

**MARK
SOUTHERLAND**

Jazz originated as an improvisational music, though you'd hardly know it today, as so much of the form has become staid and set, part of a historical record. Records are meant to be played and danced and sung



to, however, and always, but always, broken. Mark Southerland, jazz musician and sculptor extraordinaire, has found a route—passing by Pee-Wee's Playhouse, taking a left at Disney's Fantasia, running through the Little Prince's planet—to keep the wild but beautiful improvisational heart of jazz alive. His gigs involve himself dressed as a monk from some far-off planet, clothed in flowing, brilliantly patterned robes; his co-performer and sometime collaborator Shay Estes wears Technicolor bodysuits that recall Lady Miss Kier by way of mermaid heaven. Both sport water polo caps, of course, for that playful underwater feel. The stage is a combination kid's room and psychedelic star lounge. And the instruments, oh, the instruments. Southerland plays loose and fast not just with music but with the brass tubes that make it, combining and separating and recombining their parts into sculptures that Estes wears over her shoulder or through her legs, and he toots. Sometimes the effect is a bit too Surrealist woman-as-muse-as-object, but then Estes opens her mouth and belts out a gorgeous tune of her own, and all is right again. Not that there's any one way for it to be right, at least in jazz. That's how improvisation goes, thank goodness.

—Lori Waxman