

## For The Record

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**Spontanea**  
***Chromasonic***  
**Right Brain Records**



Musicians have long taken inspiration from the sensory world around them, creating artistic works informed by how they experience the art and life of others. The Seattle-based free improvisation collective Spontanea has delivered their own ethereal take on this with a new album, *Chromasonic*, released in 2020.

The group, consisting of Matthew Benham (electric guitar, effects), James Hoskins (cello), Carol J Levin (electric harp, percussion), Kenny Mandell (saxophones, flute, percussion), and Scott Schaffer (bass, mandola) used a series of abstract paintings by artist Ellie Polk as inspiration. With no instructions beyond looking at and immersing themselves in a given image, the five members of Spontanea spontaneously interpreted seven visual works, creating a string of otherworldly soundscapes.

Much like these improvising musicians have described diving deeply into the music and the imagery, I found it easy to relinquish control of my little living room and let myself sink into the soundscapes they created. Each of the seven tracks offers a different aural palette, and you can feel the hard line of a reset as they transition from one to the next; much like strolling through the open doors of an art museum and never ending your observations. The third track, "Ataraxia," is often busy and textural, and at times even humorous without being silly—a skill surely developed through many improvisation sessions. Suddenly, you are into the next improvisation, "Kaleidotopia," and there is a cello unfurling as delicately as a flower, teased further open by the other members of the ensemble.

The painting used for the album cover is one of Polk's paintings which was used to inform the penultimate improvisation, "A Riot Of...." The colors are warm and earthy, and more opaque compared to others from the gallery. The improvisation, in turn, makes quick and exciting twists as if they read the painting like a graphic score. Perhaps one could call Polk a cartographer of sorts. You will enjoy the improvisations from these illustrious musicians on their own, but I heartily recommend diving into them one by one with Polk's paintings nearby to enrich the experience. —Haley Freedlund