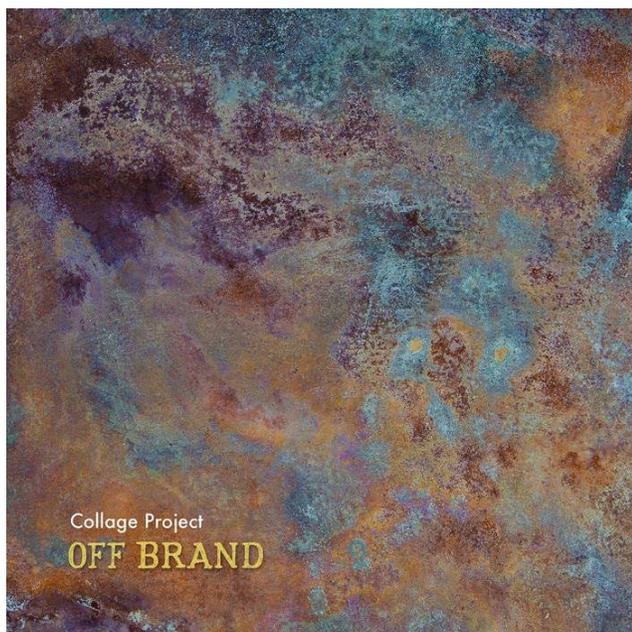


**CD Review****Collage Project: *Off Brand***

by Jarrett Hoffman



There's a fascinating and colorful gray area between jazz and contemporary classical music, as evidenced by this past summer's album *Off Brand* from the Collage Project. Joining bassist Aidan Plank, electric guitarist Dan Bruce, and guitarist Daniel Lippel are three guests — drummer Nathan Douds, saxophonist Noa Even, and trombonist Chris Anderson — together harvesting a bounty of unique and compelling combinations of sound.

The playlist mostly alternates between free improvisations and original works by members of the core trio. A couple of those tracks fall more cleanly into genre boundaries than others. On the jazz side, there's Plank's *Open Glimpse*, while "Free #8" leans into contemporary classical with bold and boisterous extended techniques, especially from Even's saxophone.

But on most of the disc, bits of language from either side intermingle in a decidedly fresh way. It's not just those two styles either: we taste the folk idioms of Bartók in a duo version of Plank's *Quartet for Béla*, and we hear electric guitar riffs with a hint of classic rock in a few tracks, including the excellent opener, Lippel's *For Manny*.

One of the most impressive moments of the album comes in the B section of that work, where Plank, Bruce, Lippel, and Douds trade off and overlap with quick bits of material. The result is like a modern take on a Mozart operatic finale — all the characters saying their piece at once, in a way that's both thrillingly chaotic and somehow still coherent, compositional gold.

As for the performances, these players have it all: a nuanced expressiveness, a variety of colors, and a potent virtuosity. The writing itself is just as impressive. There are no sudden changes just for changes' sake, and rarely does any section linger too long. Instead, both the free improvisations and the composed works evolve organically and creatively, often catching you off guard in a satisfying way.

On a more granular level, be sure to listen closely for the interesting doublings that dot these works like treasures. Bruce's *Inner Androids* offers a few: the bowed bass joined by long tones in the trombone to start things off, and later the unisons between trombone and electric guitar. And how about the combo of saxophone and electric guitar in Bruce's *Adaptation Dance*, the kind of sound that makes you think for a moment — wait, what *is* that?

That's a gratifying question that might come to mind a few times over the course of the album, as you encounter the new territory and new sounds continuously carved out by these musicians.

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