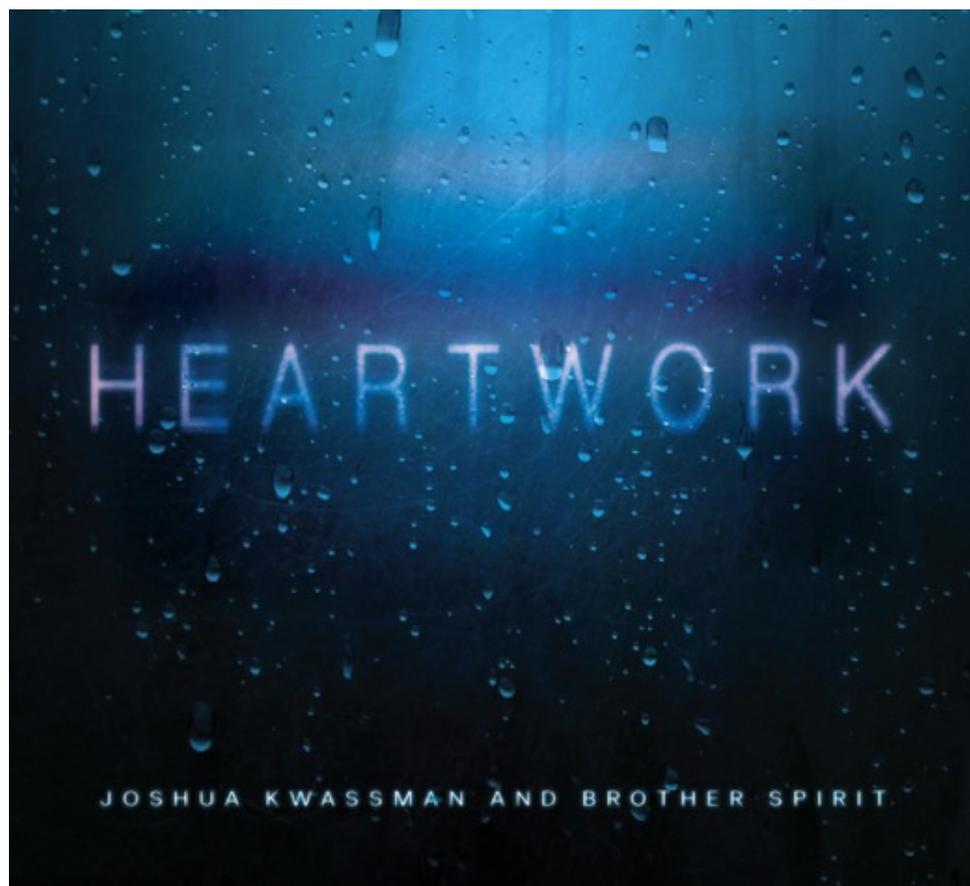




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Composer/Multi-Instrumentalist Joshua Kwassman Confronts Human Weakness on Personal and Societal Levels with Sophomore Release, *HEARTWORK* - Available May 26 via SquarEast Records



[Stream Tracks from *HEARTWORK*](#)

The release of **Joshua Kwassman's** acclaimed debut album, *Songs of the Brother Spirit*, heralded the arrival of an exciting and innovative new composer on the modern jazz scene. Now, with his highly anticipated follow-up ***HEARTWORK*** (Available May 26 via SquarEast Records), Kwassman takes a monumental leap forward with a sweeping, deeply personal new work that incorporates influences from jazz, classical, and rock music into a breathtaking eight-part composition.

HEARTWORK also marks the evolution of his unusual ensemble, originally assembled to realize the multi-hued *Songs of the Brother Spirit*, into a full-fledged band named after that debut. Brother Spirit has become a versatile septet uniquely adept at realizing Kwassman's ambitious musical imaginings. A native of Newington, Connecticut who studied at the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music and New York University, Kwassman has folded a wealth of influences and studies into his stunningly cinematic compositions.

Where its predecessor looked back on the trials of growing up via a harrowing incident from the composer's childhood, *HEARTWORK* draws its inspiration from an equally personal but more mature source. As Kwassman describes, "*HEARTWORK* tells a story of human weakness and the internal struggles that we all face. It speaks of the weaknesses that befall us on individual and societal levels; the conflicts we face in our daily lives between our desires and human greed, and the force inside us and around us which reminds us of our impact on our surroundings."

