

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine contemplates the reality of time. He suggests that we are pulled into the past by our memories and extend ourselves into the future by our expectations. It is only when memory and expectation come into balance in our thinking, Augustine offers, that we fully experience the present. That Jason Adasiewicz and Keefe Jackson have come together as a duo on the remarkable *Rows and Rows* is both unexpected and completely fitting, reflecting something about time in the Augustinian sense. Here, memory and expectation come into balance to offer us forty-four minutes of unfiltered, luminous presence.

The early 2000's were a fertile time in the story of Chicago jazz and improvised music. The city has always shepherded important musical voices but there was a kind of groundswell around 2001, when a number of now-established and heralded players came into the scene, many of them working at The Jazz Record Mart and sharing a house on Winona Avenue. This community included voices like drummers Frank Rosaly and Tim Daisy, cornetist Josh Berman, bassists Brian Dibblee and Jason Ajemian, and saxophonists Aram Shelton and Dave Rempis. Groups were formed, often with the same personnel but supporting a different leader's vision and playing at venues such as The Empty Bottle, The Hungry Brain, and Elastic Arts. As jazz writer Larry Kart observed: "I hadn't witnessed a close-knit community such as that since the days of the AACM." It is this music-centered setting that pulls us into the past when Jackson and Adasiewicz first met and memory becomes intertwined with the future.

In the years since, Jackson and Adasiewicz have produced creative outputs of staggering proportion: Jackson's *Project Project* and *Likely So*, Adasiewicz's stunning *Sun Rooms* records, each documented on Delmark and celebrated by critics around the globe. They met intermittently in groups led by others too, most notably Josh Berman and His Gang and Frank Rosaly's Cicada Music, with the memory of that house on Winona Avenue still vivid with each encounter. Since 2001, Jackson's and Adasiewicz's voices have become two of the most distinctive in jazz, as Chicago is apt to produce. "It's the quality of investment in their own sounds," Berman suggests, "you would not mistake either of these musicians for another. There is no pretense."

In 2013, at Jackson's bidding, they came together as a duo to explore, in both of their words: "compositions as vehicles for improvisation." They each brought tunes, probing the sonic landscape to rekindle and refresh, allowing memory to infuse the present with the expectation of the future. What often thrills in a duo format is the sound of individual voices meeting and then forging a new, two-dimensional voice. One thinks of the incredible partnership of John Carter and Bobby Bradford or the equally alluring duo recordings Derek Bailey made with Evan Parker and Anthony Braxton. What fascinates here is the sense that what you are hearing could never exist with less or more participants. Jackson and Adasiewicz have changed since their days together on Winona Avenue, but it's

the memory of that place and the individual sojourn of each musician that makes *Rows and Rows* such an intriguing listen.

And what a listen it is. There are Jackson's throaty, gutsy, fulsome horns in contrast with the stark, sudden attack of the vibraphone. The shifts in texture when Adasiewicz puts the sustain pedal down or grabs a bow and we hear overtones ring like an ocean. There is tunefulness: compositions so catchy and singsong that you walk away whistling, taken off-guard by the way they creep into your subconscious. There is spontaneity: beautifully crafted solos that do what we want improvisation to do—surprise and yet seem inevitable. And then, adding to the spell of *Rows and Rows*, there are moments that defy description: the sound you can't place, the unison line you wonder how they pulled off, the passage that swings so hard and sounds so old-school that you suspect they might be joking. But then you catch yourself, realizing, (echoing Berman): "there is no pretense."

The past, the future, and the present; Augustine gave us deep ideas to ponder. All three can be heard on *Rows and Rows*: the house on Winona, the arrival points after long journeys, the expectation of what awaits. Here are two unmistakable voices, coming together to speak in a language no other duo could.

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