

[EXPLORE](#)[DONATE](#)[SIGN UP](#)[SIGN IN](#)

# About

[Home](#) » [Jazz Articles](#) » [Matt Otto: Umbra](#)



Album Review

## Matt Otto: Umbra



By [Dan McClenaghan](#)

August 9, 2023

[Sign in](#) to view read count

This music—nine Matt Otto originals—has the feeling of shadowy sounds. Shapes without defined borders emerge. On the opener, "Little Things," the core trio—the leader plus bassist [Jeff Harshbarger](#) and drummer [John Kizilarmut](#)—are joined by Fender Rhodes player [Matt Villinger](#) and guitarist Alex Frank. The electronic resonance gives the sound an alluring and shadowy blur, as does the guest guitarist.



Saxophonist Matt Otto boasts a large discography. Notable selections include two previous Origin Records releases, 2009's *Red* (review [here](#)) and 2017's *Iberia* (review [here](#)). These two previous recordings, and now *Umbra*, say that Otto is a true original in his compositional efforts. He sounds like no-one else. Free? Sort of, and laid back, with a beautiful sax tone. It sounds like he is laying out his own personal truths. Take them or leave them.

On "Mousai," played by just the trio, Otto rips a bit, but with restraint, a melodic prayer maybe with a touch of a haunting to it. "Prez" has more sun than shade. A nod to

[DONATE](#)[SIGN UP](#)[SIGN IN](#)

Umbra, the title tune, is a short and simple melody. It is all about the group, no solos emerge, and there is an ethereal loveliness to the melding of sax, trumpet, guitar and Rhodes.

In Gary Fukishima's liner notes for the disc, the tunes are referred to as vignettes, with a sense of direction. That sounds right. The music says Matt Otto is an artist with a vision. He has brought that vision into sharp focus here.



## Track Listing

Little Things; Hawk; Mousai; Prez; Paw Paw; Umbra; Wanjiku; Esthesis; Melisma.

## Personnel

[Matt Otto](#): saxophone, tenor; [Jeff Harshbarger](#): bass, acoustic; [John Kizilarmut](#): drums.

## Additional Instrumentation

Hermon Mehari: trumpet (1, 4, 8); Matt Villinger: Rhodes (1, 2, 4, 6, 8); Alex Frank: guitar (1, 2, 4, 6, 8).

## Album Information

Title: [Umbra](#) | Year Released: 2023 | Record Label: [Origin Records](#)

## Post A Comment About This Album