

# Raves for THAW

#1 CD of 2013 - [Rhapsody.com](http://Rhapsody.com)

Top 10 Songs Public Radio  
Can't Stop Playing 2014



“My favorite classical record of the year was by reed player and composer Ken Thomson, who, in partnering with the strings of the JACK Quartet, made his Cantaloupe label debut with the amazing Thaw, an album that moves from atonal cries to joyous riff-parades and on to some gorgeous melodic moments.” - [Rhapsody.com](http://Rhapsody.com)

“What's most impressive about their collaboration Thaw is how it couples that signature eclecticism with an irresistible warmth and (dare I say) earworm accessibility. Spring is on its way.” - [NPR](http://NPR)

“Brainy, gritty and visceral, the music leaps off the disc.” - [Time Out NY](http://TimeOutNY.com)

“His new career highlight” - [WQXR](http://WQXR.com)

\*\*\*\* “Hopeful, tender evocations... ice turns to liquid.” - [Downbeat](http://Downbeat.com)

“While Thomson can be a prankster, these suites show a serious side worth hearing.” - [iTunes](http://iTunes.com)

“Over the course of its four movements, Thaw makes good on its title, with its form changing from the piercing, Bartokian gestures and harsh, defiant stabs of the opening “Concrete” to the comparatively pliant closer “Thaw,” which alternates between lyrical solo passages and urgent syncopated rhythms executed with brutal efficiency.”- [Textura.org](http://Textura.org)

“Thomson’s Cantaloupe debut as a composer is utterly diverse and vividly imagined.” - [Altoriot](http://Altoriot.com)

“Impressive writing from Ken Thomson: The strings of the quartet undergo a continual process of transformation. First, you get the feeling that you are listening to an accordion, then, a slightly distorted electric guitar. Thomson is an example of a generation of musicians straight from New York that are free from constraints and tradition. And the pieces convey a unique energy and curiosity.” - [Bayerischer Rundfunk BR-Klassik CD Tip](http://BayerischerRundfunk.de)

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Playlists, albums, articles & videos from our Rhapsody music experts.

Classical | Best Of 2013

*December 20, 2013*



## Top 25 Classical Albums of 2013

by **SETH COLTER WALLS**

If you haven't been keeping up with our [monthly classical release roundups](#) -- hey, we've missed you! -- then here's a headline from 2013: Whatever management problems doomed organizations like the Minnesota Orchestra or the New York City Opera (RIP to both, at least as we knew them), the classical music *recordings* scene is still a pretty vibrant one. (Also, we should make space to note that big institutions like the LA Philharmonic are doing quite well, too.)

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**My favorite classical record of the year was by reed player and composer Ken Thomson, who, in partnering with the strings of the JACK Quartet, made his Cantaloupe label debut with the amazing *Thaw*, an album that moves from atonal cries to joyous riff-parades and on to some gorgeous melodic moments.**

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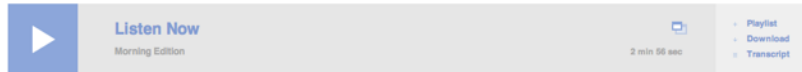
1. Ken Thomson, *Thomson: Thaw*
2. Jeremy Denk, *J.S. Bach: Goldberg Variations*
3. Claire Chase, *C. Chase: Density*
4. New York Philharmonic, *Steven Stucky, Christopher Rouse, Ives*
5. Hilary Hahn, *In 27 Pieces*
6. Yuja Wang, *Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto No.3 In D Minor, Op.30 / Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No.2 In G Minor, Op.16*
7. Herbert Schuch, *Ullmann: Piano Concerto, Op. 25 - Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 3*
8. Jace Clayton, *Clayton: The Julius Eastman Memory Depot*
9. Dawn of Midi, *Dysnomia*
10. Caroline Weichert, *Schulhoff: Piano Works Vol. 2*



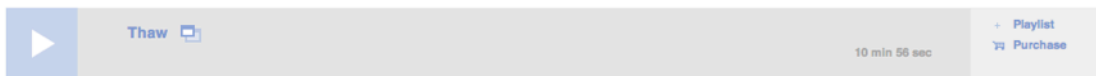
# Heavy Rotation: 10 Songs Public Radio Can't Stop Playing

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February 27, 2014 1:00 AM ET



Ken Thomson and JACK Quartet, 'Thaw IV'



Composer Ken Thomson.

