

## BROWNMEN ELECTRYC TRIO

### Gravitation: A Study In Freefall

[ released Oct 31, 2013 on Browntasaurus Records ]

This album, the sophomore release from the award-winning BROWNMEN ELECTRYC TRIO, represents the definitive "studio" recording for the band. Featuring both Brownman Ali on trumpet & Colin Kingsmore on drums as the consistent sound from track to track, they are accompanied by a rotating cast of all-star bassists including Damian Erskine, Tyler Emond, Marc Rogers, Ben Miller, Ian De Souza, and introducing Brad Cheeseman.



Below, jazz journalist Daryl Angier -- former editor-in-chief of CODA magazine and the writer of the liner notes for the 1<sup>st</sup> B.E.T. release JUGGERNAUT -- breaks this latest album down for us.

## Staying Grounded with Brownman and the Electryc Trio

By Daryl Angier

*"I'm more than happy to live lean and drive a Civic the rest of my life as long as I get to keep making this music on my own terms."*

*--Brownman Ali, June 2013*

Making a full-time living as a performing professional musician isn't easy. Making a living as a musician in a niche genre like jazz is even harder, and making a living in jazz in a "small" market like Canada that is spread out over a massive land mass is just about the hardest of all. For jazz musicians, 'twas ever thus. But it's what makes Brownman Ali -- a multi-award winning Trinidadian-born trumpeter, bandleader and composer -- such a special case worthy of examination. Not only has he forged a successful career in a field filled with obstacles, he's done it in an uncompromising fashion, staying true to his vision of propagating his own brand of funkified, exploratory modern jazz that often amazingly builds carefree entertainment from the seemingly antithetical building blocks of complex compositional, rhythmic and improvisational structures. Brownman's music is informed heavily by an urban music aesthetic—encompassing everything from hip hop and r&b to house, jungle and dubstep—which he readily acknowledges has often placed him outside jazz's more polite and inoffensive mainstream.

"Rather than create music specific to an audience or scene, I try and create this music from whatever crazed place inside me fuels it. And I do so already knowing who my audience is," he says. "I go after those people, rather than try and meet some kind of

expectation". Such statements seem taken from the playbook of one of Brownman's greatest influences -- Miles Davis.

His value system is actually well-suited to the current DIY zeitgeist in the music business. In the time since Brownman first emerged on the Toronto music scene in the mid '90s as a go-to session player and prime mover in both the Jazz and Latin-jazz arenas, the economics and business models of the entire music industry have been completely up-ended and re-aligned. Gone are the days (if they ever existed in the first place) when your merit as a player alone would somehow result in the emoluments of a successful career being bestowed upon you—festival promoters and club bookers calling you for gigs, labels looking for new talent to record, glossy magazines writing about you. Nowadays, if you want these things, you better be prepared to develop the skills and the wherewithal to go get them yourself.

From the beginning, however, Brownman has seemed hardwired to make it in a hardscrabble world like the Canadian jazz scene. At this point in his career, it's hard to imagine what might be a suitable alternative outlet for his manic energy and considerable creativity. As illustration, the quotes here come from a conversation at 3am during an all-night session at the then deserted underground Euphonic Sound recording studio where he was putting the finishing touches on this record. This session followed a Friday-night gig at Poetry Jazz leading a 3-man permutation of his latin-jazz group CRUZAO in that tiny jazz hotspot in Toronto's Kensington Market. It's exactly how you might imagine a typical day in the life of one of the hardest-working creative players on the Canadian jazz landscape today. Another day will mean another project. The BROWNMEN ELECTRIC TRIO (B.E.T.) is just one of the 7 ensembles he leads, most of which he does all the composing for. Unshockingly, he is also called upon by a multitude of other bandleaders and at the time of this writing, he is the featured soloist with the JOHN CHEESMAN JAZZ ORCHESTRA (a uniquely eclectic, electric jazz orchestra), the DON LAWS Quintet (a Bobby McFerrin protégé), the LUANDA JONES Quintet (Brazilian-jazz), the BROWNMEN-TALSKY 5 (a co-led group with up & coming head-turning vocalist Jordana Talsky), STRANGE ATTRACTORS (an all-star collective quintet of top-shelf Canadian jazz composers), the SUGAR DEVILS (New Orleans flavoured soul), OMEGA MEN (a trumpet+DJ duo with DJ Cutler from New York), and too many more to list here. And he still does a ton of studio work for musicians in an equally wide range of genres.

