

LEON FOSTER THOMAS

Pannist | Percussionist | Composer | Arranger | Educator



Leon Foster Thomas is a gifted international jazz musician, steel pan virtuoso, drummer, percussionist, composer, arranger and lecturer. He blends his Caribbean roots with the harmonic and improvisational complexities of jazz, creating a lively and eclectic meld all his own. Winner of the **World Steelband Music Festival's** Soloist and Duet competitions in 2002 and 2004, critics laud him as “the next big thing on his instrument”, “...an enthralling improvisor...” *All About Jazz*; “...masterful with impeccable musicianship” *When Steel Talks*; and “a benevolent wizard” *Venice Magazine*.

Leon's deft and ambitious command of the steel pan has transcended the instrument's novel stereotype to be featured at world stages such as New York's Jazz at Lincoln Center, Adrienne Arsht Center of the Performing Arts (Miami), Moscow International House of Music, Jacksonville Jazz Festival, Perm International Jazz Festival (Russia), Miami Downtown Jazz Festival, and International Festival of Contemporary Culture (Kazakhstan). He has also worked with artists such as: Hugh Masekela, Randy Brecker, John Daversa, Sammy Figueroa, Vince Mendoza, Richard Smallwood, Ky-Mani Marley, Len “Boogsie” Sharpe, Dolly Parton, Igor Butman, John Beasley, and many more.

With two critically-acclaimed solo albums under his belt, his latest release, **Metamorphosis**, (Ropeadope Records), exemplifies his growth and maturation as a musician. Honing his in-depth talents as a musical storyteller, Leon has produced an album which perfectly illustrates his transformative journey.

Leon has a Bachelor of Music degree from Florida Memorial University and a Master of Music degree at Florida International University. He continues to perform at festivals and concerts around the world, as well as conduct lectures and master classes at various educational and cultural institutions.



PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
786.200.5389

ChamberMusic

American Ensemble



Leon Foster Thomas

Pan American



Watch Leon Foster Thomas perform at last year's Festival Miami at www.chamber-music.org/extras

The funny thing is, I never liked the instrument," says Leon Foster Thomas. True, the steep pan (aka "steel drum") is a product of the Miami-based musician's native Trinidad. But it wasn't really a part of Thomas's culture when he was growing up; most of the pannists he encountered were on television, playing ersatz arrangements of classical favorites. "We would get up to change the channel and watch something else," he says.

Still, music was his passion, especially African drums, which is why as a 13-year-old he accepted an invitation to play with a school steel orchestra. "It was a bit of an embarrassment," Thomas says. "There was this small kid there, five or six years old, also playing the pan, and I thought 'How come he can play and I can't?'" The competitive spirit kicked in, and Thomas started hanging out at pan yards—the outdoor lots that

serve as both rehearsal and gathering places—borrowing sticks and playing when older musicians took their breaks.

Jazz came later, when Thomas got a music scholarship to come to the U.S. to study at Florida Memorial University in Miami. "I just wanted to go to college and come out of poverty," he says. "I had no idea who Grover Washington, Jr. was; who Miles Davis was—I was just playing. But then someone gave me [Davis's] *Kind of Blue*, and it was an eye-opener. I wore that record out." He started studying with trumpeter Melton Mustafa, the head of FMU's jazz program; later continuing his studies as a graduate student at Florida International University.

Thomas has had to fight to establish the steel pan as a legitimate jazz instrument. One night at the Miami jazz club Churchill's Pub, he was setting up to join a jam session,

and the pianist started to heckle him. "He said 'Where are you going with that?'" Thomas relates. "I think he was already drunk, but I thought 'Okay man, I'm just going to play, and I'm going to make sure you *know* I can play. It was 'Bye, Bye Blackbird,' and I played the *hell* out of that tune. After I was done, he came and shook my hand. He told me 'I never knew you could get that sound out of it.'"

When you listen to *Brand New Mischief*, the 2012 album that Thomas wrote and recorded to celebrate the birth of his daughter Ancey, you hear that the pan, when played with a jazz sensibility, can be as cool, or as funky, as any instrument out there. "My whole goal," Thomas says, "was just to be able to *play*. Since I can't play any other melodic instrument, I use it to express how I feel inside. And now it's pretty much my voice." ■ www.leonfosterthomas.com

Photo: Thomas Luis Oltrabal

All About Jazz

Home » Articles » CD/LP/Track Review

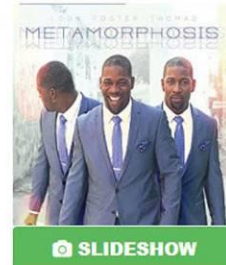
Leon Foster Thomas: Metamorphosis



By **JAMES NADAL**
July 10, 2016
[Sign in](#) to view read count



Being one of the newest percussion instruments on the planet, (circa 1939) the steel pan is actually on a similar timeline with the development of modern jazz. Taking into consideration strong African influences and a hybridization process, they appear to be a natural combination. Pan Master [Leon Foster Thomas](#) has taken the instrument most associated with his homeland of Trinidad, right into the heart of jazz composition and performance with *Metamorphosis*, in a bold rhythmic and melodic encounter.



With shades of early Kaiso (calypso) music blended with jazz, "Kai-Fusion," lays the soundscape for the pan to interplay with the horns, all revolving around carnival derivations and imaginings. The utilization of twin trumpets and a sax gives this opening track exhilarating anticipation and excitement. In a throwback to when bands had to play dance music to make it, "Midnight Refrain," honors the speakeasies and clubs where the audience and musicians collided in a mutual sense of satisfaction and good times.

