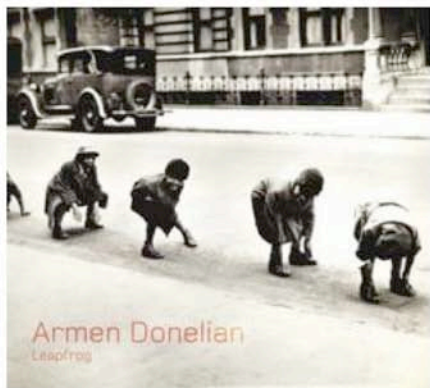


## Editors' Picks

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By HILARY BROWN

### Armen Donelian, *Leapfrog*

(Sunnyside)

The game of leapfrog is an anomaly. It's not an exhibition of brawn, and it requires no premeditated strategy. It isn't a team sport per se, nor is it characterized by star athletes or bouts of glorified showboating. It's the essence of simple pleasure, a diversion free of competition, catalyzed by the vigor of its young players. Pianist Armen Donelian couldn't have picked a more appropriate title for his ninth

Sunnyside album. *Leapfrog* is a panorama of spacious arrangements, instrumental turn-taking and bounding euphony put forth by a team of voracious up-and-comers—guitarist Mike Moreno, tenorist Marc Mommaas and drummer Tyshawyn Sorey. Donelian recruits veteran bassist Dean Johnson to anchor curiously modern compositions while diligently mentoring his contemporaries. *Leapfrog* is a vast lyrical playground in which Moreno, Mommaas and Sorey are free to roam, and it illustrates their heightened individual abilities and ranges. In the style of the game, Johnson and Donelian lay the foundation for their collaborators to saunter joyously between the former's carouseling bass lines and the latter's swirling piano calliope. On "Behind the Veil," Moreno floats between shimmering chorus, subtle, '60s-style tremolo, and warm solos, driving his point home with theatrical hammer-ons and sweeps. A master of restraint, Sorey refines his sound with a buttery-smooth brush technique but also knows how to swing, interchanging freewheeling, cymbal-fueled bop on "Rage" with tribal rhythm and ambient drop-outs on "Mexico." Mommaas intelligently weaves in and out of the mix, navigating the spectrum of styles with eloquent interjections and circular breathing on "Bygone." Donelian steps in when needed on "Smoke," applying steadfast yet understated interludes. *Leapfrog* is a free-spirited road trip, not a think piece. It's a landscape of hills and valleys traversed by a vehicle of both cohesion and personality. Plus, it's fun—just like the childhood game. The tour itinerary on the Donelian's website lists CD release shows at Firehouse 12 in New Haven, Conn. (Sept. 23), and at The Cornelia Street Cafe in New York (Sept. 24).