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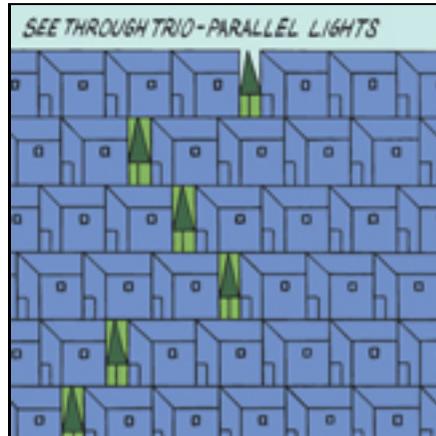
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**See Through Trio: *Parallel Lights***

Woods and Waters

The acoustic bassist often struggles to be heard in the typical jazz context, with the horns and drums generally responsible for drowning out the bass player. No such dilemma confronts Pete Johnston, whose Toronto-based See Through Trio features the double bassist alongside pianist Tania Gill and alto saxophonist Karen Ng. Born in Nova Scotia, Johnston relocated to Toronto in 2001 where he earned graduate degrees (in composition and ethnomusicology, respectively) at York University whilst performing in various groups, among them the now-defunct Muskox (textura's review of its fine 2011 release *Invocation / Transformations* is [here](#)). A composer as well as pianist, Gill's worked with everyone from Mary Margaret O'Hara to Anthony Braxton and issued her own well-received debut recording *Bolger Station* in 2010 (reviewed [here](#)), while Ng, a graduate of Humber College and York University, has performed with Do Make Say Think and Broken Social Scene, among others.

Produced, engineered, and mastered by Jean Martin (of Barnyard Records) and recorded on March 9, 2014, *Parallel Lights* is actually the fourth album by See Through Trio, but in a certain sense it's this unit's debut, given that it's the first one with Ng aboard (she replaced Mark Laver in 2013). While the trio's sound is democratically shared by all involved, Johnston appears to be the de facto leader, given that all nine of its compositions are credited to him.

The group namechecks Carla Bley and Ornette Coleman as influences, and it's easy to see why when the music on the forty-eight-minute release often sounds like some playful merger of the two. In fact, See Through Trio's pieces are at times reminiscent of Coleman circa *Something Else!!!!* and *Tomorrow is the Question!* That both albums hail from the late '50s shouldn't be interpreted to mean that the music played by See Through Trio is a throwback but more to draw a parallel between the group's own free-bop tunes and Coleman's compositional style on those recordings. The intricate melodic lines coursing through "Tiny Spirits Lifting," for example, don't sound all that far removed from the kind of material that's on Ornette's first albums.

The tunes on *Parallel Lights* straddle a middle ground between improvisation and composition, with melodic themes arising to individuate the pieces without getting in the way of the players' improvising tendencies. While at times all three play (see the stately ballad "Thirteen Months Long" as an especially satisfying example of their interplay), extended solo spots are often taken by each. Johnston, for example, introduces "Minor Curve" with a nice Haden-like solo, while the opening half of "Tomorrow Generator" is given over exclusively to Gill and the opening minute of "Never the Right Angle" to Ng. Gill even ventures inside the piano on "Inside Chance" to add exotic textures and strums to the album. Each musician contributes strongly to the album: Ng's sound is feathery and smooth, and thus contrasting at times with Gill's angular attack, and one comes away from the recording hearing it as an explorative conversation of sorts between individuals sensitive to the expressions of those with whom they're conversing.

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