The "Gulf of Paria," lies in between Trinidad and Venezuela, and in this piece Thomas portrays an aquatic introspection exercise, commencing with a tranquil piano/pan melody, setting the mood for trumpeter John Daversa to soar into the clouds. "In the Corner," is a personal manifestation of a musician's doubts, and how to overcome them. Thomas enters uncharted zones, rising with angst, and sliding into consolation, revealing a full spectrum of emotions. Percussionist Sammy Figueroa is featured on "Delusion of a Dream," the most Caribbean flavored track, and "Unknown Memory," is a bop-fusion adventure with Daversa on the EVI (electronic valve instrument) for a futuristic approach.

The sounds and influence of reggae are evident on "Dubplate Swing," but then Thomas dives into blues territory with some clever harmonious twists and turns, accenting the pan against the horns. The African currents flow within the soca inspired Nelson Mandela tribute "Take A Bow," Jean Caze playing vivid trumpet phrasing reminiscent of [Hugh Masakela](#). "A Whiter Shade of Pale," endures as one of the great ballads of the rock era, and Thomas—with perfect piano accompaniment by Martin Bejeran—performs an intimate odyssey, as if the song was initially intended to be performed on a steel pan. A lesson in mastery of technique, tone and tempo, all as the ceiling flew away. The band all gets to stretch out on "Cry of Hope," a rising frenetic bopper which closes out the repertoire on a high note.

Whereas the steel pans are usually centered on calypso and other Caribbean music, Leon Foster Thomas has an abstract crossover intent. He utilizes formal musical training and education, combined with his innate Trinidad heritage, to obtain maximum benefit of the uniqueness options. This is steel pan music for contemporary times, no longer is it a novel instrument with colorful applications. He takes his jazz compositions seriously, and technically exhibits how the steel pan can be applied within these parameters. *Metamorphosis* is defined as a marked change in appearance, character, and function, all applicable to Thomas, and his music, as he takes this relatively young instrument into maturity.

Track Listing: Kai-Fusion; Midnight Refrain; Gulf Of Paria; In The Corner; Delusion Of A Dream; Unknown Memory; Dubplate Swing; Take A Bow; A Whiter Shade Of Pale; Cry Of Hope.

Personnel: Leon Foster Thomas; steel pan, percussion; Martin bejerano: piano; Kurt Hengstebeck: upright bass, electric bass; Michael Piolet: drums; Jean Caze: trumpet; David Palma: tenor sax, flute; Fernando Ulibarri: guitar; John Daversa: trumpet, EVI; Sammy Figueroa: percussion.

Title: [Metamorphosis](#) | Year Released: 2016 | Record Label: [Ropeadope](#)

PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
786.200.5389



Proving His Mettle

Internationally renown steel drummer Leon Foster Thomas puts a tropical spin on jazz—and South Florida sounds in his beats.

BY BOB WEINBERG
 PORTRAIT BY JOE GATO

Leon Foster Thomas is a mesmerizing performer. On stage with trumpeter Etienne Charles' sextet in November, Thomas worked his magic on the steel pan, an instrument more frequently associated with tropical seaside resorts than with auditorium jazz concerts. But here he was, at the Rose and Alfred Miniaci Performing Arts Center in Fort Lauderdale, nearly stealing the show from fellow Trinidad and Tobago native Charles. With speed and precision, the 35-year-old Miami resident coaxed chiming notes from his instrument, a benevolent wizard conjuring sunny spirits from a gleaming cauldron. Charles, perched atop a wooden frame drum, beamed at the pan player, reveling in the signature sounds of their homeland. Kicking off the 2016-2017 season of the South Florida JAZZ concert series, they set a high bar for the monthly performances to follow.

Thomas had reason to be inspired. He had recently learned his third recording, *Metamorphosis*, was being considered for the Grammy ballot in multiple categories, including Album of the Year and Best Instrumental Jazz Album. Although the recording didn't make the final cut, it certainly merited consideration. On nine original compositions and one cover—a heartfelt read of Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale"—Thomas and an A-list crew of South Florida jazz talent meld calypso and Afro-Cuban rhythms with jazz harmony. The opening "Kai-Fusion," which spotlights dazzling solos from saxophonist David Palma, guitarist Fernando Ulibarri and the leader himself, provides the perfect introduction.

"'Kai' is short for 'Kaiso,' the first lineage of calypso and soca," Thomas says. "I wanted to take that and have it be groove-oriented. It's a party, but with the sophistication of the jazz elements."

Thomas—"Foster" to his friends—came to South Florida in 2001 to study at Florida Memorial University, later earning a master's degree from Florida International University. He's now among a vanguard of young pannists transforming the instrument's role in jazz. Peers such as Jonathan Scales and Victor Provost have also been gaining critical acclaim, following in the footsteps of pioneers Othello Molineaux and Andy Narell. Molineaux, who recorded with bass player Jaco Pastorius, remains a venerated figure in the jazz world—particularly in South Florida, where he's lived for decades. Thomas hadn't heard of him until he moved here.

In fact, Thomas says he faced a considerable learning curve when it came to jazz. His friend, drummer Andrew Atkinson, turned him on to recordings by Keith Jarrett and Miles Davis. He also dove into the area's abundant Latin music. "It wasn't foreign to me," he

Proving His Mettle

Internationally renown steel drummer Leon Foster Thomas puts a tropical spin on jazz—and South Florida sounds in his beats.

BY BOB WEINBERG
 PORTRAIT BY JOE GATO

says. "But coming to Miami, it was like, 'OK, there's a difference between Puerto Rican clave and Cuban clave.'" With the help of pianist Martin Bejerano and percussionist Sammy Figueroa, Thomas peppers *Metamorphosis* with Afro-Cuban *sabor*, or flavor.

On tracks such as "Midnight Refrain," Thomas also explores bluesier hues. "'Midnight Refrain' is all about that speak-easy," he says. "Sweaty, moonshine, what have you, in the middle of New Orleans. I had a chance to go to Bourbon Street to conceptualize some of these things. There's a correlation with New Orleans and Caribbean music because of the slave trade."

