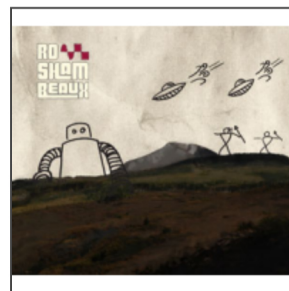




## Ro Sham Beaux: Ro Sham Beaux (2012)

By DAVE WAYNE, Published: May 4, 2012

Most jazz tunes are arranged in a certain way: head, solos, head. It's a valid and useful way to present improvised musical ideas based on a theme or chord progression. The head can be a simple melody or a convoluted riot of contrasting harmonies and tempi. Rock or pop songs are constructed differently: verse, chorus, verse, plus an intervening bridge and perhaps a short instrumental solo. Ro Sham Beaux plays around with both of these archetypes in an amusing and innovative way. Much of what they do falls closer to the rock/pop arena in that their compositions hew closer to the verse (bridge), chorus, verse (bridge), chorus model.



It's not hard to imagine saxophonist Zac Shaiman as a vocalist—his lines are clean and simple but his delivery is dramatic and carefully paced. Like Eddie Harris, he's a superb technician who doesn't always feel the need to prove that he's a superb technician. Also like Harris, Shaiman is quite fond of electronically augmented saxophone sounds. Though he's playing a digital keyboard of some sort, Luke Marantz really loves those crusty old distorted Fender Rhodes sounds, his urgent, rhythmically adept playing reminiscent of Jan Hammer. The rhythm section—drummer Jacob Cole and bassist Oliver Watkinson—plays with an appealing combination of grace and athleticism. Cole's traps work is pitch-perfect. Though he doesn't really sound like David King or Jim Black, Cole's off-kilter fills and extensive use of metric modulation are similar to strategies employed by both. Watkinson is superb— all warm, woody sound, and deep groove.

The eleven tunes are varied, concise, and certainly come from a world where indie rock, jam bands, and modern jazz all peacefully coexist as equals. It's tempting to compare the sound of Ro Sham Beaux to Medeski, Martin & Wood or the Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey. But Ro Sham Beaux stands out, not only by virtue of Shaiman's wailing saxophone, but also because its approach is much closer to that of an indie rock band than to a funk or jazz band. Ro Sham Beaux' prime directive is putting its tightly-conceived songs across.

The group's melodic content alone is remarkable, with "Bearblade," "Town," or "Tejas Drive" particularly irresistible and memorable. "Meatballs..." almost lapses into a smooth jazz territory, only to be de-mellowed by Watkinson's excellent solo. Things go bucolic on "Town," rock heavy on "Soul Crusher," and abstractly funky on "keut str8 boiz." Yet, as evidenced by the CD's final two tracks, "High Society" and "Anthem," Ro Sham Beaux can be risky, complex, and experimental when it wants to be.

*Ro Sham Beaux* is one of the year's most accomplished and fascinating debut CDs in any musical style. The group's sound and its songs are downright habit-forming—and repeated listens reveal new and different angles every time.

Track Listing: Bearblade; Slave to the Cube; keut str8 boiz; Town; Soul Crusher; Tejas Drive; Meatballs are the Way to a Woman's Heart; Joga; Dreamulator; High Society; Anthem.

Personnel: Zac Shaiman: saxophones and effects; Luke Marantz: keyboards; Oliver Watkinson: bass; Jacob Cole: drums and glockenspiel.

Record Label: Red Piano Records