

**GOING FOR ADDS: July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**FILE: Jazz Improv**

**ARTIST: JASON KAO HWANG and  
CRITICAL RESPONSE**

**TITLE: Book of Stories**

**LABEL: True Sound Recordings TSO4**

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### MUSICIANS

**Anders Nilsson**

electric guitar

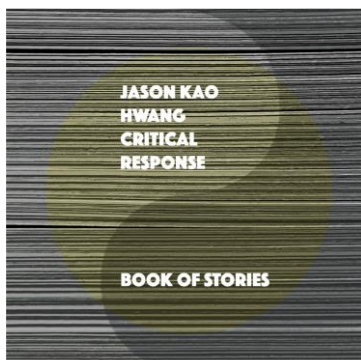
**Michael T.A. Thompson**

drums

**Jason Kao Hwang**

electric violin,

composer



In *Book of Stories*, arising from composition, improvisation, synergy, and truth seeking, *Critical Response* challenges the disillusionment and divisiveness that encircle this moment in history.

Michael T.A. Thompson and I performed many times with choreographer/dancer Patricia Nicholson. Both Michael and the late J.A. Deane, encouraged me to explore multiple FX processing. I have been listening to Anders Nilsson for years and knew that this trio would bond, and we have. Beginning in 2018, then interrupted by the pandemic, at long last, I am thankful to be sharing this CD with the world.

— Jason Kao Hwang

### TRACKS

**1. The Power of Many in the Soul of One (13:53)**

*Dedicated to Joshua Wong, a leader of the democracy movement in Hong Kong*

**2. Upside Down Circle (13:06)**

*Inspired by my youthful years living in the East Village (NYC) during the 1980's*

**3. a silent ghost follows (7:38)**

*Inspired by a recurring dream, I know this ghost.*

**4. Dragon Carved into Bone (12:12)**

*Inspired by Chinese bone carvings in my childhood home.*

**5. Friends Forever (5:49)**

*Dedicated to the late Will Connell, Jr. and Takeshi Zen Matsuura, members of my first band, the collective quartet Commitment*

### CREDITS

All compositions by Jason Kao Hwang, © © 2023 Flying Panda Music, BMI

Recording Engineer – Tom Tedesco, Tedesco Studios

Mix Engineer – Jason Kao Hwang

Mastering Engineer – Paul Zinman, Soundbyte Productions

Art and Design: William Mazza Studio

Liner Notes: Scott Currie

Photo: Tom Tedesco

Special Thanks: Gennevieve Lam, New Jersey State Council on the Arts

### LINER NOTES by Scott Currie

Fusion – after a half-century or so – has reached a certain age, meriting serious reconsideration if not complete reconceptualization, as indeed it receives here by *Critical Response*. While the Afrofuturist experimentalism of its trailblazing earliest manifestations may soon have devolved in more commercial directions, it crossed paths briefly but seminaly with avant-garde jazz on New York's downtown Loft Jazz scene, whose inspiring aesthetic intersections reverberate throughout the music now at hand.

Jason Kao Hwang, of course, is no stranger to fusions, having distinguished himself among the illustrious alumni of that loft scene by virtue of his visionary musical alchemy: amalgamating composition and improvisation, blending contemporary and creative music, integrating East and West. In this *Book of Stories*, he all but reinvents the electric violin to reimagine the synergies across the jazz-rock spectrum in concert with kindred spirits Anders Nilsson on electric guitar and Michael T.A. Thompson on drums.

“**The Power of Many in the Soul of One**” provides immediate proof of concept, by deploying the tension between laid-back riff-based jams and aggressive rhythmic interruptions, as well as the contrast between wide-open fields of lyricism and dense battlegrounds of angst, to outstanding narrative effect, as the undercurrent of agitation introduced early on re-emerges in the urgent clashes of the harrowing collective-improvisational climax.

“**Upside Circle Down**” pays clearly heartfelt homage to Jason's formative years on the Lower East Side scene, with a lofty ballad that dances perilously on the cutting edge of rhapsody, from the freely extemporized opening investigations of electric timbres, through chorus after chorus of the main song-form's alternating funky riffs & lyrical bridge, to the concluding poignant trio improvisation and coda.

“**a silent ghost follows**” evokes electric soundscapes of psychoanalytic dreamwork, employing the manifest content of short unison lines as points of departure for exploring the latent content through solo, duo, and trio improvisations.

“**Dragon Carved into Bone**” invites listeners to join the trio in imagining the exciting directions in which fusion might have evolved had it held fast to its loft-era experimentalist DNA, perhaps cross-fertilizing with downtown punk and electronica to yield wild-flowered fields of turbulent tuttis, intense collective improvisation, and funky jam sections, as deeply rooted in the fierce urgency of now as in the fearless insurgency of then.

