



Libra

[Tim Garland](#) | Global Mix (2009)

By [John Kelman](#)

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The line between jazz and classical music is being increasingly blurred—or, in the case of the multidisciplinary Tim Garland, erased entirely. The British reedman began experimenting with fusing the two disciplines on *Rising Tide* (Sirocco, 2003), where he both wrote for his trio and a string quartet upfront, and scored strings around a solo saxophone improvisation. Garland expanded the concept further on the sweeping *If the Sea Replied* (Sirocco, 2005), a suite for the Northern Sinfonia Strings and his new Lighthouse Trio, featuring piano wunderkind Gwilym Simcock and equally intrepid percussionist, Asaf Sirkis.



Libra expands on *If the Sea Replied*'s creative innovation even further. A richly conceived double-disc set, it features the Lighthouse Trio alone, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on the even more ambitious "Frontier" suite, and with guitarist [Paul Bollenback](#), who appeared on Garland's more clearly jazz-oriented *Change of Season* (Sirocco, 2004).

It's a given that The Lighthouse Trio, with some significant performance time behind it, is even more simpatico than ever before. The classically trained Simcock, who came late to jazz but has proven himself a stunning improviser and bandleader on *Perception* (Basho, 2007), excels on the lyrical yet exciting "The Eyes of Ages," and engages in empathic interplay with Bollenback on the dark-hued "Old Man Winter," propelled by Sirkis' world music-informed hand drums. The foursome engages in a hint of unexpected gospel on "Hang Loose," with Bollenback on acoustic slide guitar, and swings hard with outstanding collective chemistry on the album closer, an obliquely swinging version of [Charles Mingus](#)' "Nostalgia in Times Square," where everyone solos with fiery energy—especially Sirkis, in a rare appearance on conventional drums.

Garland fleshes out the bottom end when Simcock doesn't, yet The Lighthouse Trio largely avoids the compelling urge to approach music in a conventional fashion, allowing for plenty of space and atmospheric to let the music breathe on during Garland's soprano solo on the complicated "Arabesque for Three" where, as much as any solo on the disc, asserts his fully emergent voice. "Bajo del Sol," first heard with Bill Bruford's Earthworks on *Random Acts of Happiness* (Summerfold, 2004) and *Earthworks Underground Orchestra* (Summerfold, 2005), actually benefits from the reduced instrumentation, allowing for more intimate interplay amongst the trio.

The four-movement, 20-minute "Frontier" suite is Garland's most successful merging of long-form classicism and open-ended jazz-centricity to date. Dynamic, with bold Stravinsky-esque dynamic passages, Garland takes advantage of the entire sonic range of the orchestra, bringing the trio in for an improvised section that still works within form on "MoonGod," while "On SunGod" begins as an evolving tenor solo that leads to the introduction of stronger form as the orchestra reenters.

The closing movement, "Libra," ends "Frontier" on a more melodic note, the strings creating a rich foundation for Garland's soprano. It's an appropriate ending to a suite that contributes in making *Libra* a clear masterpiece of invention and improvisation; once again positioning Garland at the forefront of contemporary music without borders.

Style: [Modern Jazz](#)

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