*Naomi White/Courtesy of the artist*

Both Ken Thomson and the JACK Quartet specialize in extremes of endurance and intense thorniness. Thomson – saxophonist and clarinetist for the avant garde marching band Asphalt Orchestra, spazz-jazz-punk outfit Gutbucket, and the Bang on a Can All-Stars – is a musician better associated with ear-piercing shrills, multiphonic honks and free-jazz freakouts than warmth or lyricism. JACK has earned its reputation with ecstatic takes on far-from-center composers like Iannis Xenakis, Georg Friedrich Haas and Helmut Lachenmann. What's most impressive about their collaboration *Thaw* is how it couples that signature eclecticism with an irresistible warmth and (dare I say) earworm accessibility. Spring is on its way.

–**Hannis Brown**, Q2 Music



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## Q2 Music Album of the Week

### Ken Thomson Spins Invention and Prankster-ish Glee in 'Thaw'

Q2 Music Album of the Week for November 25, 2013

Monday, November 25, 2013

By [Seth Colter Walls](#)

Ken Thompson and JACK Quartet's  
'Thaw' (Cantaloupe Music)

**Ken Thomson's** resume is a decent guide to his taste. Playing alto sax in the Asphalt Orchestra – also known as Lincoln Center's street-marching band – shows he's into new arrangements of Charles Mingus, Bjork and Frank Zappa. Thomson's own chamber-jazz compositions, played by his Slow/Fast ensemble, sit comfortably in a lineage with several generations of Downtown splatter-swing.

- [Stream the entire album below](#)

He's also the latest addition to the Bang On A Can All-Stars (in which he plays clarinet), so there's bound to be a post-minimal influence, as well. And yet his first album as a composer for the Cantaloupe label – titled "Thaw" and performed by the **JACK Quartet** – is much more than a sub-genre shopping-list. It's his new career highlight.

The three-movement *Perpetual* opens the disc. Slowly unfolding unison lines, shared among the low end of the quartet and Thomson's bass clarinet, present a wintry (if gentle) sound world that ices over into something more crunchy and alarming, once the remaining quartet players enter, sporting keening dissonances.

If the first movement's slow and steady run up the pitch ladder feels to you like a set-up, or a pregnant pause, you're not far off: "Bad Idea," the second movement, is a raucous, 16th-note parade. The scalar writing and steady riffing might get old quickly in other hands, but the invention of Thomson's writing – some JACK players are right with him, note for note, while others slash in and around his lead line with prankster-ish glee – keeps things compelling.

The final movement, "Don Pullen Says It's OK," references Thomson's appreciation for the mobility of the jazz pianist, which made room for the blues as well as free-jazz piano-as-percussion. After the extremities of harmony and rhythm displayed in the first two movements, Pullen's influence on Thomson's finale manifests as a comfort with unabashed tonality.

*Thaw*, a four-movement work for string quartet, takes up the balance of the album. It shares a few strategies with the first piece: instrumental parts that may seem alienated in the early going; convergence toward unison lines; a late-in-the-piece turn toward folk-like melody (see the pizzicato charm of "Hole"). By the time of the finale, the opening austerity has, as implicitly promised, thawed into something downright hummable.

## Q2 Music

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### RECOMMENDED LINKS

['Thaw' is Available at Amazon.com](#)

[Ken Thompson and JACK Quartet 'Thaw' Release Party at SubCulture](#)



Billy Hart Allen Toussaint Steven Bernstein

# DOWNBEAT<sup>®</sup>

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

**Beyond** / BY PETER MARGASAK

## New Sonic Frontiers

**Ken Thomson and Jack Quartet, *Thaw* (Cantaloupe 21095; 45:17 ★★★★★)** Reedist and recent Bang On A Can member Ken Thomson offers two pieces for the fearless Jack Quartet, including "Perpetual," on which he plays bass clarinet. The final movement of the three-part work is titled "Don Pullen Says It's OK," and he cites the mercurial jazz pianist as an influence in boldly toggling between jagged, dissonant clusters of abstract sound and tender, blues-soaked passages. That last section is marked by somber, patiently unfurling melodies, while the bracing "Bad Idea" is a punishing assault of 16th-note fury. The title work features just Jack, but the range of moods and attacks is similar, from the stark, hard opening section of "Concrete" to the hopeful, tender evocations of the final section, where ice turns to liquid.