Thomas' recent return to Trinidad was very much a homecoming. The fourth child of seven, he caught up with kin and also worked with the Fonclaire Steel Orchestra. One of the island's premier steel bands, Fonclaire played a pivotal role in Thomas' development. "I had to go back to the drawing board because the other guys just outplayed the shit out of me," he says. "I was talking to the band, and we've decided to invest in the youth—we're investing in the future."

Raised in humble conditions—with no plumbing or electricity for years—Thomas understands the importance of providing a hand. Fortunately for him, what his home lacked in amenities, it made up for in music. Thomas' father was a celebrated drummer; his mother, a singer. And then there were the neighborhood pan yards, rehearsal spots for steel pan players.

"The pan yards are where you go to see the pan orchestras," he says. "There weren't really any buildings allocated for steel pans, so everything happened in someone's backyard."

From festivals and competitions in Trinidad to rehearsal rooms at FMU to sharing stages with stars such as Hugh Masekela and Dolly Parton, Thomas has awed listeners in both hemispheres. In May, Thomas led bands at the Virginia International PANFest and at the Jacksonville Jazz Festival. In July, he and vibraphonist Drew Tucker headlined a show at the Arts Garage in Delray Beach. And in August, Thomas and his trio will play club dates in London.

Wherever he travels, Thomas brings the sound of South Florida with him. He describes how he went to visit his friends Atkinson and saxophonist Tivon Pennicott at a club in New York. "People were like, 'Oh, that's the Miami crew,'" Thomas says. "We have a certain sound, and we're not going to get away from it. Anywhere we go, you can tell, 'These cats are from Miami.' You can tell by the mixture of cultural elements in our playing. We're very sharp." ▮

Thomas' father was a celebrated drummer; his mother, a singer. And then there were the neighborhood pan yards, rehearsal spots for steel pan players.

"The pan yards are where you go to see the pan orchestras," he says. "There weren't really any buildings allocated for steel pans, so everything happened in someone's backyard."

From festivals and competitions in Trinidad to rehearsal rooms at FMU to sharing stages with stars such as Hugh Masekela and Dolly Parton, Thomas has awed listeners in both hemispheres. In May, Thomas led bands at the Virginia International PANFest and at the Jacksonville Jazz Festival. In July, he and vibraphonist Drew Tucker headlined a show at the Arts Garage in Delray Beach. And in August, Thomas and his trio will play club dates in London.

Wherever he travels, Thomas brings the sound of South Florida with him. He describes how he went to visit his friends Atkinson and saxophonist Tivon Pennicott at a club in New York. "People were like, 'Oh, that's the Miami crew,'" Thomas says. "We have a certain sound, and we're not going to get away from it. Anywhere we go, you can tell, 'These cats are from Miami.' You can tell by the mixture of cultural elements in our playing. We're very sharp." ▮

All About Jazz

Home » Articles » CD/LP/Track Review

James Nadal's Best Releases Of 2016

By JAMES NADAL
December 20, 2016
Sign in to view read count



Having had the honor and pleasure to review over eighty records in 2016, choosing a dozen is a difficult task. There are featured blues and soul vocalists, which are maintaining the significance of these genres alive with the authentic talent and dedication required. Included are stimulating offerings from innovative fusion and experimental artists, as well as diverse instrumental and vocal performances from Africa and the Caribbean. My sincere appreciation to all the musicians, producers, promoters, publicists and friends who send music; and to Michael Ricci our publisher and editor-in-chief for his invaluable technical assistance.



William Bell
This Is Where I Live
(Stax Records)



Patsie Jean
Nwayo
(Self Produced)



Aireene Espiritu
Back Where I Belong
(Little Village Foundation)



Michael Spiro/Wayne Wallace
Canto America
(Patois Records)



Leon Foster Thomas
Metamorphosis
(Ropeadope)



Shez Raja
Gurutopia
(Dot Time Records)



Shabaka And The Ancestors
Wisdom Of Elders
(Brownwood Recordings)



Mark Fox Quartet
Three Octaves Above The Sun
(Cherry Sound Records)



Kat Riggins
Blues Revival
(Bluzpik Media Group)



Taeko Kunishima
Iridescent Clouds
(53 Jazz)



Fidel Morales
Omio
(Omio Music World)



Caféz
Sol Boricua
(Talismusic Records)

Leon Foster Thomas: Metamorphosis



By DAVE WAYNE
July 12, 2016
Sign in to view read count



Throughout the history of jazz, what once seemed to be oddball instruments have inexorably become part of accepted sonic landscape, while others have fallen into disuse. It's hard to believe that the vibraphone, flute, and violin were once seen as un-swinging, non-jazz instruments, while the banjo and tuba were considered essential linchpins of the jazz sound. Some instruments—both the clarinet and the tuba leap to mind—have gone fully 180 degrees from hip to obsolete and back to hip again. Others have remained on the fringe until a key virtuoso is able to make a convincing case for their non-novelty use. Good examples of the latter are Gregoire Maret's stellar work with the chromatic harmonica and Susan Alcorn's improv magic on the steel guitar. The steel pans are in a similar position, though no one has really taken the instrument to the next level. Not yet, anyway. Long associated with easygoing, tourist-pleasing Caribbean calypso and reggae sounds, the limited range and inflexible timbre of the steel pans make their use in a creative, non-smooth-jazz context damn near impossible. Despite the best efforts of Andy Narell and Othello Molineaux (the latter has been almost Herculean in this regard), the steel pans remain a novelty instrument in jazz.



