  
(Six improvised duos) Ellery Eskelin, tenor  
saxophone; John Hollenbeck, drums/percussion
6. *No Images* ..... (4:30)  
John Hollenbeck, autoharp with portable fan

Total playing time: 57:41

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## Notes

While drummer/composer John Hollenbeck chose to title his debut recording *No Images*, what becomes clear quickly is that there is indeed a visual analogue to every piece on the album. In some cases the images are specific and concrete; in others they're more impressionistic and subject to interpretation. One could even posit a visual counterpart for the two sets of completely abstract miniatures. But one of the most remarkable things about the disc—a long overdue documentation of one of New York's most impressive contemporary musical artists (and best kept secrets)—is the sheer range and diversity of compositional strategies he employs to evoke his gallery of unseen imagery.

*Bluegreenyellow*, for three tenor saxophonists and drums, is a study in musical *synaesthesia*—strictly speaking, a medical condition in which sensory inputs are mixed unusually: for instance, "hearing colors"—in which each saxophonist represents one of the colors in the title. First up in order of solos is David Liebman, who returned to the tenor saxophone for this 1995 session after many years as a soprano specialist; he provided the color "blue." Ellery Eskelin represents the color "green," and also demonstrates the element of chance inherent in writing music for improvisers; according to Hollenbeck, the shade of green he'd had in mind ("kelly green") was not the shade that Eskelin actually played ("kind of olive green"). Rick Dimuzio, an old friend of Hollenbeck's, was the only "yellow" tenor he could find, he says, his section goes beyond color into onomatopoeia as well: "at the end of his section, he tells—plays—a joke with severe laughter following."

*Without Morning* teams Hollenbeck with two fellow explorers of the gray area between composition and improvisation, vocalist Theo Bleckmann and guitarist Ben Monder. Monder,

one of the most promising young guitarists on the contemporary New York scene, is Hollenbeck's former roommate, and the two share a longstanding musical empathy. *Without Morning* is Hollenbeck's first meeting with Bleckmann, who has since become one of his most frequent collaborators. The two have recorded an intimate and wide-ranging self-released duo CD, *Static Still*, and have also worked together in the ensembles of composer/vocalist Meredith Monk. The melancholy piece, according to Hollenbeck, is a "musical goodbye"—the resolution of a love affair.

The Liebman/Hollenbeck *Vignettes* and Eskelin/Hollenbeck *Vignettes* are two sets of six spontaneously improvised musical encounters between the drummer and two of his *Bluegreenyellow* collaborators. Liebman's reputation stretches back decades to his work with such famed leaders as Miles Davis and Elvin Jones, while Eskelin is one of the more versatile hornmen to come to the fore in the 1990s. The pieces heard on the album are unedited and presented in the sequence in which they were recorded—in a sense, each is a series of stream-of-consciousness conversations. Each player brings his own measure of order and chaos to the proceedings, and despite obvious timbral similarities, comparison of the two sets readily demonstrates the wide range of expressiveness and individuality afforded by free improvisation.

Hollenbeck makes use of a recorded sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in *The Drum Major Instinct*. Conceived during Hollenbeck's last year at the Eastman School of Music, the piece is scored for two tenor trombones, bass trombone, drumset, and the taped voice of King. According to Hollenbeck, he chose trombones "because statistically they're the most humble in a big band setting—they are the team

players." He had not yet encountered the sanctified trombone choirs of Harlem, but had been impressed with trombonist Gary Valente's "preaching" in the band of Carla Bley, leading him to feel that the instrument had the right "spiritual characteristics" for the piece. Nor had he heard drummer Max Roach's LP *Chatahoochie Red*, which also makes use of a King speech. Hollenbeck sets King's words in an entirely different way from his legendary forebear, yet both find an artistic affinity in the orator's martial cadences.

*The Drum Major Instinct* is performed in total darkness, so that the presence of the musicians would be as invisible as that of the orator himself—necessitating memorization of the written materials. The piece begins and ends with a simple four-chord cell, and follows the rhythms of King's heroic oratory—drawing upon its emotional power while simultaneously creating a dramatic setting for it. At times, the players follow the cadences of the speech, while elsewhere they comment freely upon it, like the congregation echoing the words of the minister. The piece builds in intensity along with the sermon, resolving into a chorale as King's message reaches its climax. At the end, the instrumentalists follow King down the aisle of the church and shut the door behind them as they exit.

Ending the album is a very recent work, *No Images*, a concept adapted from an earlier composition and based upon a poem by Waring Cuney. In the poem, a young woman longs to see her image reflected in the waters of a flowing river, but can't envision it in the dishwasher of her daily life. Hollenbeck evokes the desired reflection by simply playing his late grandmother's old autoharp with the whirring blades of a small personal fan—capturing a fleeting, evanescent image through a decidedly un-technocratic use of technology. It's another small but telling example of the poetic sensitivity and ingenuity that Hollenbeck brings to bear in each new creative challenge he sets for himself.

