



Kneebody Returns with Ninth Studio Album, *Anti-Hero* - Capturing Grammy® Nominated Quintet's Fiery Energy From Live Performances

Available March 3 on Motéma Music

Compositions Inspired by Loss & Civic Responsibility Through Musical Exploration

Sixteen years in and the genre-bending electric jazz collective **Kneebody** is stronger than ever. On the heels of their recent groundbreaking collaboration with electronic musician Daedelus, the band returned to the studio refreshed and armed with a slate of road-tested tunes for their ninth studio album. Kneebody makes their **Motéma Music** debut on **March 3** with the release of ***Anti-Hero***, the pulsating result of that creative rebirth, featuring an assured set of churning backbeats and unrestrained exploration.

When **Kneebody** first convened in the year 2001, they were five twenty-somethings gigging around Los Angeles' vast pockets of nightlife. Trumpeter **Shane Endsley** and saxophonist **Ben Wendel** formed the frontline, telepathic and complimentary, while keyboardist **Adam Benjamin**, bassist **Kaveh Rastegar** and drummer **Nate Wood** formed the rhythm section.

These five artists, all bandleaders in their own right, have become first-call musicians not only for their jazz contemporaries, but also for mainstream icons such as John Legend, De La Soul, Snoop Dogg and Pearl Jam to name a few. Yet throughout the years, Kneebody has always remained their artistic home.

It is the goal of the band to not be confined to any genre. Though they exist in an instrumental jazz world, their influences and abilities cover an enormous swath of genres from chamber pop to hard-driving electronic-based productions.

"I've often joked that our band is almost infamous at this point for being extremely hard to describe," says Wendel. "I've always been proud of that. The music we're doing is always new but the band itself is not new. Kneebody has always been our creative home. It's always been the ground for us."

The band opens with the ethereal "For The Fallen" composed by Endsley. The spiraling meditation is ominous. Endsley and Wendel weave in and out over Benjamin's humming keyboards, never getting too comfortable, while Wood supplies a pounding backbeat for the self-titled track. Inspired by the expanding outlets for protest and specifically the 2014 battle for net neutrality, Endsley wrote the tune with a sense of empowerment. "There's this revolution in this age that can come from our living rooms. You can launch an uprising from a coffee shop," he marvels.

Wendel's "Drum Battle", which originally appeared on the band's 2015 Daedelus collaboration *Kneedelus*, is a high-energy workout understandably powered by Wood's hard-rocking kit. Benjamin takes a soaring solo on the tune that bends in and out of centuries, conjuring an electric squall squarely in the here and now.

The title track "Anti-Hero" is a more subdued but no less propulsive song composed by Benjamin. "It's one that we have been playing pretty regularly for the last three or four years. It was a nice feeling to record a song that was already in a fully mature phase."

A majority of the material on this record was honed on the road in the last few years. The band takes pride in adhering to the spontaneity of never repeating a take. Months of road-testing tunes results in a very focused mission for the band but the studio as instrument has its charms too.

"When it really works, to write collaboratively is the best thing ever," says Benjamin. "The five of us are totally equal in terms of our decision making on a compositional level, performance level, even on a business level. When everything is aligned and that works well, it is the best thing ever. We all share in the process and feel responsible for the things that go well. That's what has kept it together for 16 years. We all feel like it's our baby, individually and collectively."

Endsley's "The Balloonist" is one of those studio experiments. "It has kind of an irreverent, brat-rock punky beat. It's above the earth. There is a heaviness but it also has a bouncy lightness to it." Benjamin's humming keyboards help that process with Rastegar and Wood in choppy synchronicity on the brisk rocker.

Two of Rastegar's contributions are tributes to musicians gone far too soon. "For Mikie Lee" is a tribute to Bay Area musician Mikie Lee Prasad, a triumphant mid-tempo tune that moves with grungy deliberation. Both Wendel and Endsley heighten the performance with soaring confessions amid the pounding rhythm section.

"Austin Peralta" is the album closer. "Austin was a phenomenon," remembers Rastegar. "He was at a high school that we would go to teach some workshops and clinics. I remember him as an 11th grader, confident, shaggy-headed precocious wunderkind. Pretty soon after high school he started hiring some of us to play his gigs." Upon the pianist's unexpected passing at the age of 22, Rastegar wrote the tune as a solo bass meditation. In the studio he opened it up to the rest of the band. "We put two drum kits on it. It's got a stately mournful sound but it's also got so much wandering beauty, people floating in and out."

"Profar," Benjamin's nod to West Indies baseball player Jurickson Profar, grooves with life. "It's a dense, through-composed piece that's almost like an etude or a chamber music piece," says Benjamin. "Usually in our set list and our live shows, we like to have a balance of music that is dense versus music that is very open. We like to improvise with structures in a jazz tradition." Both horns shine with bright solos that ride over Wood's sly tambourine and a plucky chicken scratch groove.

The spacious "Carry On" is one of Wendel's contributions, a tricky bout that summons the heavens. "I have always felt that Kneebody is more in the spirit of a singer-songwriter, rock band where songs are honed in a certain way. My criteria tends to be that the song has a real strong composed element to it. If there are solos, it's going to be really specific and maybe kind of minimal. I'll think specifically of a band member that would be perfect for. They aren't open jazz vehicles where I could bring it to anybody and ten million people can solo on it. There's a certain kind of conciseness that I think is the same sort of producer version that someone would bring to a singer's album."

"Yes You" is a frenetic feature for Wendel, highlighting his deft chops and endless string of ideas and motion. The live element pervades with the sound of a band deep into a conversation that only they can control. They flutter like a flock of birds, plunging in and unafraid of hard turns on sharp corners.

"It feels to me like the best representation of what the band sounds like live in terms of a focused effort," confides Wood about **Anti-Hero**. "That keeps it not too wandering for repeated listening but it has the energy of a live show. It was an easy album to make. We can just kind of do our thing and it seems to work pretty well."

Anti-Hero is available for pre-order on Friday, January 20.

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