SLIDESHOW

The Trinidadian percussionist and composer Leon Foster Thomas is the latest player on the scene to promote the steel pans as a plausible lead voice in a "serious" jazz environment. His third album as a leader, *Metamorphosis* makes a very convincing case. Armed with a Bachelor of Music from Florida Memorial University and a Masters in Music from Florida International University, Foster Thomas certainly has what it takes, compositionally, to frame his instrument in the most favorable light possible. He's also an enthralling improviser, and *Metamorphosis* provides him with a diversity of musical environments in which to display his abilities.

The most rewarding tracks on *Metamorphosis* are those that stray the farthest from the polite Caribbean-themed pop-jazz one normally expects from a steel pan album. Thomas, saxophonist David Palma, trumpeters John Daversa and Jean Caze, and the excellent backing band (special props to drummer Mike Piolet and pianist Martin Bejerano) crank up the intensity to the max on "Cry of Hope," a dynamic, post-Coltrane romp that edges into free-bop territory. Stuff like this would—without question—clear the patio at any seaside resort. No less artful is "Gulf of Paria," a delicate jazz waltz. Thomas' extraordinarily lyrical pan solo here is perhaps the finest on this album. Thomas is also quite adept at the sort of creative jazz-funk that's currently in resurgence thanks to players such as Kamasi Washington. The album's first two tracks, "Kai Fusion" and "Midnight Refrain," are excellent examples of nu-jazz fusion: plugged-in jazz that's brainy and danceable. Again, Thomas' rhythm section, and particularly Bejerano, Piolet, and bassist Kurt Hengstebeck provide buoyant, colorful and stylistically flexible backing.

The rest of the album, while equally well-played, is a bit less interesting. "Dubplate Special," with its second-line inspired rhythm, is a party-oriented groove that benefits from Thomas' excellent extended improvisation. "Delusion of a Dream" and "Unknown Memory" are rather predictable jazz-funk; the latter an appealing feature for Daversa's unhinged EVI soloing. The saccharine "Take a Bow" suffers slightly by its resemblance to the The Doobie Brothers' hit "Takin' It to the Streets." Yet it is almost completely redeemed by Caze's excellent, Miles Davis-inspired trumpet solo. Thomas' slowed-down version of "Whiter Shade of Pale" actually works quite well as a jazz ballad, and as an opportunity for Thomas to show what he—and his instrument—are capable of.

Track Listing: Kai-Fusion; Midnight Refrain; Gulf Of Paria; In The Corner; Delusion Of A Dream; Unknown Memory; Dubplate Swing; Take A Bow; A Whiter Shade Of Pale; Cry Of Hope.

Personnel: Leon Foster Thomas; steel pan, percussion; Martin bejerano; piano; Kurt Hengstebeck; upright bass, electric bass; Michael Piolet; drums; Jean Caze; trumpet; David Palma; tenor sax, flute; Fernando Ulibarri; guitar; John Daversa; trumpet, EVI; Sammy Figueroa; percussion.

Title: *Metamorphosis* | Year Released: 2016 | Record Label: [Ropeadope](#)

PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
786.200.5389



Caribbean Beat

EMBARK | MUSIC | REVIEWS

Caribbean Playlist (September/October 2016) | Music Reviews

This month's listening picks

By Nigel Campbell | Issue 141 (September/October 2016)



Metamorphosis — Leon Foster Thomas (Ropeadope Records)

Caribbean musicians are increasingly moving to the metropolitan commercial centres of the music business world to spread the rhythms and sounds created in these islands. Leon Foster Thomas, a Trinidadian steel pan virtuoso, is resident in Miami, and relying on that connection to a larger market to spread the sound of the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. *Metamorphosis*, Thomas's third album, is his debut on important jazz label Ropeadope Records, and signals a critical and commercial blossoming beyond his early funky steel pan jazz beginnings into a standout quartet leader — a metamorphosis, if you will. These are ten tracks of progressive jazz fusion, highlighting the intelligent interplay between steel pan and other instruments, without losing the idea that Caribbean music can be improvised, and swing. World fusion is in effect. Haitian-born, New York-bred trumpeter Jean Caze and master Latin jazz percussionist Sammy Figueroa guest on the album.

WLRN
 **Cultural Connection**
SAME-DAY DISCOUNT THEATRE TICKETS



Leon Foster Thomas—Steel Pan Virtuoso Performing at University of Miami Maurice Gusman Hall (Oct 16 - Oct 16)

Synopsis

October 16, 2014 @ 8:00 PM
UM Gusman Concert Hall

LEON FOSTER THOMAS—STEEL PAN VIRTUOSO
Blends Caribbean, Jazz, Latin, and More

LEON FOSTER THOMAS, steel pan
MARTIN BEJERANO, piano
KURT HENG STEBECK, bass
MIKE PIOLET, drums

Theater Location

1314 Miller Drive
Coral Gables, Florida 33146

Leon Foster Thomas, a gifted jazz musician and steel pan virtuoso originally from Trinidad and now based in Florida, blends the music of his Caribbean roots with the music of North and South America in a lively meld all his own. Also a drummer, percussionist, composer and arranger with nine CDs to his credit, his first-rate programming, phenomenal musicianship and warm stage presence will keep you smiling and on the edge of your seat.

PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
786.200.5389

Leon Foster Thomas finds million uses for steel pan in next jazz release



By: Carol Banks Weber | AXS Contributor | Jun 21, 2016

You wouldn't think there'd be much use for a steel pan player in jazz other than light, spare accompaniment or a special effect in one encore. [Leon Foster Thomas](#) changes the game for all steel pan players few and far between on yet another nervy, yet highly musical album, *Metamorphosis* on [Ropeadope Records](#) (June 3, 2016).