**No images**

She does not know her beauty  
She thinks her brown body has no glory  
If she could dance naked under palm trees,  
And see her image in the river  
She would know  
But there are no palm trees on the street  
And dishwasher, gives back no images

—Waring Cuney

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**John Hollenbeck's** versatility as a percussionist and composer is revealed in a body of work that ignores boundaries. Performances with Michael Moore, Achim Kaufmann, and Fred Hersch have showcased Hollenbeck's melodic and sensitive small-group jazz drumming. His unique approach to big band work is also in great demand. He is a member of Bob Brookmeyer's New Art Orchestra, the BMI Orchestra, Jim McNeeley's Tentet and is a frequent guest with the Village Vanguard Orchestra and Maria Schneider's Jazz Orchestra. He has performed and recorded with the WDR Big Band and the Maritime Jazz Orchestra with soloists John Taylor, Kenny Wheeler and Norma Winstone. John's rock-infused drumming can be heard with the Cuong Vu Trio with Stomu Takeishi.

Hollenbeck's performance career stretches far beyond jazz. He has gone onto perform a variety of traditional musics from around the world, including klezmer performances with David Krakauer's Klezmer Madness and Frank London (of the Klezmatics), projects in Colombia with Antonio Arnedo, and in Argentina with Fernando Tarres. He has also toured and performed at Carnegie Hall with former Astor Piazzolla pianist, Pablo Ziegler.

As a composer, Hollenbeck combines elements of his experiences in jazz and world music. The recipient of a bachelor of music in percussion and a master's of music in composition from the Eastman School of Music, Hollenbeck has received many awards and commissions including a Meet The Composer's grant and a National Endowment grant to study composition with Bob Brookmeyer. He also has won the Jazz Composers Alliance Composition Contest and was awarded the 2001 IAJE Gil Evans Fellowship. Hollenbeck's latest chamber piece, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, was commissioned by the Bamberg Choir in Germany and issued on the Edel Classics label along with works by J.S. Bach, Igor Stravinsky and Paul Hindemith. John composed and performed the percussion score to Meredith Monk's *Magic Frequencies* and her newest work, *Mercy*, in collaboration with Ann Hamilton.

John leads two ensembles, The Claudia Quintet (with Chris Speed, clarinet/tenor sax; Ted Reichman, accordion; Matt Moran, vibes; Drew Gress, bass) and Quartet Lucy (with Theo Bleckmann, voice; Dan Willis, English horn/saxophones; Skuli Sverrisson, electric bass). Look for these ensembles on upcoming Blueshift releases.

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## Production Notes

Produced by John Hollenbeck.

*Bluegreenyellow*, Liebman/Hollenbeck *Vignettes*, Eskelin/Hollenbeck *Vignettes* were recorded on February 20, 1995. *The Drum Major Instinct* was recorded on February 24, 1995. Recorded at East Side Sound by Jon Rosenberg. License for the taped voice of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. granted by Intellectual Property Management, Atlanta, Georgia, as exclusive licensor of the King estate.

*Without Morning* recorded on February 11, 1996 at the power station by Aya Takemura. *No Images* was recorded on May 25, 2001 by Jon Rosenberg.

Digitally mixed and mastered in 24-bit resolution at Sony Music studios by Todd Whitelock.

Voice introductions: *Bluegreenyellow*–Jon Rosenberg; *Without Morning*–Theo Bleckmann; Hollenbeck *Vignettes*–Lisa Hollenbeck; *The Drum Major Instinct*–Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Eskelin/Hollenbeck *Vignettes*–Matthew Hollenbeck; *No Images*–Jon Rosenberg.

*Bluegreenyellow*, *The Drum Major Instinct*, *Without Morning* and *No Images* composed by John Hollenbeck © 2001 Grand Blvd. Music ASCAP/GEMA. Liebman/Hollenbeck *Vignettes* spontaneous compositions by David Liebman and John Hollenbeck © 2001 Liebstone Music /BMI and Grand Blvd. Music ASCAP/GEMA. Eskelin/Hollenbeck *Vignettes* spontaneous compositions by Ellery Eskelin and John Hollenbeck © 2001 Eskelin Music Company/BMI and Grand Blvd. Music ASCAP/GEMA.

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Blueshift was created to explore the new developments in the ongoing relationship between original composition and improvisation at the leading edge of modern American jazz. Blueshift is a unit of Composers Recordings, Inc./CRI, America's premier new music label. CRI was founded in 1954 and dedicated to the discovery, distribution, and preservation of the finest in contemporary music representing the diverse inspirations of American culture.

Executive director: John G. Schultz

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