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**“Friends Forever”** concludes the set with a moving tribute to the inspiration of departed comrades whose living legacies keep true believers moving forward with ever-increasing resolve, in this case with the blues-drenched melodicism that serves so often and so well as Jason’s compositional calling card.

Make no mistake: while drawing masterfully on all that has gone before, this trio has no time for nostalgia. Their music lives in the improvisational moment, as T.A.’s responsive propulsion drives Anders’ spiky virtuosity through Jason’s carefully structured compositional itineraries for these journeys of spontaneous discovery. Meanwhile, Jason’s painstaking attention to electronic detail transforms his instrument into a protean kaleidoscope of timbral possibilities, whose instantaneous metamorphoses evoke passing glimpses of shredding electric guitar, breathy wooden flute, and rich contrabass that further expand the vistas of his formidable violin conception. Altogether, throughout the fascinating combinations and permutations explored in *Book of Stories*, Critical Response’s spontaneous fusions bespeak a collaborative commitment to the present moment, in which shared memories of past glories engender collective visions of future possibilities.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

The music of **Jason Kao Hwang** (composer/violin/viola) explores the vibrations and language of his history. His compositions are often narrative landscapes through which sonic beings embark upon extemporaneous, transformational journeys. His most recent releases *Uncharted Faith*, his duets with the late J.A. Deane, *The Human Rites Trio*, and *Conjure*, his duos with the late Karl Berger, have received critical acclaim. Downbeat Magazine named his quintet recording *Sing House*, one of the Best CDs of 2017. In 2019, 2018, 2013 and 2012 the El Intruso Jazz Critics Poll voted him #1 for Violin. The 2012 Downbeat Critics’ Poll voted Mr. Hwang as “Rising Star for Violin.” The first *Burning Bridge* was named one of the top CDs of 2012 by Jazziz and the Jazz Times. In 2011 he released the critically acclaimed *Symphony of Souls* (Mulatta), performed by his improvising string orchestra, *Spontaneous River*. In 2010, the New York Jazz Record selected *Commitment, The Complete Recordings, 1981-1983* (NoBusiness), from a collective quartet that was Mr. Hwang’s first band, as one the “2010 Reissued Recordings of the Year.” His quartet *EDGE* released three critically acclaimed CDS, *EDGE* (2006, Asian Improv), *Stories Before Within* (2008, Innova), and *Crossroads Unseen* (2011, Euonymus). As composer, Mr. Hwang has received support from Chamber Music America, US Artists International, the NEA, Rockefeller Foundation and others. As violinist, he has worked with Karl Berger, Anthony Braxton, William

Parker, Butch Morris, Oliver Lake, Reggie Workman, Pauline Oliveros, Patrick Brennan, Tomeka Reid and many others.

**Anders Nilsson** is a New York-based guitarist, composer, improviser. He plays electric guitars, 11-string alto guitar and bağlama. His output spans a wide musical spectrum ranging from solo shows (“Night Guitar”), Anders Nilsson Group (a rhythm-heavy band in NYC), “Outer Space Caravan” with violist Stephanie Griffin, saxophonist Michael Attias and bassist Ken Filiano, Anders Nilsson’s AORTA. He is also a band member in several groups playing jazz or improvised music. After receiving a BA from Malmö Academy of Music and having worked as a musician in Sweden for a few years he moved to New York in 2000 and got his MA from CCNY. He has performed and/or recorded or toured internationally with many artists associated with the blues/jazz/experimental paradigms such as Kalabalik (with Raoul Björkenheim and Gerald Cleaver), Paquito D’Rivera, William Parker, Elliot Sharp, Fay Victor, art-metal band Angelblood, and Persian vocalist Mohsen Namjoo. Always welcoming of interdisciplinary interaction, he has collaborated with Butoh artist Akira Kasai, theatre director Doris Mirescu and video artist Arrien Zinghini. Nilsson’s work as a composer includes music for short films, dance performances, string quartet, theatre plays, as well as a constantly growing book of a hundred compositions including brief to epic works for solo guitar, jazz, to large experimental ensemble works. Many of these works have been released on several acclaimed albums.

Soundrhythmium **Michael T.A. Thompson** (drums) is an anomaly. He has played, toured and/or recorded with such a wide variety of musical artists, including Charles Gayle, Joe McPhee, Oliver Lake, Kidd Jordan, Alex Foster, Roy Campbell Jr., Dennis Gonzales, Matthew Shipp, Uri Caine, Henry Grimes, John Patitucci, Marc Ribot, William Parker, The Shadow, Becket, reggae artist Owen Gray, as well as artists from classical to rap and beyond. He has played on sound tracks for TV shows and Radio commercials etc.. T.A.’s palate encompasses an abundance of sound colors. He hears everything and plays with it in a way that’s ever inventive and perceptively responsive. Thompson plays as he breathes. You’ll always find him in the moment, inspired as well as inspiring.



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