Originally from Trinidad Tobago, the Miami-based Foster Thomas isn't alone in his steel pan jazz adventure. He goes on a fun tear on eight originals and one cover of Procol Harum's 1967 rock classic, "A Whiter Shade Of Pale," with the likes of trumpeter/EVI player [John Daversa](#), percussionist [Sammy Figueroa](#), tenor saxophonist/flutist David Palma, guitarist [Fernando Ulibarri](#), bassist Kurt Hengstebeck, pianist [Martin Bejerano](#), drummer Michael Piolet, and trumpeter [Jean Caze](#).

"Take A Bow (Tribute To Nelson Mandela)" starts off on a similar riff to the Doobie Brothers' 1976 hit, "Takin' It To The Streets." But any similarity to the pop song fades quickly as soon as steel pan hustler Foster Thomas and the horns and reeds get to the meat of the situation. Foster Thomas syncs up with the pulse of the song, but then branches out for his own melodic, rhythmic twist that never gets tired. He also knows how to incorporate intricate, exotic, and pulse-racing beats, especially on this percussively enhanced tonic.

His righteous version of "A Whiter Shade Of Pale" stays on the same melodic page as Procol Harum, giving him a chance to showcase what he can do on the steel pan. He bounces from scripture to mimicry of vibes, drums, and even keys in his threaded solo throughout, carrying the melody to its ultimate fruition, accompanied by piano and a hushed percussive cymbals in the background.

Foster Thomas gets a lot more complicated on the other tunes. "Kai-Fusion" bristles with entertaining showmanship, dissolving the lines between jazz and funk as his steel pan weaves in the muscle of the lines between horns and percussion. He continues his groundbreaking path as a natural part of a jazz band on "Midnight Refrain," off the open beats of a bass, creating hypnotic shifts.

"Gulf Of Paria" with Daversa is sheer, jazz brilliance, commandeering the straight-ahead concepts of the past into an R&B-laced future. He really plays with a deft hand, controlling the vibrato and the echo like the champion he is.

In many ways, *Metamorphosis* is leaps ahead of his last, R&B-favored album, [Brand New Mischief](#) (2012), which barely scraped the surface of the jazz potential. He made that record in honor of the birth of his daughter, earning plaudits from Jazz Weekly and All About Jazz.

If anyone's going to raise the level of the game with the steel pan, it's this guy. The songwriter, drummer, and arranger has been in award-winning bands and helped other artists take top honors with his gift on a rarely appreciated instrument. Slowly but surely, he's taking steel pan to the next level.

PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
 786.200.5389



Furio Chirico



e all'EVI, il mitico **Sammy Figueroa** alle percussioni) e altri validissimi musicisti (Kurt Hengstebeck al basso, **Michael Piolet** alla batteria, Jean Caze alla tromba, David Palma al sax tenore, Fernando Ulibarri alla chitarra), con i quali ha inciso nove brani originali più una rilettura in chiave ballad di "A Whiter Shade Of Pale" dei Procol Harum. Musica spesso tirata, ma sempre caratterizzata da una felice vena melodica, con arrangiamenti articolati pensati per far risaltare le doti strumentali dei solisti di turno, tutti bravissimi. Più che lo *special guest* Figueroa, veterano di mille battaglie chiamato in causa per i brani più 'esotici' dell'album, colpisce il drumming fresco e robusto di Piolet, una gradita scoperta per chi scrive. Molto bello!

Alfredo Romeo

MANLIO MARESCA & Manual for Errors
Hardcore Chamber Music
Awand
Maresca suona la chitarra, compone ed è il leader di Manual for Errors, una sorta di all star band composta da Francesco Lento alla tromba, Daniele Tittarelli al sax alto, Roberto Tarenzi al pianoforte, Mattered Bortone al contrabbasso ed Enrico Morello alla batteria (più

tagonista di un solo "vecchia scuola revisited" su "Ating Out", di scambi mai banali su "Speedball" e di una dimostrazione di assoluta maestria con le spazzole su "Nodo in Gola".

Alfredo Romeo

MINRAUD

Vox populi

Hidden Stone Records

Viene da Bologna una nuova band progressive metal che firma con *Vox populi* il suo convincente debutto discografico. Alessandro Rubino (voce), Michele di Lauro (chitarra e voce), Enrico Brazzi (basso) e Michele Panepinto (batteria) provengono tutti da differenti esperienze nella scena metal underground italiana e hanno trovato un comun denominatore musicale nella passione per il vecchio Prog Rock italiano riletto in chiave Metal e Hard & Heavy. Preso il nome in prestito da quello di un pianeta descritto nel racconto *Nova Express* di W.S. Burroughs, la band si è invece ispirata per l'album al racconto a fumetti *V per Vendetta* scritto da Alan Moore e illustrato da David Lloyd. I testi invitano a riflettere sul ruolo dell'individuo nella società, alle gabbie in cui è costretto o si costringe a vivere, la musica tende alla sperimentazione, non disdegna



di lasciare briglia sciolta alle capacità tecniche dei suoi componenti né di mischiare pattern e colori elettronici a suggestioni etniche, accennando qua e là - non senza un filo di ironia - a un improbabile portamento swing o a un macchiettistico giro di valzer. All'altezza della situazione e spesso in bella evidenza drumming di Panepinto, uno dei migliori prodotti delle Scuderie Capitanie, dai groove di esemplare chiarezza e precisione. Un esordio davvero incoraggiante.