The album's wide-ranging palette thus looks inward as well as outward, from the introspective to the global, to explore the disappointments and struggles of life in modern society. Its concerns range from the day-to-day regrets of falling short of one's own expectations to the calamitous impact of failing to act on the major issues facing the planet itself.

"It works on both a micro and macro level," Kwassman explains. "It deals with things that were going on in my life, when I had to grapple with my own weaknesses, but also relates to the things I see going on around me. The overarching idea has to do with my own desire to be better for myself and for the things that are happening in the world to be better as well."

These may be epic-scale themes for a young composer to tackle, but the scope of Kwassman's music is more than up to the challenge. His richly orchestrated arrangements incorporate his own woodwind playing, which includes alto and soprano saxophone, clarinet, and contra-alto clarinet among other instruments, along with voice, guitars, cello, and rhythm section.



The use of wordless vocals, here performed by alternative R&B singer-songwriter **Aria Jay**, is one of the most immediately striking features of Kwassman's music, and one that exemplifies the evolution of his work since the first album. There, the human voice was evocative but at times threatened to overwhelm the rest of the ensemble; on *HEARTWORK* it's a fully integrated element, employed as judiciously as every other instrument to weave the album's vivid sonic tapestry.

"The use of vocals was really experimental on the first record," Kwassman admits. "Going into this record I knew what my palette could be and the vocals are more in balance with the rest of the group. I was careful to place the vocal in arrangements in a melodic sense that was less dominant. This is an egalitarian band where everyone is on the same level of significance, so I really restrained my use of the voice."

Sarah Markle's cello is an important change since the first album, as is the incorporation of **Craig Akin's** electric bass. Kwassman himself adds the deep-throated contra-alto clarinet to his arsenal, while the use of a 19th-century field snare, in addition to the

remainder of **Rodrigo Recabarren's** percussion array, adds to the feeling of internal war that runs throughout the compositions.

Another development is the use of two guitarists, which is the fortuitous result of unfortunate beginnings. Kwassman's longtime guitarist **Jeff Miles** suffered an injury prior to the recording of *Songs of the Brother Spirit*, requiring the great Israeli guitarist **Gilad Hekselman** to step in. Realizing the incredibly chemistry that Hekselman shared with the band, Kwassman called on both guitarists for *HEARTWORK*. The pair are given the spotlight on "Let Me Dream a Different World For Us," with Miles on baritone and Hekselman on acoustic guitar, their intricate, tactile interplay breathing life into Kwassman's fantasy of a world free from weakness and injustice.

Angelo Di Loreto's urgent, pulsating piano, soon to be accompanied by Recabarren's electronica-influenced rhythms, opens the ever-shifting title track, which serves as an overture for the album, incorporating most of the themes to come, if often in heavily disguised form. "This piece has intensity, fear, doubt, excitement, tenderness, regret and sorrow, things that I've felt and want to convey across the whole record," Kwassman says. It conveys the tension between heart and mind, which I think are two oppressive agents within us in both positive and negative ways."

The centerpiece of the album is the 25-minute "Kyoto," split into two pieces but consisting of a single narrative arc. The most globally-oriented piece of the composition, "Kyoto" is a direct reaction to the United States' failure to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the international treaty designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow the catastrophic progress of climate change. "That moment was a huge opportunity lost," Kwassman says. "I feel like we're gambling with the only world that we have. This piece mourns and eulogizes the world that I see being taken for granted and conveys the feeling of hopelessness that I alone can't do much to help."

Jay and Di Loreto join together for the elusive, mesmerizing melody of "Broken Covenant," which Kwassman says represents "a broken promise with oneself, an internal war between two senses of self: one that feels the weight of greed and one that is characterized by a sense of humanity and human goodness." The song serves as a bookend in tandem with the penultimate track, "All's Well That Ends," which begins with the same motif that ends "Broken Covenant." The second piece rejects the compromises conveyed in the first, offering a sense of hope and renewal.

The delicate "Penance" deals with the immediate aftermath of the compromises in "Broken Covenant," a reflective, crystalline piece with Kwassman sitting at the piano accompanied only by Jeff Miles on various guitars. Its direct opposite is the final piece, the soaring, hopeful "May Our Children Do Us Better," which Kwassman sees as the end credit theme for his cinematic masterwork.

Upcoming Joshua Kwassman Performances:

May 20 / Dazzle Jazz Club / Denver, CO

June 6 / Discover Jazz Festival / Burlington, VT

June 16 / SubCulture / New York, NY

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