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that Brownman's efforts have only been rewarded with a life of scuffling and little recognition. His long list of awards include two National Jazz Awards (with 11 nominations to his name over the years), a Toronto Independent Music Award for jazz group of the year (B.E.T.), and he recently received a citation from the Trinidad High Commission for being a "Distinguished National of Trinidad and Tobago" for his contributions to Canadian jazz. Most importantly Brownman has achieved what all the greatest musicians aspire to: an immediately identifiable sound and personality on his instrument that captivates the listener's attention from the first notes. His formative years under the instruction of Canadian stalwarts Guido Basso & Mike Malone and his most important 10-year period of

evolution in New York working with his mentor Randy Brecker, along with countless hours of woodshedding, resulted in the development of his hard-blowing, notey style that owes almost as much to the verbal acrobatics of '90s hip hop MCs that were in ascendancy during this same period as it does to bop-based trumpeters like Brecker and Freddie Hubbard. The improvisational aspects of hip hop have always been prominently featured in several of the ensembles Brownman leads, and it is not uncommon to hear him making comparisons between historic rapper's "flow" and the lyrical phrases of his fav iconic jazz trumpet players.

Indeed, it felt like destiny calling when rapper Guru of Gang Starr fame tapped Brownman in 2006 to join Jazzmatazz, his periodic jazz-meets-hip-hop project, and take over Donald Byrd's trumpet chair. Jazzmatazz would occupy the bulk of Brownman's time for the next 4 years, doing 4 world-tours and appearing on Jazzmatazz Vol. 4— with the notable exception being the release of the first BET record, *Juggernaut*, in 2009. On the surface, Jazzmatazz looked like a working musician's dream come true: constant touring around the world playing to sold-out crowds of young, hip fans. But after Guru's surprising death from cancer at age 48 in 2010, some darker truths from that period began to emerge. Guru was being controlled by a manipulative and physically abusive business partner who hid Guru's illness and isolated him from friends and family. Payment problems slowly arose as this partner took over more of the business, until Brownman and bandmate DJ DooWop were forced to quit the group in Jan 2010 (a May 2010 article in the *Boston Phoenix*, for which Brownman was interviewed at length, is the definitive account of this entire sad episode, which became a major scandal in hip hop circles). To make matters worse, Brownman's own father was also suffering from a particularly cruel cancer and succumbed to the disease just two months after Guru did. And as an additional insult, a few months later while playing a gig in New York, Brownman's car (yes, a Honda Civic) was stolen, along with all the gear in it.

All that is simply to say that life is ups and downs, and Brownman seems capable of weathering it all while producing remarkable music, fueled by life experience. Samples from Mos Def, Chris Rock, Miles Davis, Guru & Martin Luther King, start to distinguish the current B.E.T. record from *Juggernaut*, a live recording that served as an excellent representation of seeing the group in a club. *Gravitation*, however, is a studio album, which has allowed Brownman to add new highly texture layers, colours and flourishes throughout: dueling basses here, obscure and not-so-obscure dialogue samples there, and most significantly a large cast of six bass players from near and far, including one of America's top 6-string players - DAMIAN ERSKINE. Throughout the record, Brownman on electric trumpet & the astonishing COLIN KINGSMORE on drums are teamed with a variety of these bassists in various trio permutations, often with accompanying "bass chords" (chords played on the upper neck of the bass) and Brownman's micro-Korg (which often appears on live shows) adding density to the tracks. "These guys are planetary-pulling, space-and-time bending monsters man!", he states emphatically when discussing the bevy of bassists featured on this new record. However, notwithstanding the studio magic and a cast of actually many more than three players, this album at all times sounds like a true *trio* record: three musicians

succumbing to the gravitational pull of the omni-present improvisational impulse, losing themselves in this always exploratory music. There's no mistaking these sounds for anything else except a Brownman Electric Trio record.

