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THE ABSOLUTE SOUND ■ AUGUST 2006

MUSIC JAZZ

## Jazz Caps

**Liberty Ellman: *Ophiuchus Butterfly*.**  
Ellman, producer; Andy Taub, engineer. PI  
Recordings PI19. Music: ★★★★★  
Sonics: ★★★

The stunner of the pack is Liberty Ellman's *Ophiuchus Butterfly*. Ellman, 35, grew up listening to his mother's eclectic record collection—Hendrix, Miles, Coltrane, the Stones, Albert King—and the influences show. He roams easily from dissonant strumming (à la Pat Metheny) to skylark plucking (Jim Hall) to wild noise pedals (out of Derek Bailey), yet all the while he's an original. His music is meticulously composed—intricately complex but accessible, emotionally rich. The title tune begins in a syncopated rhythm, then segues into a punctilious counterpoint with the alto and tenor saxophone, one of them playing in unison with the guitar, the other playing in rondo. The tuba enters the fray, sometimes thickening the bass line, sometimes oom-pah'ing a third-part

harmony with the two saxes. It all sounds like fragments colliding, but they somehow lock together, like a kaleidoscope or a Rauschenberg collage. It's mysteriously rowdy and heady. The second tune, "Activation," is a melancholy ballad, with Ellman bending lovely, sparkling notes.

The sound is good, nothing more. All the instruments sound tonally right, but they're missing the third dimension. The drumheads sound like they've been covered with paper. Still, this guy's worth hearing through a ten-dollar pocket radio.

FRED KAPLAN

**FURTHER LISTENING:** Tony Williams: *Emergency*; Miles Davis: *Bitches Brew*; Bill Frisell: *With Dave Holland and Elvin Jones*