

# Shijin creates eclectic, futuristic jazz on new self-titled album

By **Dodie Miller-Gould** - October 26, 2018

Shijin is proof that a potential listener should never judge recordings by the photo on the cover. If such pre-judgment were accurate, then Shijin would be a nu-metal band with a dark critique of the world. What the jazz quartet has instead is a penchant for experimental sounds and arrangements. Once in a while on “Shijin” there are elements that sound like other genres of music, but mostly, it is jazz with some experimental turns and some lovely passages done in saxophone or piano. “Shijin” was released Oct. 26, 2018, a perfect soundtrack for the introspection that sometimes accompanies fall.

## About Shijin

The co-op group is comprised to two Americans and two Europeans who create jazz that is both colorful and intriguing. The group’s members are Jacques Schwarz-Bart on saxophone, Stephane Galland on drums, Malcolm Braff on piano, Rhodes and Laurent David on bass.

Each musician comes with a long history of performance. Their solo careers are only rivaled by the work they do with the ensemble. Schwarz-Bart is from the Caribbean. The son of accomplished writers, Schwarz-Bart found his own path to expression when he began to play the saxophone at age 24, after not choosing a career he had once seemed destined for—that of statesman. Three years after his introduction to the saxophone,

Schwarz-Bart began to study at the Berklee School of Music. Since then, he has played music for performers like Meschelle Ndegeocello, D'Angelo, Ari Hoening and others.

Stephane Galland, a native of Belgium, seemed destined for a life behind the drum kit since age three, when he first began to play. Classical lessons soon followed, and at age 11, Galland discovered jazz. He has recorded more than 20 CDs for his group AKA MOON. In addition to working with various artists from almost all the continents, he has also worked with notable jazz artists in the US. His project, LOBI explores multiple ancient traditions in a modern and forward-thinking way.

Malcom Braff plays keyboards and piano in Shijin. Born in Rio de Janeiro, but grew up in Dakar and Switzerland. In the course of his career outside of Shijin, Braff has recorded almost two dozen albums as a leader on projects recorded on the Blue Note label.

Laurent David plays bass, but started out studying classical guitar before switching to electric bass. Aside from Shijin, he has worked with the jazz trio TRIAS. He also did some work for Yael Naim's first recording, and has worked with numerous musicians who delve into improvisation. He has appeared in many European jazz festivals.

The quartet is known for the mind-blowing music they create collectively as Shijin. Tracks that shouldn't be missed from this album is "Smells Funny" and "Afro Bear."

## "Shijin" by Shijin

With eight songs ranging in run times from a little over three minutes, to almost eight minutes, there is little to be predicted about Shijin. There is a feel to the songs that will remind some listeners of other genres. However, the arrangements and instrumentation will reinforce what jazz fans know about the genre and they will appreciate the forward-thinking risks that the quartet has taken.

## "Afro Bear"

Drumming that seems to have been taken right out of the rock 'n' roll style book opens the track. Long, smooth passages from the saxophone change into short, thoughtful bursts. This is the beginning of the song where the hyper-kinetic energy of the piece draws listeners in. A piano motif keeps the dynamics lively even as the song slows down.

Keyboard accents sound like what many envision the future to sound like. The result is an atmospheric vibe that makes the song good for listening and contemplating the future of jazz.

## “Smells Funny”

Moody like early 1990s alternative rock when it opens, the saxophone chimes in to remind listeners that this is experimental jazz. Immediately after the opening, the bass gets heavier and the saxophone is making a commentary that might be too advanced for most people to grasp. Even if listeners do not understand everything the band is trying to do, what they will hear is the way a song verges on cacophony without losing control. In the capable hands of the members of Shijin, the songs, this one included, never lose their verve, or forget what they were supposed to be in the first place.

### **Dodie Miller-Gould**

Dodie Miller-Gould is a native of Fort Wayne, Indiana. She has BA and MA degrees in English from Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne, and an MFA in Fiction from Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her research interests include popular music and culture, 1920s jazz, and blues, confessional poetry, and the rhetoric of fiction. She has presented at numerous conferences in rhetoric and composition, and creative writing. Her creative works have appeared in Tenth Muse, Apostrophe, The Flying Island, Scavenger's Newsletter and elsewhere. She has won university-based awards for creative work and literary criticism.

