FOUNDATION

Nick Maclean’s SNAGGLE feat. the Ali Bros (Browntasauras Records)

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Reviewed by Jaymz Bee

Isaac Asimov believed you could predict the future if you had enough people and enough math. He called it psychohistory. I call it a good rhythm section. Give me six musicians who listen to each other and I’ll tell you where the next thousand years are going, or at least the next eight bars.

Nick Maclean has been building this particular galactic empire since 2013, which in jazz years is roughly the fall of Rome. SNAGGLE has always been the kind of band that makes critics reach for the phrase “Canada’s answer to Snarky Puppy,” which is a compliment that sounds like an insult, like being called the Tim Hortons of espresso. Forget the comparisons. On Foundation they have stopped answering anybody’s question and started asking their own.

The concept: a suite inspired by Asimov’s Foundation saga. A concept album about science fiction from a jazz-funk band. In 1974 this would have come with a gatefold sleeve, a poster of a nebula and a warning from your parents. In 2026 it comes with Brownman Ali, which is better than a poster. Brownman plays electric trumpet the way the mutant Mule manipulates minds, three moves ahead and slightly amused that you haven't noticed. He has produced this band since The Long Slog, and his fingerprints are everywhere, smudged in the right places.

His brother Marcus Ali is on tenor, and there is something about brothers on horns. The Breckers knew it. The Adderleys knew it. You can’t fake that kind of argument; it has to start at the dinner table. Marcus brings a warmth that keeps all this interstellar engineering from floating off into the vacuum.

Maclean himself is Hari Seldon, the psychohistorian who, through clever long-form mathematical puppet-mastery, saves the galaxy by bending it's fate to his will. Maclean's

keys and synths do the Herbie Hancock thing without doing a Herbie Hancock impression, and anyone who has heard his Hancock work knows he has earned the right to wear that lineage like a good suit. Jay Yoo’s guitar handles the turbulence, Adam Mansfield, a Brownman protégé, drums like someone who read the whole trilogy and the prequels, while Matt Gruebner's basslines keeps the empire’s foundations from cracking.

What I love is that nobody here mistakes complexity for depth. The grooves are dirty. The ideas are big. It’s music you can think to and dance to, which used to be called fusion before fusion became a dirty word, and is now just called being good.

Asimov wrote that violence is the last refuge of the incompetent. So is smooth jazz. This record is neither. It’s the sound of a Toronto band realizing the galaxy is bigger than the Rex, and then going out to conquer it on a tour bus.

Seventeen thousand years of darkness, Asimov warned. Not on my turntable.

Jaymz Bee