"The Search" is pretty much the only thing Brownman works on in his playing anymore. He's already armed with an arsenal of advanced harmonic, rhythmic and melodic knowledge from years of training. But to achieve the kinds of things he wants to hear in his music today, he knows that doesn't come through the perfect execution of licks and tricks, but through a sincere commitment to exploration and chance-taking with his playing. He calls it "swimming the deep waters". And as we sit here at 3am, I watch as he listens back to these fresh new recordings and points out what he thinks are the standout sections of tracks. "In those moments I can really hear the search," he says. "Can you hear that?", he asks of me. Hear it I can. And dear listener, there are many moments on this record where the depths of that gravitational abyss are being explored, and I encourage you to join Brownman and his crew on their freefall journey planetside and see for yourself where you'll land.

## The GRAVITATION Tracks

(Edited by Andrew Nicholson)

### **01) There Will Never Be Another You (5:16) by Harry Warren, 1942 | arr. by Brownman, 2012**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet & micro-Korg, Colin Kingsmore -drums, Damian Erskine - bass*

This vintage 1942 standard was initially a jam, a warmup in the studio to "get the blood flowing", and was never intended to make it's way onto the record, but the warmth of Brownman's wah-wah pedal, his lyrical soloing and the creative interaction between guest bassist Damian Erskine (American 6-string icon & current bassist for the Jaco Pastorius Big Band) and Colin demanded it make an appearance. Colin's hilarious defiance of strict instructions (read: "no marches!") is evident as many appear during this jam. Brown takes on an "if you can't beat him, join him" approach in the final moments of the song. The track also includes a short improvised interlude which feels like deep breath before the final return of the melody. Both Brown's and Damian's strength as soloists are on clear display throughout the track, and it's a spirited, funky, fun way to start this record buckling the listener in nicely for what's to come.

### **02) Lady Bird (6:35) by Tadd Dameron, 1939, arr. by Brownman, 2010**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet, Colin Kingsmore -drums, Tyler Emond - bass 1 (right), Brad Cheeseman - bass 2 (left)*

Interestingly the voice introducing the tune is Miles Davis - pre-throat surgery, on a gig in Paris with Tadd Dameron in Paris in 1949. It is one of the only recordings of Miles pre-dating his now famous scratchy throat, and was carefully time-stretched to match the tempo of B.E.T.'s entry. This classic Dameron tune, also features Juggernaut bassist Tyler Emond (right channel) going head to head with the newest bassist to join the ranks of B.E.T.'s alumni - Brad Cheeseman (left channel). Both represent 2 of Toronto's most exciting 20-something electric bassists. Though Tyler's musical focus has him now moving in different artistic directions, catalyzing his retiring from the trio (in fact selling his 6-string and focusing on his own brilliant

acoustic group HYLIA), the Electryc Trio's earliest permutations were strongly defined by his presence. The 2 bass players deliver each of their unique breeds of 6-string improvising in an almost dance-like atmosphere. Early on, Brown takes a very short solo on this track in order to make room for the 2-bass feature, but does a trumpet-drumset dance of his own just before the tune wraps up, ending with the closing chord and applause from the 1949 sample.

**03) Cantaloupe Island (6:00) by Herbie Hancock, 1964, arr. by Brownman, 2005**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet, Colin Kingmore - drums, Tyler Emond - bass*

The trio has been playing this classic Herbie 1964 tune since 2005 and it's breezy opening volley can't help but evoke the feeling of mountain driving with the top down. The track also features Brown's unaffected (no pedals) open horn sound. The warmth and depth of his tone is on display early in the track, until he's pitted against Colin for some energized drum trading, where he again reaches into his pedal bag for some tones more suited to an exchange of ideas with Kingmore's versatile and ubiquitous drumset skills.

