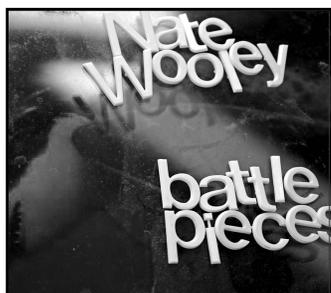


**A Pouting Grimace**  
**Matt Mitchell (Pi)**  
 by Clifford Allen

Pianist Matt Mitchell is incredibly active as a collaborative sideman, working with alto saxophonist Tim Berne's Snakeoil, drummer John Hollenbeck's Large Ensemble and leaders like reed players Jon Irabagon, Anna Webber and Michaël Attias. Mitchell's interests as a pianist and composer have stretched well past the arena of a rhythm section. He goes beyond a kaleidoscopic (and volcanic) relationship with various traditions and what the piano can do and operates within small units as though blueprinting group improvisation toward larger ideas, bending rhythmic and tonal relationships to create worlds within worlds. While he's recorded as a leader only a few times since 2012—mostly in duo and quartet settings—his latest, *A Pouting Grimace*, builds on concepts explored in live performance and sees the field expanded to as many as 12 players. In addition to the leader's piano and electronics are four percussionists, five woodwinds, harp and bass in various configurations, the largest of which are conducted by Tyshawn Sorey.

Following a minute of electronic washes, the stuttering clangor and shifting rhythmic overlays of "Plate Shapes" herald themselves, seeming at first to be shrill and chaotic as Irabagon's soprano slices through and is crowded by dense, repeating piano and percussion clusters before Sara Schoenbeck's gruff bassoon ululations emerge. The piece moves through several interconnected patterns, inciting minimalist grooves and crepuscular anthems, which overlap and guide soloists toward brief areas of unbridled intensity. Following the bass saxophone-fronted (courtesy of Scott Robinson) tug of "Mini Alternate" and its resonant, pointillist stomp, the full orchestra press of "Brim" features additive cells twisting against fleet and phase-shifting rhythmic play or small-group asides. By the time two short, teetering and self-contained electronic works emerge, splitting the disc roughly in half, the set's patterns have become clear as each plays on and recapitulates the preceding several ensemble motifs. The disc's second portion is sparser to a degree, shaping in directions favored by composers like Toru Takemitsu and Morton Feldman ("Sick Fields") through massed small actions and the sharp colors of double reeds, harp and higher-pitched percussion. Mitchell has outdone himself with *A Pouting Grimace*, though one can be sure he's already onto the next expression of restless creativity.

For more information, visit [pirecordings.com](http://pirecordings.com). Mitchell is at The Stone Dec. 21st-22nd. See Calendar.



**Battle Pieces 2**  
**Nate Wooley (Relative Pitch)**  
 by John Sharpe

Typically with movies, appending a number to the title instantly signals a rehash of the concept and a

decrease in the quality of whatever made the original appealing. Thankfully the same rule does not apply to creative music. Trumpeter Nate Wooley's *Battle Pieces*, both the name of the unit and resultant works, combines free improvisation by one part of the group with the remaining members performing a kaleidoscope of short and long compositions, chosen freely from an expanding book, to create new dialogues within the band. Such a model almost guarantees that the product will be minted afresh every time out. And this second outing, recorded live in Germany in 2016, has a markedly different feel to its 2015 predecessor.

It helps that Wooley has such an allstar crew at his disposal. Saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock, pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and vibraphonist Matt Moran are peerless improvisers and would be likely to conjure outstanding music regardless of system. While everyone gets ample time in the spotlight, the overall ambience is episodic, with movement achieved through overlapping series of group textures rather than individual derring-do. It seems that Wooley's charts are as much about process as notation, with the reiterated, almost swinging, trumpet motif at the start of "Battle Pieces 6" one of the few overt structural markers. It recurs during the track and is even picked up by Courvoisier towards the end.

Among the highlights are the wonderful duet for tenor and piano during the same cut. Laubrock squeals and growls as Courvoisier contrasts the extremes of her keyboard. That's followed almost immediately by an unaccompanied trumpet sequence in which Wooley chatters, slobbers and wriggles to marvelous effect while simultaneously interjecting vocal noises into the flow. Wooley enjoys another splendid excursion on "Battle Pieces 8", but the standout moment here belongs to Laubrock where she plants overblown outbursts amid silence, suggesting a gamut of emotions from vulnerability to pride, before passing the baton for another cycle of ensemble interplay.

