

way down east is my first album.

I have been venturing to the downeast region of Maine for the past few summers to teach saxophone and clarinet at Summerkeys, a truly amazing summer music festival which takes place in Lubec, the easternmost town in the United States. Come July each year, I fancy myself the “easternmost” sax player in the land! Because Lubec is the end of the road, I call this album **way down east**.

During the three month Summerkeys program, there are two weeks of faculty recitals held in the Congregational Christian Church (est. 1812) in Lubec. I have relished these performance opportunities because I have been granted total creative freedom to present my work however I imagine. I feel understood, I feel seen. As a saxophonist, sound, color, and expression have been central focuses for me. For my latest summer performance, I chose material that I felt would capture the beauty of my sound in the church sanctuary. I took this opportunity to perform solo, because I find it to be the most challenging medium of performance for me. Playing unaccompanied demands courage and vulnerability, which is a mental space I yearn to explore. The name of this album is an homage to Sonny Rollins, who spent many hours alone on the Williamsburg Bridge, and his 1985 solo saxophone concert at the MoMA (*The Solo Album*.)

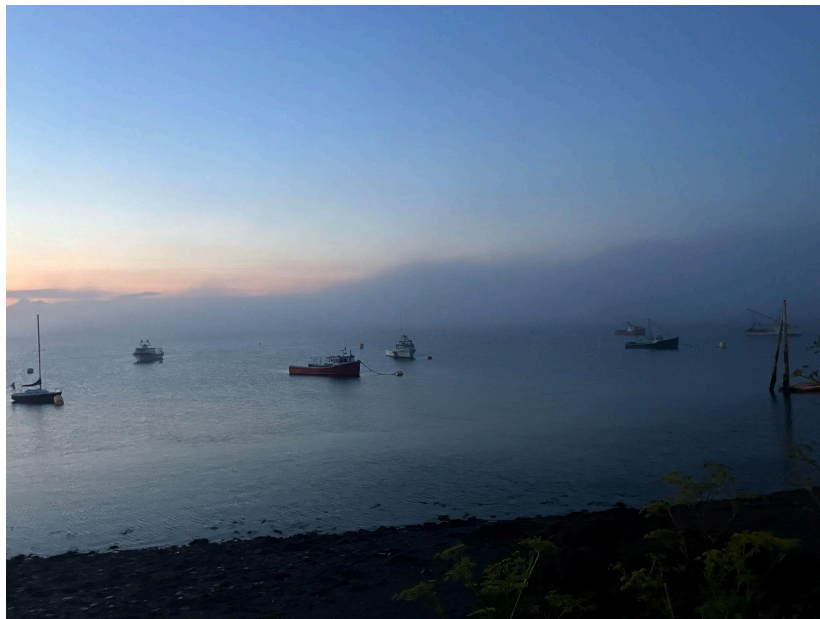
I open with Ben Solomon’s **Etude No. 1** for solo saxophone. I met Ben when we were teenagers at David Liebman’s 2010 saxophone intensive in Pennsylvania. To say I was astonished by his playing is truly an understatement. I was mesmerized by his panoramic command of the instrument and unique ideas. Ten years later in 2020, Ben published a book: *Chromatophores: 12 Modulating Etudes for Saxophone*. Each of the 12 etudes investigates modulation as an expressive timbral device. For this etude Ben comments: “Imagine your saxophone is a harp...The harmony of this etude develops naturally from a process of changing one or two notes in each chord, which then leads the ear in the direction of the next harmonic center. Many of these harmonic shifts are inspired by Maurice Ravel’s elegant use of voice leading.” This indication to imagine the saxophone as a harp presents challenges in relation to breathing and phrasing. The rhythmic continuity and the pivoting harmony brings me into a trance state when I perform this piece.

I have been playing Duke Ellington’s **Sophisticated Lady** since I was 16 years old. What first grabbed my attention about this piece was the excitement in the bridge, where the key modulates down a half-step from Ab major to G Major. That feeling affected me before I understood harmony. Sometimes I think in terms of color, and I perceive a shift from deep purple to emerald green. The melody is a perfect balance of chromatic and diatonic movements. It moves up in thirds and then comes down chromatically and rests near where it began. The tune originally was an instrumental feature for baritone saxophonist Harry Carney, but it took on many iterations over the years, with lyrics

eventually added. A wonderful display of this evolution in one recording is featured on *Masterpieces by Ellington* (Columbia, 1951), a recording I have drawn much inspiration from.

I'm endlessly fascinated by Björk. I attended the Björk retrospective at the MoMA in 2015, around the same time she released her album *Vulnicura* (latin for 'Cure for Wounds.') To me *Vulnicura* is perfect, the songwriting, the texture of the strings, the space, and the lyrics. Björk inspires me as an instrumentalist with her depth of expression. From one syllable to the next she can embody fragility and strength. **History of Touches** came out of pondering what music is closest to me. I had been listening to it a lot at the time. The idea to add synthesizers in post-production was influenced by my teacher David Binney, whose propensity to embrace timbres outside of the acoustic setting inspires me. His album *A Small Madness* (AUAND, 2003) was the first time I heard this concept, it was a sonic surprise and a feeling I wished to capture here.

I wrote **lubec song** during my first year at SummerKeys in 2022. I spent the first two weeks at the Bayview Street faculty house all by myself, which afforded me many hours with a Yamaha upright piano in Studio M4. To recapture that atmosphere, I thought it would be a fun surprise to perform the piece on the piano, as it was conceived. This piece reflects my impressions of night time in Lubec; the tranquility, and the silence that vanishes if you quiet yourself and become part of this magical place. It brings me back to that feeling, alone at the edge of the world.



Track Info:

1. **Etude No. 1** by Ben Solomon copyright 2020 by Vireo Music Publishing (ASCAP)*
2. **Sophisticated Lady** by Duke Ellington, Irving Mills, Mitchell Parrish copyright SONY ATV Harmony & EMI Mills Music Inc. (ASCAP)*
3. **History of Touches** by Björk Gudmundsdottir copyright 2015 Kobalt Music Publishing (ASCAP)*
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Credits:

Nathan Bellott alto saxophone, piano, electronics

Produced by Nathan Bellott. Design, photography, and liner notes by the artist

Mixed and mastered by Juanma Trujillo

Recorded July 26, 2023 at the Lubec Congregational Christian Church in Lubec, Maine

Thank You:

Family

Friends, with special gratitude to Dana Saul

Mentors. Too many to name them all but specifically Hal Galper, Jon Gordon, David Binney, Charli Persip, Bob Mover, Barry Harris, Ann Cusano, Erich Cawalla, Bill Bower, Tim Price, Bobby Sanabria, David Dejesus, Jon Irabagon and Charles McPherson

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Turtle Bay Music School & Brooklyn Music School

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My students who inspire me

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