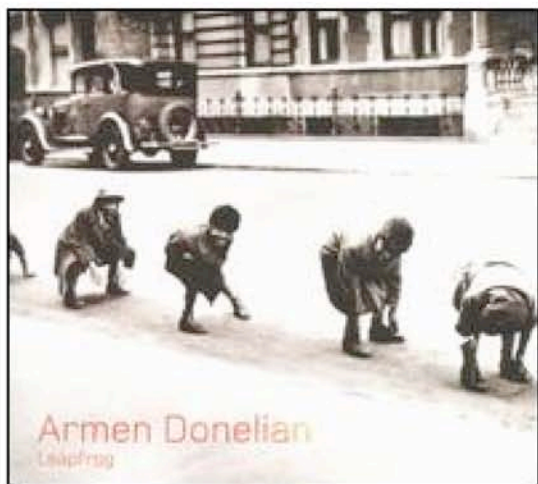


## Leapfrog Armen Donelian

Sunnyside (SSC 1040)  
60:30



### Review

by Alex Henderson

Some jazz improvisers express themselves through original compositions, while others express themselves through standards. Of course, one doesn't automatically rule out the other; being standards-friendly doesn't mean that an improviser cannot be creatively successful as a composer. Different artists have different standards/original material ratios, depending on what they feel works best for them. On his Sunnyside recordings of

the '90s and 21st century, Armen Donelian hasn't been terribly standards-obsessed; he might include one or two of them on an album, but his own compositions have often dominated his releases. And the acoustic post-bop pianist doesn't include any standards at all on *Leapfrog*, a self-produced 2010 date that employs Marc Mommaas on tenor sax, Mike Moreno on electric guitar, Dean Johnson on bass, and Tyshawn Sorey on drums. The only thing on *Leapfrog* that Donelian didn't compose is Mommaas' wistful "Bygone"; everything else on this 60-minute CD is a Donelian original, and that includes the edgy "Rage," the moody "Winter," and the angular, Thelonious Monk-ish "Smoke," as well as the reflective "The Poet" and the mysterious "Behind the Veil." Meanwhile, "Mexico" (which Donelian previously recorded in the early '90s) is an airy piece that, according to Donelian, is meant to aurally depict the wide-open spaces that one finds in the desert of northern Mexico, south of Arizona. Donelian the composer and Donelian the acoustic pianist are equally important on *Leapfrog*; both of them are crucial to the album's creative success. And while *Leapfrog* isn't quite as essential as some of the albums Donelian has recorded in the past, this is nonetheless a solid and absorbing effort from the veteran pianist/composer.