

Jane Harbury Publicity

For Immediate Release
October 4, 2013

CHRISTINE JENSEN & THE TORONTO JAZZ ORCHESTRA
LED BY FOUNDER JOSH GROSSMAN
LIVE AT THE REX • NOVEMBER 11, 2013 • 9:30pm • \$10 AT THE DOOR

Montreal-based composer-saxophonist and bandleader Christine Jensen and her 19-piece jazz orchestra will release her highly anticipated sophomore album entitled *Habitat*, on October 3rd on Justin-Time Records. As a follow-up to her critically acclaimed and Juno-award winning album, *Treelines* (2010), *Habitat* expands on Jensen's viewpoint as a composer and improviser. "Always a compelling writer, capable of strong lyricism combined with harmonic invention and plenty of narrative twists and turns, Jensen's music not only impresses on a first encounter, but reveals more with each and every listen." (John Kelman-*All About Jazz*)

Saxophonist and composer Christine Jensen's second album with her Jazz Orchestra marks a significant growth in her writing for large ensemble. *Habitat* features six compositions, all with a deeply ingrained sense of place. "I always search for a theme in my writing," Jensen explains. "The only question is whether the theme comes out of the music or vice versa. This time, the music came from places, or the feelings and imagination of place."

For Jensen, the process of writing for large ensemble is a time-consuming one. "I average about two pieces a year," she admits, "because that's how long it takes" from the initial sketch to orchestration to revision after reading it through with the band. The compositions have now grown to be explicitly for the orchestra. Jensen achieves the fine balance of small group improvisation with large ensemble orchestration and melodic development, in the vein of her inspiration Bob Brookmeyer and her contemporary (and fellow McGill alumnus) Darcy James Argue.

Much of the band remains intact from the Juno award-winning *Treelines*, including featured trumpet soloist Ingrid Jensen, with a few key personnel changes. Rich Irwin assumes the drum throne here – "he's a studio drummer with a great sense of time, and he listens to every detail of the music," Christine enthuses. The foundation of the band is in good hands with Irwin, returning bassist Fraser Hollins, low brass specialist David Martin, and Samuel Blais on baritone saxophone. "If the low end of the band is solid, the rest of the band shines." This mix of accuracy and familiarity with Christine's music allowed *Habitat* to unfurl more quickly. "We only did two takes of almost everything," Christine says, still in awe that a recording of this grandeur only took a day-and-a-half of studio time with the full orchestra.

The rapport between Christine and Ingrid Jensen is in full evidence on "Treelines," a 2010 commission from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. An episodic piece that seamlessly weaves its way from open improvisation to straightahead swing, Ingrid serves as the pivot for each new section. "It's reflective of how we hang out together," Christine says with a laugh. "In two hours we can cover a lot of ground, from serious music analysis to philosophy to goofing off with our kids." Given the sisters' busy schedule, Christine has presented large ensemble concerts without Ingrid, allowing her to showcase more of the other impeccable soloists in the band, notably Chet Doxas' tenor feature on "Nishiyuu." "I consciously wanted to feature Chet, and I tried to capture the spirit of his playing within the piece," explains

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Christine. Other band members, including alto saxophonist Erik Hove and pianist John Roney, take the spotlight on “Intersection,” a piece that predates *Treelines*.

One of Jensen’s strengths as a large ensemble jazz composer is her ability to link contemporary harmonic language, as evidenced in the beautiful chorale writing on “Blue Yonder,” with traditional big band structures and swing. “I grew up playing dance band music, and I’m probably the last generation to get to do that, where I sat in a section with people that taught me to play music from their era,” Christine recalls. “I’ve played the Basie and Glenn Miller books to death as a student. That music is in me.” However, Jensen is also marked by a boundless curiosity, and her fascination with the brilliant forward motion Afro-Peruvian *festejo* rhythm is the basis for “Blue Yonder,” a piece commissioned by UMass-Amherst. “My brother-in-law [drummer/percussionist] Jon Wikan likes to share his enthusiasm about certain rhythms that he studies, so we worked – *a lot* – on the *festejo* together.” Jensen also cites Maria Schneider’s “Bulería, Solea y Rumba” as an influential piece, for its use of Latin rhythms that are neither Cuban nor Brazilian in heritage.

Jensen features herself on soprano saxophone on the final track, “Sweet Adelphi,” the lone piece on this album that has its roots as a small group tune that she and Ingrid have frequently performed. “Initially, I thought the Jazz Orchestra was just a project, but the band has taken on a life of its own. I now compose with the large ensemble in mind.”

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