

# Carn Davidson 9, Joshua Rager Nonet, Gaia Wilmer Octet CDs reviewed

Sophisticated and energetic mid-sized jazz ensembles shine on these albums out of Toronto, Montreal and Boston.



*PETER HUM*

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Toronto jazz ensemble Carn Davidson 9 *LLOYD SMITH*

## Murphy (self-released) Carn Davidson 9

Jondo (Bent River Records)  
Joshua Rager Nonet

Migrations (Red Piano Records)  
Gaia Wilmer Octet

Here's an omnibus review of three discs that feature different and equally accomplished examples of what a mid-sized modern mainstream jazz ensemble can do.

Out of Toronto, there's *Murphy*, the sophomore release from Toronto's Carn Davidson 9, a group that picked up a Juno nomination in 2014 for its debut disc, *Nine*. Co-led by trombonist William Carn and saxophonist Tara Davidson, the nonet launches its new disc with late shows tonight and Friday at the Rex Jazz and Blues Bar in Toronto.

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On *Murphy*, the group consists of Davidson and Carn joined by reed players Kelly Jefferson and Perry White, trumpeters Kevin Turcotte and Jason Logue, bass trombonist Alex Duncan, bassist Andrew Downing and drummer Ernesto Cervini. If you've kept careful track, you've noticed that the group dispenses with a chordal instrument and makes do with a bare-bone rhythm

section duo to maximize its horn power. In addition, there's much instrumental doubling, tripling and even quadrupling — Davidson plays alto and soprano saxophones, flute and clarinet — so the music over the course of the disc's hour or so is expansive and colourful.

*Murphy* — the album takes its name from a cat who belongs to Carn and Davidson, who are partners in real life as well as in music — consists of eight original compositions by either Carn or Davidson, and the pieces have been arranged for maximum diversity.

Carn's tune *Try Again* is a brassy, swinging opener that frames minor-blues solos by White and Carn with nicely detailed writing. It's instantly clear on this track that Downing and Cervini are a propulsive rhythm team that does just fine without the contributions of a chordal instrument. Indeed, the album's rich arrangements distribute chordal material among the horns so as to make the inclusion of a guitar or piano conventional at best or gratuitous at worst.

The album takes a turn for the lyrical with Davidson's loping 5/4 tune *Family Portrait*. *Glassman* and *Second Act*, both by Carn, begin with chamber-music austerity only to swell into full-fledged jazz — there's a freewheeling trumpet solo in the former after a refined trio for Emilie-Claire Barlow's voice, clarinet and muted trombone, and in *Second Act*, Davidson gets to stretch out on soprano saxophone.

Davidson's *Reason*, *Season*, *Lifetime*, a groovy tune that's indebted to Eddie Harris' *Freedom Jazz Dance*, features another strong turn by Davidson on soprano saxophone plus some typically mighty blowing by Jefferson. *Colebourn*, also by Davidson is a calming, pastoral piece.

And then there are two tunes inspired by a certain cat. *Murphy's Law*, by Davidson, is an unfurling minor-key tune while *Murphy!* packs a great deal into its seven minutes, giving the album a finish that brash, contemporary and at times even trippy.

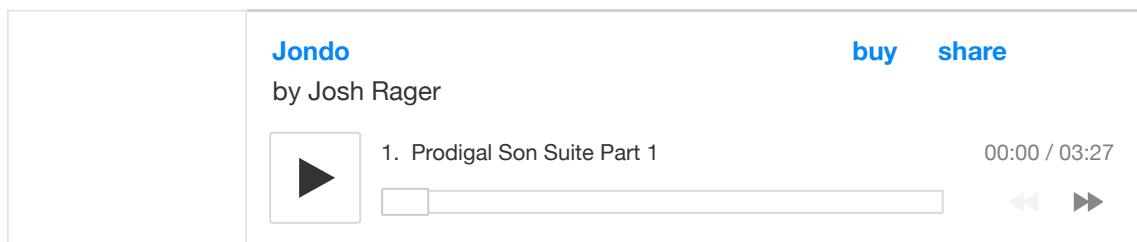
Here's the EPK for *Murphy*:

## Carn Davidson 9 - Murphy EPK

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From Montreal pianist Joshua Rager comes *Jondo*, a nonet album that more conventionally balances five horns (trumpeter Bill Mahar, tenor saxophonist Frank Lozano, alto saxophonist Donny Kennedy, trombonist Jean-Nicholas Trottier, baritone saxophonist Cameron Wallis) with a four-person rhythm section (Rager, guitarist Kenny Bibace, bassist Dave Watts and drummer Rich Irwin).



