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MUSIC

Chicago jazz-fusion unit Cordoba actualize their ambition on Specter

by **Leor Galil**
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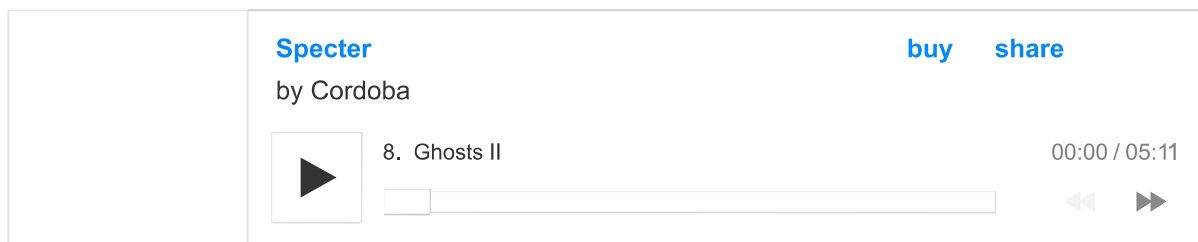


Cordoba
Credit: Ayethaw Tun

When *The Sick Muse* interviewed Chicago jazz-fusion sextet Cordoba in 2019, vocalist Brianna Tong talked about the ways improv-based music can be a megaphone for protest movements. “I don’t think it’s revolutionary, but I think it can deepen the things that are in the lyrics of those songs,

and provide an outlet to feel more about the song,” she said. “I think it is an important part of people’s radicalization to actually feel about what the fuck is happening, and not just be like this is how it is, it sucks.” Tong speaks from experience: she’s been part of the People’s Lobby and Reclaim Chicago, and was already engaged in organizing and activism when Cordoba began releasing music in 2016. You can feel the intensity she wants to communicate in the irascible clomp of “No Answer,” from Cordoba’s new *Specter* (Amalgam). And even when Tong’s screams are so garbled that it’s impossible to make out individual words, the outrage comes through—and the lyrics that are clear put the capitalist system squarely in her crosshairs (“Why do I have to pay for water . . . and a place to fucking live”).

Cordoba went big for *Specter*, enlisting Chicago’s [Kaia String Quartet](#) and other auxiliary musicians to enrich their ambitious sound. (In that same *Sick Muse* interview, guitarist Cam Cunningham said, “I want Cordoba to be a Wagnerian experience, without any of the racism.”) But the core members of Cordoba—Tong, Cunningham, multi-instrumentalist Eric Novak, keyboardist Zach Bain-Selbo, bassist Khalyle Hagood, and drummer Zach Upton Davis—have also developed a synchronicity powerful enough that they can actualize most of their grand visions without any help at all. The velvety “Ghosts 1” could smooth-talk its way onto an R&B-heavy playlist made to woo a new flame, and if it can help love happen—or if any song on *Specter* can—then I’d consider that a positive revolution in this acutely painful year.





 *Cordoba, Specter*

Amalgam

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