**04) Chocalet Citeh (6:16) [dedicated to Chris Rock] by Brownman Ali, 2010**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet, Colin Kingmore - drums, Damian Erskine - bass*

The first Brownman original to appear on this recording. Brown has long been a fan of Chris Rock's work stating, "his devastatingly accurate edgy humour is simultaneously social commentary couched in a slick coolness". He wanted this tune to speak to that - slick, coolness meets edginess. The title comes from the 1<sup>st</sup> moments from "Bring The Pain" as Rock walks on stage, he exclaims "D.C.! Chocolate City!" But Rock says "Chocolate City" with his particular Rock-isms, causing Brown to name his tune phonetically - "Chocalet Citeh". Unlike the 3 standards earlier on the album, this tune - written predominantly in 7/4 - has a more intricate form including a drum'n'bass interlude (used later as a springboard for some Kingmore brilliance), and complex harmony behind the trumpet solo. Damian lays down a moving bass solo meditation before Brown comes blazing in, again without pedals, showcasing his tone and improvising ideas, before Colin rockets away against the drum'n'bass ostinato.

**05) Caravan (9:57) by Duke Ellington, 1937, arr. by Brownman, 2003**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet, Colin Kingmore - drums, Tyler Emond - bass & Luisito Orbegoso - congas/perc*

On the 1<sup>st</sup> album, Juggernaut, the title track featured Brown's CRUZAO bandmate - acclaimed conga player Luisito Orbegoso. We again see his return on this spirited Latin take on Duke Ellington's 1937 classic. Brown again chooses a more open horn approach for this track, saving the face-melting pedal choices for the climaxes of the tune. His use and exploration of the altered, almost eastern, scale choices is a fascinating one, and perhaps precipitates Tyler equally "eastern" approach in his bass solo. Both make definitive statements as soloists, before making room for Colin to again have his way with the track, supported by Luisito's 3 congas & variety of claves and bells. The tune picks up steam as the ensemble makes their run to the end, with short flourishes from Luisito on congas before Brown re-enters for one last burst of virtuosity to close the tune off. You'll have trouble not dancing to this track.

**06) Splatch (6:41) by Marcus Miller, 1986 (from Miles Davis' Tutu), arr. by Brownman, 2013**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet, Colin Kingmore - drums, Marc Rogers - bass*

Though his approach as a trumpet player is quite different, Brownman's musical ideologies and concepts are very informed by Miles Davis', so it's no surprise to see this famous tune from Miles' primordial "Tutu" release make an appearance. A tip of the hat to both Miles and the 80's, this track features the incomparable Marc Rogers (bassist for Holly Cole, the Philosopher Kings and original bassist for Brown's hip-hop crew GRUVASYLUM) thumb-slappingly laying the groundwork for this tune's deep funk groove. Enlisting some studio magic to create a 10-trumpet all-Brownman horn section on the bridge adds to the tune's power. Brown weaves his way thoughtfully through the solo section, bursting forth for the final solo break, before calmly setting the stage for Marc's own soulful solo. Marc's crackerjack solo break is nothing short of eyebrow raising on its own, before they settle into an 80's style rideout, complete with 80's style fade.

**07) Recorda Me (8:14) by Joe Henderson, 1963, arr. by Brownman, 2009**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet & micro-Korg, Colin Kingmore - drums, Tyler Emond - bass & Ian De Souza - bass chords*

Using this time-honoured Joe Henderson tune as a springboard, this is the 1<sup>st</sup> taste of hip-hop on Gravitation, and is dramatically prefaced by a sample from Martin Luther King Jr's last speech. One may notice that Brown arranged this tune in 2009 - just before the death of his father, and his bandleader & friend Guru. "We've got some difficult days ahead", states MLK. If we imagine this being said in 2009, it would foreshadow Brown's own challenges for the next difficult year of 2010. The tune has a melancholy flavour to it, in Brown's tone and approach particularly, which has an outer hue of effects, but is primarily an open trumpet tone for the bulk of the tune. Tyler, in contrast, is magnificently drenched in effects with both Ian De Souza providing bass chords & Brown on micro-Korg providing an almost "X-files" type of soundscape. Bookended by MLK, this tune has real gravity with Guru's ghost seemingly in the air during the excursion.