Opening the disc is Rager's *Prodigal Son Suite*, a tribute to the late Montreal pianist and McGill University jazz professor Jan Jarczyk, a mentor to Rager and hero to his bandmates. Jarczyk was an esteemed composer, and Rager's sophisticated effort, which nods to Kenny Wheeler's influence as well as Jarczyk's, does him proud. During the suite, saxophonists Lozano and Kennedy along with Trottier have moments to shine.

The title track is a sophisticated piece of Latin-tinged postbop, which affords Rager his first opportunity on the album to stand out as a polished assured soloist. He also steps to the fore on the lilting waltz *Child's Play* and the upbeat straight-eighths tune *The Master Waits*. The tune *3 Legged Dog* has some perhaps appropriate rhythmic quirks before it settles down and walks

without a limp. The *Inside Track* is a fast modal swinger, with stirring solos by Lozano, Kennedy, Mahar and Rager. I have to say, the soloist whose playing really pops for me every time he steps up is Kennedy.

The disc's remaining two tracks are ballads that Rager didn't write but chose to arrange. He's cast Montreal pianist/drummer's lovely piece *No Goodbye* as a classy showcase for guitarist Bibace. The standard *Summer Night* closes the album and gives baritone saxophonist Wallace his feature.

Finally, there's *Migrations* from Brazilian-born, Boston-based saxophonist and composer Gaia Wilmer. Her debut album shows a lot of poise and an ear-catching blend of advanced musical elements and folkloric, motherland influences alike.

Wilmer's ensemble (flutist Yulia Musayelyan, vocalist Songyi Jeon, Wilmer on alto sax and tenor saxophonist Gustavo D'Amico, guitarist Leandro Pellegrino, pianist/accordionist Vitor Gonçalves, bassist Mayo Pamplona, drummer Richie Barshay) has a captivating airiness to it, but also a great deal of rhythmic rigour. Over eight tracks, the music's continually swirling and imaginative and this meaty disc definitely rewards repeated listens.

Here's a live performance of Wilmer's charging tune *Criançada*, which features nice exchanges between Pellegrino and D'Amico.

### Gaia Wilmer Octet - Criançada

55 views • No comments



On her album, Wilmer's very generous in allotting space for her peers to solo, but she steps forward during *No Talking* to show her own independent approach.

### Gaia Wilmer Octet - No Talking

49 views • No comments



Closing the disc is its rousing cover of Hermeto Pascoal's *Acuri*. Here's a clip of Wilmer's group ripping through that one:

### Gaia Wilmer - Acuri (Hermeto Pascoal)

75 views • No comments



In my own modest musical efforts, I often feel like I'm in over my head trying to maximize the impact of five- and six-piece bands. No wonder I'm so knocked out by the engrossing writing and unfettered playing of the slightly larger bands above.

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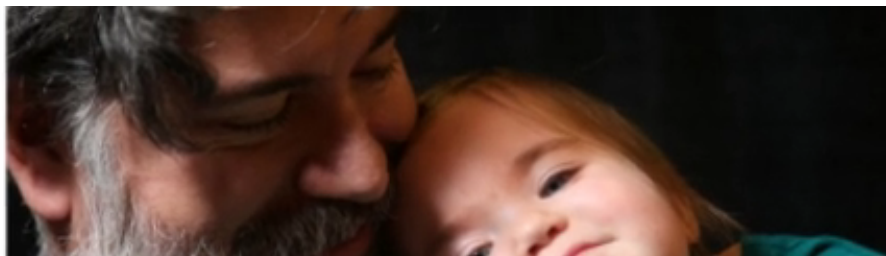
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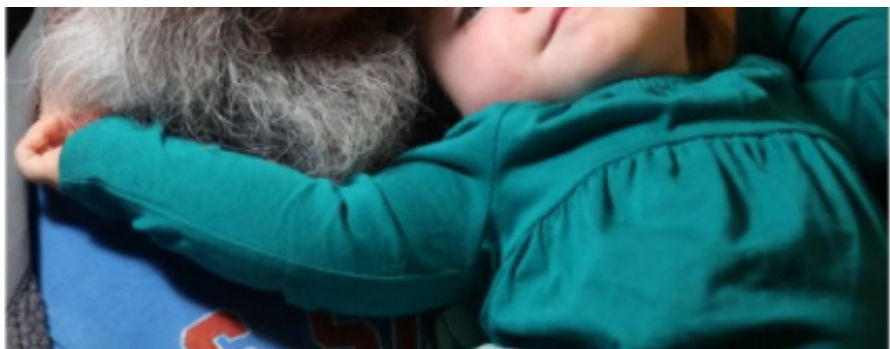
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