For more information, visit [relativepitchrecords.com](http://relativepitchrecords.com). Wooley is at The Stone Dec. 19th. See Calendar.



**Before the Heat Death**  
**CP Unit (Clean Feed)**  
 by Stuart Broomer

CP Unit certainly stands for alto saxophonist Chris Pitsiokos, who composed all the music here, but it invokes cardio-pulmonary unit as well, analogue for this heart-racing, hyperventilating music, recorded in 2016 when Pitsiokos was just 25. The CD has seven tracks and lasts slightly under 29 minutes, but it's hard to imagine a listener feeling shortchanged. Pitsiokos' compositions are impossibly tight-knit, usually near maximum velocity and with lines ricocheting between him, guitarist Brandon Seabrook, electric bassist Tim Dahl and drummer Weasel Walter in a way that both blurs and preserves sonic identities.

The music has definite affinities with numerous John Zorn projects, like the hyper-kinetic moments of Naked City. "Death in the Afternoon", for example, feels like the bulls have been grazing on amphetamines or perhaps they're mechanical bulls. Along with titles like "Fried" and "Guillotined" (which works with the efficiency of a computerized slaughter house) there's also a ballad (conveniently called "Ballad" for ready identification) on which Pitsiokos works with the kind of rich vibrato and attenuated line that distinguished Eric Dolphy, here set against a backdrop composed in

part of amplifier hum. Even when the music is reflective, it keeps to a demanding agenda. "Supersax", generously, has roots in Ornette Coleman, rather than the band and the ultimate "Wet Brain" moves through a series of almost violent bass and drum patterns.

Pitsiokos is blessed with partners who sound like they were born to play this way, whether matching up with his insistent coordinates or jamming their own hard-edged lines into the tight weave of composed and improvised parts. It's wild, invigorating music, certainly not pretty but very precise.

For more information, visit [cleanfeed-records.com](http://cleanfeed-records.com). Pitsiokos is at The Stone Dec. 26th. See Calendar.

ON SCREEN

Horace Tapscott  
Musical Griot

A Film by Barbara McCullough

Musical Griot  
 Horace Tapscott (s/r)  
 by John Pietaro

Pianist Horace Tapscott forged an ethnically-identified, politically fearless vision, casting a postmodern genre that foresaw much of jazz' avant garde as well as its infusion into Black Liberation. By the late '60s, Tapscott's Pan-African People's Arkestra served as the house band for the Black Panther Party. The late Will Connell, for many years Tapscott's music librarian, in later discussions with anyone who'd listen, championed the scope of the Union of God's Musicians and Artists' Ascension, the leader's educational foundry of 1961. Tapscott's was an art of pride and legacy; it's no small irony that bold activism led to a career shredded by blacklisting.

Culled together from interview and concert footage, the filmmaker's is the silent voice as Tapscott tells his own story over decades. Sections of the film stem from a lecture the pianist gave in the '90s, interspersed with discussion segments between Tapscott, journalist Greg Tate, poet K. Curtis Lyle, trumpeter Don Cherry and Dr. Samuel Browne, the legendary music teacher at L.A.'s Jefferson High School. The concept of guiding the next generation was ingrained early on: "My responsibility primarily was preservation of the art. The black arts in particular. Something had to be done so you can touch and feel it."

Tapscott's vision into the next stage the music would take, including large ensemble improvisation and multi-disciplinary collaborations, is evident. His Underground Musicians Association, a heartily experimental aggregation, pioneered the later DIY concept. Tapscott stated: "We called it garage music: the kind of thing you only play for yourselves. The police came and stopped us, said we were getting the people worked up." The radicalism inherent in both Tapscott's mentorship and performances are established herein. He stated: "The music changed behind the bombing of the church in Alabama. We started playing music by black composers. It helped free our people. This hooked us up with the Black Panthers, Angela Davis, H. Rap Brown...and the FBI and CIA." Considering the resurgence in revolutionary philosophy, Horace Tapscott's music—now free of Cold War shackles—may finally have its day.

For more information, visit [horacetapscottmusicalgriot.com](http://horacetapscottmusicalgriot.com)