**Ordering info:** [cantaloupe.com](http://cantaloupe.com)

# Featured

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November 29, 2013

## Ken Thomson: Thrash-Classical & Swing

by **SETH COLTER WALLS**

Saxophonist-composer Ken Thomson has been something of a secret weapon in New York's cultural scene for years now: He's a leader of the Asphalt Orchestra, otherwise known as Lincoln Center's own street-marching band. They typically delight summer crowds in the arts center's plaza by playing stomping arrangements of Frank Zappa's "Zomby Woof," Meshuggah's metal-opus "Electric Red," and some Charles Mingus to boot. (We've included all three of those Asphalt interpretations in our appended playlist.)

Thomson isn't just a fine player; he also writes the complex-but-grooving music for the avant-jazzy Slow/Fast ensemble. Boasting Thomson's harmonies (and playing) as well as thrashing guitar and rhythm section work, their debut album, *It Would Be Easier If...*, is clearly derived from examples set by John Zorn and other downtown New York progenitors, but without seeming derivative.

With his latest album, *Thaw* -- a collaboration with the JACK Quartet -- Thomson is deepening his talent for what composer David Lang has called, admiringly, "extreme composing." If you want to check Lang's accuracy, just head to the second movement of "Perpetual," titled "Bad Idea." (Steve Reich has also shouted out the playing on this record, too, in case you were looking for more impressive co-signs.) Along with a stray track from Gutbucket, one of Thomson's longest-running outfits, our primer gives you a way to hear all the sides of his exciting discography. Enjoy!



## Articles

2013 Artist Picks

Jane Ira Bloom

## Albums

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Antonymes

Benoît Pioulard

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Matti Bye

Celer

Maile Colbert

Viv Corringham

Ensemble Economique

Karlheinz Essl

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Faures

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Ghost Bike

Ikebana

Rafael Anton Irisarri

The Jaydes

Lantscap

Tristan Louth-Robins

Löwenritter

Chloë March

Lubomyr Melnyk

Mental Overdrive

Northumbria

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Ken Thomson

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Vitiello + Berg

## Compilations / Mixes

#100

Best of Poker Flat 2013

Evolution of the Giraffe

Danny Howells

Missing Fragments

## EPs / Cassettes / Mini-Albums / Singles

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DJ Bone

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Akira Kosemura

Fabrice Lig

Lilies on Mars

Mako

Nian Dub

Nuage

Quiroga

Sheens

Snoqualmie Falls



### Ken Thomson: *Thaw*

Cantaloupe Music

I recall reading an interview a number of years ago wherein Lou Reed expressed fervent admiration for Ornette Coleman's "Ramblin'." It wasn't so much the endorsement that stayed with me, however, but rather Reed's description of Coleman's *Change of the Century* tune as rock'n'roll. What he meant, of course, was that the recording exudes the spirit and raw energy of rock'n'roll. I'm reminded of Reed's comment as I listen to Ken Thomson's *Thaw*, which, on paper at least, looks to be a set of two classical chamber music pieces, one performed by the Jack string quartet (the four-part *Thaw*) and the other by the strings plus Thomson's bass clarinet (the three-part *Perpetual*). Put the recording on, however, and it becomes immediately apparent that the ultra-intense *Thaw* is no polite Sunday matinee performance.

Though it's funereal in tone, "underlying" inaugurates *Perpetual*, which naturally benefits from the marked timbral contrast between the bass clarinet and the strings, with a powerful sense of momentum as it methodically undertakes an ascent into a bleeding high register. Momentum is even more conspicuous during "Bad idea" when Thomson's bass clarinet appears as a non-stop barrage of sixteenth notes that the quartet punctuates with the aggressive counterpoint of its own stabbing attack. In its title, the third movement, "Don Pullen says its OK," references the late jazz pianist who routinely challenged traditions with his iconoclastic playing. Thomson, however, chooses not to mimic the pianist's style but instead appears to pay homage to him with a movement that's unfailingly elegiac in tone.

