

Jazz Central Station

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"Editor's Choice" By Drew Wheeler

With *Parable*, guitarist/composer Pete McCann crafts a solo debut album that's as artfully creative as it is hard to categorize. In the last ten years, McCann has been a supporting player for New York bandleaders as diverse as Maria Schneider, Bobby Previte and Jim Cifelli-and his own work seems to show a similarly broad range of inspirations.

The Ornette Coleman-styled, curiously childlike-yet-twisted melody of "Grimlock" is carried by the rants and rails of Peter Epstein's sax, followed by McCann's ominously spidery, hollow-bodied reverberative runs and scorching riffs. "Open Gate" begins with invocative calls over arrhythmic percussion, followed by a bewitching, nervous melody alternating with more straightforward swing.

The complex, gracefully-unspooling title melody takes on an unexpected, Mahavishnu-like flavor, and McCann tears it up in full guitar-mangler mode. "Hoedown" is a jumpin', funky-country theme with the aura of a rhythmically sophisticated square dance, while the inscrutable, fractal harmonies of "Victim Sweepstakes" are laid out against jagged, Middle-Eastern influenced rhythms-leading McCann into a righteous, raucous riffarama replete with monstrously metalloid tendencies.

James "Blood" Ulmer's harmolodic reveries are recalled in the searing, dirgelike guitar chords of "Final Passing," while "Hoevenen" goes even further out, with a mathematical lattice of off-kilter harmonies that turns into a tempestuous, free-jazz free-for-all.

Yet McCann's milder moments are attested to by tracks like "Mind Bender," a stark and beautiful guitar piece, plucked at a gentle lilt. And the soft-edged "Patricia," matched to a busy samba beat, is unapologetically mainstream, even suggestive of contemporary jazz.

Epstein's soprano plays the naively beautiful, inspiringly-ascending melody of "Gone" in lines lithe and emotive. Epstein's alto takes on an almost Desmondian tone on the thoughtfully lazy melody "Search," which devolves into a downtempo plodder with elongated, Frisellian tones. And the album closer "Sheriff Bob" is a subtly bucolic and serenely twanging number accented by McCann's countrified licks.

With such a stylistically diverse debut album, it's no surprise that Pete McCann must have wanted to cover all the bases. But what a surprise it is that anyone could cover them quite as well as he did.