**08) Irrational Funktion (8:04) [based on an irrational number series] by Brownman Ali, 2012**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet, Colin Kingmore - drums, Tyler Emond - bass & Ben Miller - bass chords*

Brown has a degree in physics. Many do not know this. But those of us that do, find it unsurprising when he writes a tune based on an irrational function number series. To further complicate matters, the 1<sup>st</sup> pass through the angular bass/trumpet pattern, has Colin playing free-time leaving the listener uncomfortably struggling to find the downbeat (exactly Brown's intention). But on the 2<sup>nd</sup> pass - Colin comes slamming in with a head-bobbing groove that makes this complex rhythmic tune sound less like math and more like funk. It has quickly become a much requested tune during live performances by musicians, for its starkness & high-wire act of rhythm. With long-time B.E.T. alumni Ben Miller providing bass chord support, Brown deftly navigates the rhythmic white-waters during his envelope-filtered Brecker-inspired solo before passing the ball to Tyler who also digs deeply. The solo hat is then handed off to Colin who guilefully blows on top of the intricate bass pattern before heading to the exit of this always, inexplicably fun, white-knuckle roller coaster ride of a tune.

### **09) Anxiety & The Creature Within (4:37) by Brownman Ali, 2010**

*feat. Brownman - electric trumpet, Colin Kingsmore - drums, Damian Erskine - bass*

This is the last tune on Gravitation to feature the talents of 6-string bass monster Damian Erskine who additionally lays down some beautiful chord work in the bridge. The tune was composed in the middle of hardship for Brown, then dealing with the death of Guru, his father, his stolen car, and difficult relationship breakup. 2010 was a rough year and this tune speaks to that. But it, almost ironically, speaks to the friendship that Brown has with Damian as they trade darkly powerful sentences throughout this tune - no one man having a solo all to himself, but instead sharing the solo spotlight together before providing a backdrop for Colin to do his thing over. A false ending brings one last moment of tension before the release of the satisfying final figures.

### **10) Catholic School Girls (5:19) by Brownman Ali, 2009**

*feat. Brownman - illegal sonic experiments, Colin Kingsmore - drums, Tyler Emond - bass*

Dirty. When asked what this tune is, that's what Brown answers: "Dirty. It's just dirty". And what do you think of when you think of dirtiness, Brown? → "Catholic School Girls". Written in 10/8 this fitfully dirty ride appropriately features a sample from Mos Def's "Ms. Fat Booty" and will likely never see the light of mainstream jazz radio. Which is unfortunate given the incredible Zappa-esque playing from all on this track. It's by far the most raucous and exploratory on the record and puts the spotlight squarely on Brown's technical abilities as both a trumpet player and as a purveyor of sonic experimentation. Colin too is ferocious on this track, which ends with a hilariously juxtaposed quote from the "Girl from Ipanema". In live performance Brown delights in saying, upon tune conclusion: "What? You didn't know? The Girl from Ipanema was a Catholic School Girl!".

### **11) Bye Bye Blackbird (6:51) by Ray Henderson, 1926, arr. by Brownman, 2011**

*feat. Brownman - trumpet, Colin Kingsmore - drums, Tyler Emond - bass*

Though originally written in 1926, most fans of jazz think of Miles' version on the 1957 "Round About Midnight" when they think of Bye Bye Blackbird. Brown has long used this tune, played with a slight hip-hop edge, to cool out the trio on live performances and is the perfect musical conclusion to this adventurous record. No pedals on this track - it's all about tone and depth of exploration - for everyone. As per Miles' version, the tune is essentially over at 4:38, followed by a 4-bar cycle repeated over and over for open improvisation. For another full 2 minutes the trio enjoys cooling out in the rideout, before Colin & Ty joyfully pushes the groove into one last drum'n'bass fun-filled romp as Brown finally takes it home with a tip-of-the-hat to a standard Duke Ellington style closing phrase.

