

up in mom's minivan and said, 'C'mon Katherine, get in the car. We're going to get tickets to Tony Bennett.' I didn't know who Tony Bennett was, but they were playing his *Steppin' Out* album full blast and sing-

ing along with all the songs. We got there and the show was sold out, so we never got to see him. But I stole the CD from my mom and played it over and over and over, and played it for my friends, who thought I

was weird. Then I started buying his older albums. And ever since then, I've wanted to have the chance to sing with him. He is one of the main reasons I learned to love jazz."

CHRISTOPHER LOUDON

Across the Keyboard

Brooklynite Erik Deutsch creates fresh fusions as both bandleader and sideman

Keyboardist Erik Deutsch is a consummate accompanist, as well versed in the language of today's pop- and rock-influenced jazz as Hank Jones is in the conventions of swing and bop. For the past decade, Deutsch, 33, has traversed the jazz and rock worlds mostly incognito, plying his craft with some of jazz's most interesting crossover artists, among them guitarists Charlie Hunter and Nels Cline and pop star Norah Jones. With a host of lesser-known, New York-based players, he's cemented his reputation as one of the most in-demand sidemen of Brooklyn's nascent jazz renaissance.

"Brooklyn's an exciting place to live right now—just an overwhelming amount of talented people living together in a small area," Deutsch said.

Deutsch has collaborated on more than 30 albums over the past 10 years, during which time he's connected styles that rarely meet, from his work as a founding member of electro-funk jam-band Fat Mama, to Americana jazz-fusion group County Road X, to stints with singer-songwriter Erin McKeown and house-music impresario Mr. V. He knows how to play without ego, serving

the music before himself, and specializes in the type of tuneful embellishment that often goes unnoticed to an unperceptive ear.

"As a sideman, you have responsibilities to serve the music, serve the band, to be sure that you're always supporting the music when it needs it," Deutsch said. "If the band needs someone as a backbone rhythmically or harmonically or energetically, or a more creative force or a wild card, I can mix it up."

Now he's brought his keen ear for rhythmic minutiae and eclectic influences together with *Hush Money*, his sophomore album as a leader. From the hypnotic legato lines of "Flytrap" to the gut-stomping funk of "Dirty Osso Bucco," it's an aural road trip across the American soundscape. In addition to touchstones like modern jazz and indie-rock, there's Detroit soul, Brooklyn hip-hop and elements

GEORGE WINSTON

solo piano

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of Nashville. Deutsch has even invented his own genre to describe his category-defying music: “cinematic chamber rock.”

“I guess the main category that this is going to be out in the world under is jazz. But is it jazz music? Man, I don’t know,” Deutsch said. “It’s a really hard question, because it’s hard to know what jazz music is. The best I can do to explain it is to say that it’s a state of mind, an aesthetic, more than it is a certain sound or a kind of rhythm.”

In addition to mixing and matching genres, Deutsch employs unorthodox instrumentation, including the subdued timbres of Antibalas Afrobeat Orchestra trumpeter Eric Biondo, bassoonist Sara Schoenbeck of Wayne Horvitz’s Gravitas Quartet, and Lonnie Plaxico regular multireedist Mike McGinnis, who is featured mostly on clarinet. The band makes for strange sonic bedfellows with the electric sound of Deutsch’s Moog synthesizer, Casio keyboard and Wurlitzer



Erik Deutsch

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organ, but the effect is often thrilling.

Deutsch appeared as a sideman at a recent engagement with folksy jazz ingénue Sasha Dobson at Rockwood Music Hall, the cozy Lower East Side venue that has served as a haven for a diverse stable of genre-bending players. He drew from an arsenal of instruments to inflect light contrasts to Dobson’s sultry, plangent songs, whether that meant blowing buoyant melodic lines, plunking out a few staccato riffs on the glockenspiel, or adding the steely strum of feathered piano strings.

A few days later, Dobson and Deutsch reversed roles as Deutsch stepped into the limelight on the main stage at 92Y Tribeca for the *Hush Money* release show. As is often the case with jazz, something was certainly lost in translation from stage to studio, as the tension of the Latin clave on “Black Flies” or the growl of Barry Saunders’ baritone sax synced to Marc Dalio’s deep shuffle on “Quittin’ Time” were better articulated live. The night’s encore was an unconventional rendition of the Appalachian mountain song “Lazy John,” featuring a captivating vocal duet between Dobson and avant-folk guitarist Jefferson Hamer.

“I love the human interaction,” Deutsch said. “That’s what I’m all about—making things happen, eating good food, having a good time. That’s really what my life is about. I’m pretty low-key—I like good music, I like to progress, but I don’t want to take myself too seriously.” **AIDAN LEVY**

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