



Vibraphonist and composer Tyler Blanton is becoming recognized as a rising star in the New York City jazz scene. Over the past five years he has shared the stage with many top rate musicians in the New York Jazz scene; saxophonist Joel Frahm, Seamus Blake and Donny McCaslin, drummers Ari Hoinig, Richie Barshay, and Matt Wilson, among many others. His performances and albums have received reviews by numerous major publications including Downbeat, Jazztimes, Village Voice, and The New York Times.

Blanton's 2014 release "Gotham," is the culmination of his most recent powerhouse working quartet which features bassist Matt Clohesy, drummer Nate Wood, and Grammy -nominated saxophonist Donny McCaslin. This tight knight group delivers an edgy tour- de- force performance of Blanton's six original works, illuminating his rich compositional pallet and stretching traditional stylistic boundaries.



"Gotham, is nothing short of remarkable."
-Dave Wayne AAJ

"Polished interaction with a free-spirited, unwavering attitude"
-Scott Albin Jazztimes

"Highly original, very modern sound"
-Dan McClenaghan, All About Jazz

"An heir apparent to the swinging and melodically charged throne of post-bop masters Gary Burton and Bobby Hutcherson, vibraphonist Tyler Blanton has slowly emerged as one of today's rising jazz stars"
- Seton Hawkins (Hot House Magazine)

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TYLER BLANTON

The Gotham Grind



Many jazz instruments have undergone a style-shifting transformation since the 1960s and '70s, but the vibraphone remains somewhat frozen in time. Sure, a handful of players have advanced the mallet message presented by Gary Burton and Bobby Hutcherson. But the basic approach to vibes has yet to be sandblasted with the impact that, say, Jimi Hendrix or Tony Williams brought to their respective instruments.

While it would be an exaggeration to say vibraphonist Tyler Blanton's *Gotham* (Ottimo Music) is changing jazz vibraphone as we know it, there's no doubt that the 32-year-old is on to something. The album's six original compositions were written and recorded in New York City, and *Gotham* reflects the city's taxing effect on artists of all stripes.

"When I was writing *Gotham*, I was definitely feeling the weight and intensity of the city draining me," said Blanton, a Ventura, Calif., native. "I'd been in the scuffle for a few years, dealing with the day-to-day, the noise pollution, and becoming totally run-down. Sometimes all the shit I'm dealing with has to come out in the music. Some of *Gotham* is pretty aggressive. There's times when I am frustrated. I wasn't feeling a jolly swing tune."

Accompanied by drummer Nate Wood, saxophonist Donny McCaslin and bassist Matt Clohesy, Blanton plays linear, sometimes cerebral music with a groove on *Gotham*, recalling '70s French fusioners Gong ("Never Sleeps"), displaced free-funk ("Gotham") and noirish soundtracks set in some gloomy urban future ("Tunnels"). With much of the material through-composed and in-the-pocket, *Gotham* is far different from Blanton's 2010 debut, *Botanic*, which was more traditional.

"I grew up playing drums in a rock band and listening to metal, so those influences are always there," Blanton explained. "And working with Nate Wood—he's played edgy, hard-hitting music involving metric changes with Wayne Krantz and Kneebody. What Nate played over what I wrote really changed the direction; it's that aesthetic of understanding how Nate plays and his rhythms and musical vocabulary. He leaves a stamp on everything he plays."

Certain tracks on the new album seem custom-prepared for Wood: The music's cyclical ostinatos, locking patterns and abrupt accents allow the drummer to express all manner of time-stretching filigree and metric modulation. Wood gives *Gotham* the feeling of a roller coaster

barreling through a maze.

"Tyler's music is rhythmically complex," Wood said, "the kind of music only another drummer would subject his band to."

Blanton is currently developing material for his Tyler Blanton Electric Trio (with bassist Sam Minaie and drummer Ari Hoenig), where he plays the malletKAT, a MIDI percussion mallet controller. Blanton vows to use any source to achieve his goals.

"As a jazz vibes player, I love Milt Jackson and swing music, and I played it for years," he said. "But I started to feel confined by what the vibraphone does within jazz. A lot of *Gotham* isn't jazz at all. Some songs began with a drum-and-bass groove, or a [malletKAT] melody. I tried to not let the vibraphone pigeonhole the style of the music. And in New York you can literally go for anything and there will be people who can [relate to] your ideas and will want to work with you."

One such person is Wood. "New York musicians are so busy that they don't have time to think about what they want to do—they just have to do it," the drummer said. "In New York, you're encouraged to play what you want and take it as far as you can. You have to be in the moment."
—Ken Micallef