### **12) Guru Closer (0:26)**

A final message & website plug from legendary rapper GURU. Brown was the featured trumpet player in Guru's Jazzmatazz from 2006 until Guru's tragic death in 2010, and the audio was stripped from a video taken in 2007 at the very end of a world-tour. In the original, Guru gushes amicably about his trumpet player for close to a minute before plugging the website. It was edited down here, but it worth finding on YouTube, just to see how visibly humbled Brown is Guru's words. A fitting closing to this aptly titled heavy recording.

-- Daryl Angier | June 2013, Toronto

*Daryl Angier is the former Editor-in-Chief of the Canadian jazz magazine CODA and tried to talk Brown into finding someone else, feeling a "bigger name" may have better suited. Expect few men know Brown's work to the depth Daryl does (having written both an in depth cover story for CODA on him & the Juggernaut liner notes). Brown is again honoured to have him write here.*

### **Brownman would like to thank:**

Brownman would like to thank: Colin Kingsmore first and foremost - my brother and right hand in the trio, killin' every track. When the 2 of us are teamed with any bass player, the chemistry we're able to achieve is palpable & never fails to amaze me. Tyler, Damian, Marc, Ben, Ian & Brad -- 6 of the best bassists I know, and all alumni of the Electryc Trio -- thank you all so much for being a part of this bottom-heavy project. Each and every one of your tracks sing. James Pew at Euphonic Sound (and Remi & Prolific!), without whose generosity with studio time this record would not exist. Nick Blagona (& MJ) for both his mixing and mastering brilliance. Dean Shu for once again providing amazing art & Daryl Angier for his always brilliant liner notes. Luisito Orbegoso for once again being un juggernaut de congas. Andrew Nicholson (Nickel!) for being my new right-hand man, and Andrew McIntosh for the years before him. To Mama Brown - few mothers truly "get" their sons - I feel lucky that mine does. To Papa Brown who we lost 3 years ago, but whose lessons of life, I live every day by as I play every note in a manner I think he would be proud of. Marcus Ali, my older-younger brother & my new sister-in-law Paula. Randy Brecker (my other father) for being a shining standard to strive to. Aaron Staebell & Rodney Appleby - the USA permutation of B.E.T. - and everyone in Upstate New York who have supported us over the years. Trane Studio, The Rex, Gate 403, Poetry & all the clubs that have let me use their venues as incubators for my growth. JazzFM, CBC Radio, The Toronto Star, NOW magazine & The Sun (Eroll!) for their support of my projects over the years. Eliana & Shannon for being 2 of my closest friends and 2 of the best mothers to their kids I know. Brianne for new & exciting journeys. Karen, Tanisha, Liz, all my colleagues & rug-rats from the Toronto Children's Peace Theatre - for reminding me of the importance of youth. Plato, Aristotle, Socrates. Miles, Freddie, Woody, Clifford, Randy, Chet, Thad, Diz & Blue. To everyone who ever played in B.E.T. (who isn't on this record) - Larnell Lewis, Aubrey Dayle, Pat Kilbride, Paul DeLong, Jeff Halischuk, Ernesto Cervini, Dane Wedderburn, Ross MacIntyre, Max Senitt, Daniel Barnes, Paco Luviano, Jack Kulp, Greg Chudzik, Daniel Powell, Lionel Williams & anyone else I may have forgotten. But most of all I want to thank YOU. For having this record in your hands and reading these words right now. I hope you'll stick around for the ride. My deepest thanks. :)

A'ight, I'm out. Peace.

- Brownman



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## GRAVITATION

A STUDY IN FREEFALL



Canadian National Jazz Award winners - "Electric Jazz Group of the Year"  
**BROWNMAN ELECTRYC TRIO**  
BROWNMAN electric, trumpet    COLIN KINGSMORE drums    6 BADASS BASSISTS electric bass



Photos by Mills Blonden

Recorded Dec, 2012 by James Pew at EUPHONIC SOUND, Toronto (additional engineers Remi & Prolific) Mixed & Mastered June, 2013 by Nick Blagona & Brownman at Psychotropic Studios, Caledonia Cover Art by Dean Shu, Orange County, California Liner notes by Daryl Angier, Toronto

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