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CLASSICAL

WILLIAM BRITTELLE BRINGS HIS ECLECTIC MUSIC TO MONTCLAIR

By Ronni Reich
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

William Britton's "Television Landscape" album could be said to draw on as many music channels as a satellite-radio subscription offers. And he seems to integrate them all into one seamless, artfully constructed epic.

"My main goal was to assimilate my background in jazz and classical with my love of popular music, especially sprawling progressive concept albums like 'Dark Side of the Moon' and 'Purple Rain,'" Britton says.

New Amsterdam Records released Britton's latest album in July to positive reviews, and the music kicks off Montclair State University's Peak Performances

series Saturday night in a show titled "Here There Be Dragons," evoking a new musical terrain with a term used by ancient mapmakers to mark uncharted territories.

"I'm excited to perform on the Peak Performances series, where the Kronos Quartet and So Percussion have performed," he says. "It's nice to see music like this included."

"Television Landscape" gazes at modern culture through lenses both critical and awestruck. "No end to the terror/No end to the halcyon days," murmurs Britton in a tender ballad as voices of a chamber orchestra chime in one by one: mournful brass, rippling harp, lush strings.

The album often stays within a

soft, soothing realm (albeit one spiked with disturbances, not to mention an ode to Sheena Easton — complete with a children's choir).

It gets edgier, though, with the squealing guitar, snarling speaking voice, freewheeling saxophone solo and noisy backdrop that lend teeth to "Wasteland," and with guitarist Mark Dancigers' wild, climactic solo in "Pegasus in Alcatraz."

It doesn't sound remotely classical, but Britton's background is in both the classical and rock worlds, with graduate study in composition and experience as a member of the post-punk band, the Blondes.

"I know there are guitar solos and it's loud sometimes, but there's a tremendous amount of planning

Here There Be Dragons

Where: Alexander Kasser Theater, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair

When: Saturday at 8 p.m.

How much: \$15; call (973) 655-5112 or visit peakperfs.org.

and forethought that has gone into this," he says. "There's a lot to sink your teeth into."

That should be true of the whole concert, an event produced by New Amsterdam. Britton co-founded the label in 2008 with composers Judd Greenstein and Sarah Kirkland Snider. Greenstein's works will appear in the Peak Performances show, played by the NOW Ensemble along with the all-female chamber band Victoire, led by composer Missy Mazzoli.

"As a label, we try to encourage people to delve into their wild and crazy ideas that might not make sense for other labels," Britton says. "We really like supporting those private dreams."

Britton says that he would not have had the courage to go ahead with the project without the support of New Amsterdam.

"I guess if I was thinking in terms of marketing, I probably wouldn't have done an extensive conceptual album," Britton says. "It was just what was in my heart and in my gut at the time."

"I think that one of the obligations of an artist is to just follow inspiration and do exactly what they want to do, and figure out how it fits into other people's lives from there."

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William Britton draws on classical, rock, jazz and pop traditions in his album, "Television Landscape."



A colorful 'Landscape'