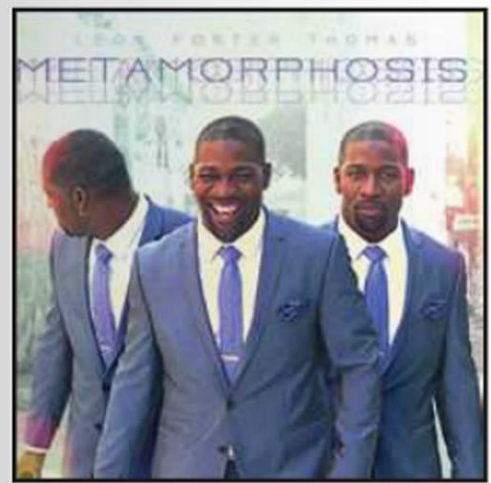
Alfredo Romeo

PAUL REED SMITH BAND

Time to testify

Favored Nations

Se il nome di Paul Reed non vi suona nuovo è perché lo avrete sicuramente già sentito evocare come costruttore di chitarre di primissima qualità, al punto che tra i suoi 'clienti' si annoverano alcuni big della sei corde quali Carlos Santana, e John Mayer. Strumenti eccellenti non possono nascere che da mani altrettanto capaci quando si tratta di fare della musica in prima persona, e che musica: una brillante combinazione di funk, rock, R&B, fusion condita da ottimi arrangiamenti, la bellissima voce black di Mia Samone e tanto, tanto groove assicurato dalla rit-



e all'EVI, il mitico **Sammy Figueroa** alle percussioni) e altri validissimi musicisti (Kurt Hengstebeck al basso, **Michael Piolet** alla batteria, Jean Caze alla tromba, David Palma al sax tenore e Fernando Ulibarri alla chitarra), con i quali ha inciso nove brani originali più una rilettura in chiave ballad di "A Whiter Shade Of Pale" dei Procol Harum. Musica spesso tirata, ma sempre caratterizzata da una felice vena melodica, con arrangiamenti articolati pensati per far risaltare le doti strumentali dei solisti di turno, tutti bravissimi. Più che lo *special guest* Figueroa, veterano di mille battaglie chiamato in causa per i brani più 'esotici' dell'album, colpisce il drumming fresco e robusto di Piolet, una gradita scoperta per chi scrive. Molto bello!

Alfredo Romeo

When Steel Talks

★ **A Review** -- **Metamorphosis** - Leon "Foster" Thomas

A look at the latest CD release from the musician extraordinaire

It's a beautiful late Spring afternoon and we are here in the quiet Fulton Park in Brooklyn listening to *Metamorphosis* by [Leon "Foster" Thomas](#), with every so often, the vibrations from the rumbling of the famous *A Train* underground adding a 3D feeling to the listening environs. Coincidentally, this park is within earshot of where so many monster musicians lived, grew up, were inspired and developed their chops: Lena Horne, [Randy Weston](#), [Max Roach](#), and [Billy Cobham](#) to name a few.

Reviewing a collection of new music is sometimes like sampling a box of unmarked assorted chocolates. It's filled with unknown risks, horror shows and potential joys. Moreover, you just never know what you are going to get. Well here is a "spoiler alert." Every music morsel in *this* box is outstanding.

Through "Metamorphosis" we get to experience multiple aspects of Leon - a young, gifted, talented and capable composer and musician with not just something to say, but lots to say. All the songs in this collection were written by Leon with the lone exception a "A Whiter Shade of Pale."

Metamorphosis is a tapestry of music delights that transcends any perceived limitations or expectations of Leon's association with the steelpan instrument. His performances are masterful with impeccable musicianship, as are those of all the other musicians performing on this collection. The series of musical conversations Leon engages the listener in through his exhibitions on his tenor pan are enthralling.

Leon's execution of a "Whiter Shade of Pale" is moving and masterful. It is an outstanding rendition of this legendary piece that further demonstrated Leon's supreme musicianship and deft command of the steelpan instrument in a solo housing with no place to hide.

So what exactly does Leon bring to the table with Metamorphosis? On first listening we felt this collection of tunes was outstanding. And overall the CD (production, performances, music) was simply great. Now - after moving away from the CD for a few weeks and returning for a second engagement, our findings and feelings on the CD are just as solid.

Hands down, this is one of the best CDs ever with the tenor pan in the spotlight. The sense of spatial placement, instrument layering and range to musical sensibilities exhibited by the producer, engineer and player are phenomenal. In short, Leon "Foster" Thomas brings a new experience to the listener through both what he has to say, his delivery and musical vehicle of choice, the tenor.

From the opening salvo of track one "*Kai - Fusion*" the tone is set for the rest of the CD with straight-up monster musicianship. Track two "*Midnight Refrain*" is just plain nasty - a funk bottom with smooth jazz topping. If you ain't moving while listening to this - you're dead. *Gulf of Paria*—track three—shares another side of Foster - thought-provoking, sensitive, worldly and observant; this track takes the listener in-flight to a new destination. Track four "*In the Corner*" is a beautiful conversational piece between the tenor

pan and Foster, with us just 'listening in.' Priceless. It is a call-and-response in the most untraditional manner - that is, between what the musician is thinking, feeling and requesting/commanding the instrument to do, and ultimately how the instrument responds sonically. As most pan players would attest, every pan is different in feel and attitude - which makes the ongoing conversation in "*In the Corner*" even more personal and moving.

There six additional tracks or better yet, chapters, to the complete story told in Metamorphosis. All unique, engaging and transformative. We will let you explore and discover for yourselves additional goodies in this 'musical box of chocolates.' As stated earlier Foster's storytelling is brilliant; couple that with his first rate-musicianship and you have something very special. A special tribute is given to the late Nelson Mandela with "*Take A Bow*" featuring Jean Caze on trumpet. Indeed, excellent.

This is a great moment in time when we are increasingly experiencing great musicians using the steelpan as their instrument of choice, to showcase their talent and tell and voice their stories and visions in all different genres of music. From [Jonathan Scales](#), [Andy Akiho](#), [Garvin Blake](#) and Billy Cobham to name a few - just great music. Add Leon "Foster" Thomas to that list. You will not be disappointed.