Over the course of its four movements, *Thaw* makes good on its title, with its form changing from the piercing, Bartokian gestures and harsh, defiant stabs of the opening "Concrete" to the comparatively pliant closer "Thaw," which alternates between lyrical solo passages and urgent syncopated rhythms executed with brutal efficiency. The second part "Dig" finds the players united at the start before branching out into separate, serpentine currents that flow sinuously in and around one another. That liquefied quality carries over into the melancholy reverie "Hole," where soft phrases alternate with pizzicato playing in a delicate manner that's noticeably contrasting in character to the album in general.

Thomson, a Brooklyn-based clarinetist, saxophonist, and composer, brings a rich history to his Cantaloupe Music debut. He plays clarinet in the Bang On A Can All-Stars, leads the twelve-piece Asphalt Orchestra, and plays sax in Gutbucket, a punk/jazz outfit that's issued five recordings on Knitting Factory, Enja, NRW, Cantaloupe, and Cuneiform. Throughout the forty-five-minute *Thaw*, the music's rhythms pulsate with a kinetic energy and exuberance Steve Reich would understandably admire; in fact, a comment by the New York composer forms part of the press release: "Want to hear some musicians really digging in? Hang on—*Thaw* is really moving."

January 2014

## Ken Thomson/Jack Quartet "Thaw"

 Der CD-Tipp zum Nachhören!

**Der New Yorker Musiker Ken Thomson**

**kommt aus dem Umfeld des "Bang on a Can" - Kollektivs, das in New York seit längerem undogmatische und spannende Festivals und Performances auf die Beine stellt. Bang on a Can hat sich zum Ziel gesetzt, international eine Gemeinschaft zu schaffen, die sich innovativ mit Musik beschäftigt. Musikalische Ideen sollen frei fließen, über Grenzen und Genres hinweg.**

Von: Ben Alber  
Stand: 16.04.2014



Cover der CD

In diesen Kosmos passt Ken Thomson gut: Er spielt in einer Punk-Jazz Band, in der experimentellen Straßen-Big-Band "Asphalt Orchestra" und er komponiert. Beim Label "Cantaloupe Music" ist eine CD erschienen mit seinen Stücken "Thaw" für Streichquartett und "Perpetual" für Streichquartett und Bass-Klarinette.

Wilde Sechszehntel-Läufe auf der Bass-Klarinette, die einen schwindlig machen. Dazu schroffe Einwürfe des Streichquartetts - im zweiten Satz von "Perpetual" landet man mit einem harten Aufprall mitten in New York, im Großstadtgewühl. Bei Ken Thomson ist jeder Satz eine Überraschung: Mal ist seine Musik klaustrophobisch dicht, mal offen, atmosphärisch und einfach zauberhaft, wie der tonal komponierte dritte Satz der Quintett-Komposition "Perpetual". Wenn Klang eine sichtbare Oberfläche hätte, dann wäre diese Oberfläche bei Ken Thomsons Musik ständig in Bewegung. Sie faltet sich und glättet sich wieder, bricht auf und zersplittert, mal bilden sich glitzernde Muster, mal matt leuchtende

Flächen.

### Frei von Zwängen der Tradition

Beindruckend, wie Ken Thomson die Streicher des Quartetts einem permanentem Verwandlungsprozess unterzieht: Man hat das Gefühl, ein Akkordeon zu hören. Dann denkt man, es spielt eine leicht verzerrte E-Gitarre mit. Ken Thomson ist ein Beispiel für eine Musikergeneration, gerade aus New York, die sich frei von Zwängen und Tradition im Kosmos Musik bewegt. Und deren Stücke eine ganz eigene Energie und Neugier transportieren. Da steht dann auch schon mal in den Noten: Soll gespielt werden wie eine Basslinie in einem Song der Rockband "U2". Und das Streichquartett darf sich in den repetitiven, sich steigenden Mustern fühlen wie eine Rockband am Ende eines Stadionkonzerts.

### Klangliche Überraschungen

Das Jack Quartet, das Ken Thomsons Musik jetzt auf CD interpretiert, ist ein junges amerikanisches Streichquartett, das sich auf Performances zeitgenössischer Musik spezialisiert hat. Gelernt haben die vier unter anderem beim berühmten Kronos Quartet. Und man hört wie beim Kronos Quartet die kompromisslose Bereitschaft, sich auf das neue musikalische Material einzulassen. Das Ergebnis ist: Musik voller klanglicher Überraschungen, und mit beindruckender Power.