Musicians:

Leon Foster Thomas - Steel Pan/Percussion
Martin Bejerano - Piano
Kurt Hengstebeck - Upright/Electric Bass
Michael "Mike" Piolet - Drums
Jean Caze - Trumpet
David Palma - Tenor Saxophone/Flute
Fernando Ulibarri - Guitar
John Daversa - Trumpet/EVI
Sammy Figueroa - Percussion

Recorded at Red Rock Studios, Miami, FL. 3/8/2016 (engineer: Dorian Reyes); 10K Island Studio, Miami, FL. 4/4/2015 (engineer: Jesse McGinty)

Mixing & Mastering by Dave Darlington, Bass Hit Recording, New York, NY.

Photography: Joe Gato

Album Design: Amin De Jesus

Produced by Leon Thomas

All songs composed by Leon Thomas

PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
786.200.5389

Midwest Record

Entertainment
Reviews, news, and views

06/17/16

ROPEADOPE

LEON FOSTER THOMAS/Metamorphosis: The rising new pan steel virtuoso is more of a jazzbo than Andy Narell. While Narell puts his chops front and center, Thomas writes and plays but does it as a member of the band. And here, he's assembled quite the smoking band with top hitters rising to the top of Latin and jazz scenes. A solidly contemporary set that sizzles and smokes, this is jazz as party music from a cat that moved from the islands to Miami and probably knows a good party when he sees one. Hot stuff throughout.

CITY NEWSPAPER

MUSIC » MUSIC REVIEWS

September 14, 2016

Save

Favorites

Share

ALBUM REVIEW: "Metamorphosis"

By Ron Netsky

Leon Foster Thomas

"Metamorphosis"

Ropeadope Records

leonfosterthomas.com

If you are tired of the same old instrumentation in jazz bands, let me introduce you to Leon Foster Thomas. Raised in Trinidad and Tobago, Thomas tears the steel pan away from its calypso roots and transports it firmly into the realm of jazz. Thomas, an absolute virtuoso on his unusual instrument, has lent his talents to Hugh Masekela, Kevin Mahogany, Cyril Neville, and many others. Now, he's assembled his own powerhouse ensemble, and "Metamorphosis" should go a long way toward putting him on the map.

His group boasts John Daversa on trumpet and electric valve instrument; Sammy Figueroa, percussion; Martin Bejerano, piano; Kurt Hengstebeck, bass; Michael Piolet, drums; Jean Caze, trumpet; David Palma, saxophone and flute; and Fernando Ulibarri, guitar. Together, they build a strong foundation with an occasional stand-out solo. But it is Thomas's steel pan ringing through that makes this album one of the most unique jazz records I've ever heard. Thomas is also an excellent composer, contributing nine wonderful original tunes. The one cover is a gorgeous take on the Procol Harum classic, "A Whiter Shade of Pale."

Tags: [Music Reviews](#), [Album Review](#), [Leon Foster Thomas](#), [Metamorphosis](#), [Jazz](#), [Steel Pan](#), [john Daversa](#), [Sammy Figueroa](#), [Martin Bejerano](#)



PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
786.200.5389



NEW MUSIC RELEASES: May 31, 2016

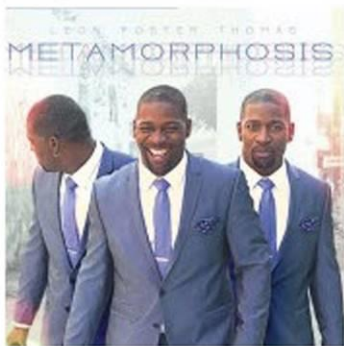
by Ksmada on [May 31, 2016](#) in [Shok Wave](#)



Shok Wave is the weekly new reggae music blog that also reviews all the new Caribbean music that relates to reggae & Kulcha Shok. That includes dancehall, ska, soca, reggae rock, surf, zouk, compas, and this week the combination of Jazz & pan as well as reggae.

NEW CARIBBEAN JAZZ RELEASES

Leon Foster Thomas - 'Metamorphosis'



Trinidadian native Leon Foster Thomas releases his third album 'Metamorphosis.' As a Trinidadian, Leon grew up in the Pan (steel drum) yards. He's graduated as a solo musician and his steel drum plays a very significant role in his progressive jazz album and it sounds very much at home with it's inclusion. All ten tracks include the last invented musical instrument of the 20th century. I love his rendition of 'A Whiter Shade of Pale.' Played in such a way it takes a minute to recognize it. 'Take A Bow' is a nice tribute to the man Nelson Mandela. As a reggae man, my favorite is the reggae standard he chose on 'Dubplate Swing.' It starts off with the bassline called 'The Answer' riddim and then goes into his progressive jazz and pan and somehow works. Leon works his musical magic.

PRESS KIT

www.leonfosterthomas.com
foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com
786.200.5389

METAMORPHOSIS



Perhaps there's a subconscious connection between Leon Foster Thomas and the late Muhammad Ali. They hit hard, hit fast and keep moving. Thomas' new recording, *Metamorphosis* (Ropeadope Records, 2016) is loaded with punches, counterpunches and poetry in motion.

Thomas plays steel pan and percussion. Accompanying him are Martin Bejerano, piano; Kurt Hengstebeck, upright and electric bass; Michael "Mike" Piolet, drums; Jean Caze, trumpet; David Palma, tenor sax and flute; Fernando Ulibarri, guitar; John Daversa, trumpet and electronic valve instrument; and Sammy Figueroa, percussion.

Thomas lights you up from the first note. "Kai - Fusion" has a dynamic opening, blending the pan and horns before they give way to a bass-led groove, complemented by the drums. The melody, if any identifiable phrase can be called this, is a series of overlapping riffs with some combination of guitar, pan and horns out front while the others counteract. Many of these are high-speed passes. Things settle down some, and Palma takes over. Piano, bass and drums mix it up in the background, while the tenor goes on an adventurous jaunt. Upon a mood change, the guitar joins in to set up the solo's climax. Things mellow a bit when it's Thomas' turn. But he, too, cranks up the heat as he gets deeper into the groove. As a listener, you might be blown

away by the leader's skill, but don't get too entranced. You might miss something. Caze and Ulibarri get their moments to shine as well.

Daversa joins the cast, playing the EVI, for "Unknown Memory." Augmented by a broken-time rhythm, Thomas sparkles and shimmers in the lead. Daversa's part gives the song a bit of an Andy Narell meets the Yellowjackets vibe. Though it's a valve instrument, as opposed to Bob Mintzer's EWI, the sound is nearly identical. Thomas and Daversa stretch out together for a busy, buzzing finale.

A native of Trinidad, Thomas was born on August 25th, 1981, in San Fernando. He credits his parents, Hillouise Louise and Loderick Rollo Foster, for his musical voice, and the pan yards of Trinidad and Tobago for his early music training. He was awarded the Visual and Performing Arts Most Outstanding Student and graduated with a bachelor of music degree at Florida Memorial University, the only historically black college or university in Miami. Thomas is a prominent figure in the Miami music scene, performing jazz, Latin, rock, gospel and hip-hop.

Metamorphosis continues the Thomas tradition of delivering music that is delightful, interesting and just all-out fun.

O's PLACE
JAZZ NEWSLETTER

Published by: D. Oscar Groomes \$7.50 Spring 2017, Issue 23.1

Metamorphosis **Leon Foster Thomas**

Leon Thomas plays the steel drums, leads the band, composed all of the music and produced *Metamorphosis*. It's a funky, contemporary set with festive Latin undertones, punctuated beats and crisp brass accents. The ingredients may sound familiar but the sounds are unique. Thomas speaks of maturing over time and he's correct. While we've always appreciated the way he integrates the steel pans into contemporary jazz-fusion, he's gained more poise and confidence over the years sharing the stage and playing with more feeling. The results entice listeners to come back for more, capturing different elements on each pass!

4/3
LFTomas
Fusion
2016

Photo: Leon Foster Thomas

Thomas, Leon Foster: Metamorphosis

Born in the Caribbean, now residing in Miami, Leon Foster Thomas has recently released his new disc *Metamorphosis* on Ropeadope Records. Foster plays the steel pan and plays it very well. The notes he gets out of his instrument is really quite stunning and is a perfect fit for his version of island jazz. This is one of those albums that will put a smile on your face. Nothing brooding and introspective here, just ten tracks that beckon to be listened to.



The band has plenty of energy to spare and show it on the opening track "Kai - Fusion". The music is vibrant with that Caribbean flare that is so infectious and the sax and guitar solos are top notch. "Midnight Refrain" is another breezy upbeat affair while "Gulf Of Paria" begins like a traditional jazz track tune with sentimental piano and a sumptuous bass line before returning to that island feel. "In The Corner" is a dreamier track before the band really starts to cook up a storm as does his steel pan solo in "Unknown Memory".

Foster and his band have made a fine album with *Metamorphosis*. Whether you dig solos or great melodies in your jazz, this album should totally satisfy. Recommended.

Band members:

- Leon Foster Thomas (steel pan, percussion)
- Martin Bejerano (piano)
- Kurt Hengstebeck (upright and electric bass)
- Michael Piolet (drums)
- Jean Caze (trumpet)
- David Palma (tenor saxophone, flute)
- Fernando Ulibarri (guitar)
- John Daversa (trumpet, evi)
- Sammy Figueroa (percussion)

Track Listing:

1. Kai ♦ Fusion (7:28)
2. Midnight Refrain (7:26)
3. Gulf Of Paria (6:24)
4. In The Corner (6:06)
5. Delusion Of A Dream (7:07)
6. Unknown Memory (6:46)
7. Dubplate Swing (4:04)
8. Take A Bow (Tribute To Nelson Mandela) (8:21)
9. A Whiter Shade Of Pale (6:03)
10. Cry Of Hope (10:00)

Added: September 12th 2016
Reviewer: Jon Neudorf
Score: ★★★★★
Related Link: [Artist's Official Site](#)
Hits: 920
Language: english

Jazz Weekly

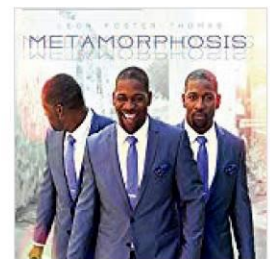
Creative Music and other forms of Avant Garde

REVIEWS

Leon Foster Thomas: Metamorphosis

by [George W. Harris](#) • September 8, 2016 • [0 Comments](#)

Most of the time you think of steel pans, your mind goes to vacations in the Bahamas or Jamaica. Leon Foster Thomas turns them into a true jazz instrument here. Along with Martin Bejerano/p, Kurt Hengstebeck/b, Michael Piolet/dr, Jean XCaze/tp, David Palma/ts-fl, Fernando Ulibarri/g, John Daversa/tp-evi and Sammy Figueroa/perc, Thomas takes hold of some advanced and tricky post bop like "Cry of Hope" and "Kai-Fusion." The steel pans sound hip and snappy along with Hengstebecks bass on "Midnight Refrain" and Bejarano's piano adds to the easy blues of "In the Corner" and funky "Dubplate Swing." Daversa adds some electronica to the noirish "Unknown Memory" and Figueroa's extra percussion adds spice to the sizzling "Delusion Of A Dream." The lone cover is a clever take of the pop hit "Whiter Shade of Pale" which allows the soft side of everyone to get appreciated. This guy means business!



Ropeadope Records

www.leonfosterthomas.com