



## Jazz: Matt Slocum and the rhythmic melody



*Matt Slocum loves the varied sounds he can make on the drums. COURTESY CHRIS DRUKKER*

**By GWEN OREL**

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When you think of jazz combos named for their leaders, you probably think of groups led by a bass player, a

singer, a clarinetist.

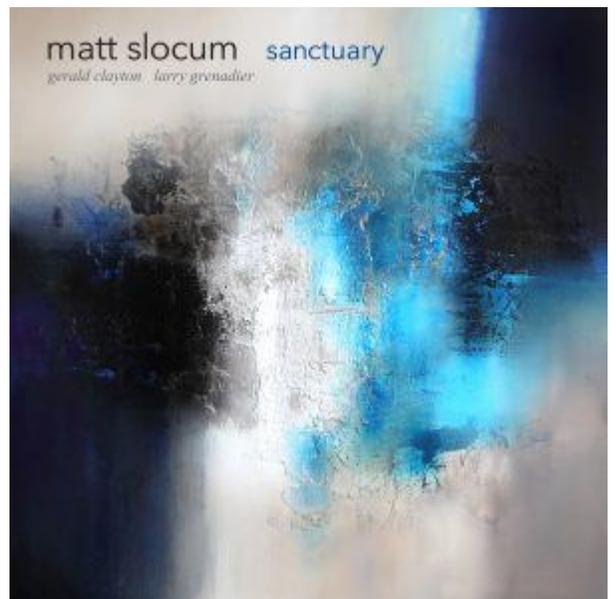
But there have always been some led by drummers as well: Buddy Rich. Gene Krupa. Max Weinberg.

Montclair's Matt Slocum, jazz drummer, released his fifth album, "Sanctuary," on Friday, May 31.

He's worked with different players for different projects; this album features pianist Gerald Clayton, with whom he's worked for nearly 20 years, and bass player Larry Grenadier.

Slocum is a full-time musician, who also teaches jazz and percussion at Newark Academy. He begins a tour in June, in Minneapolis, and will play New York City on June 15. More details can be found [on his website](#).

In the past, Slocum has written for musicians he knew he'd be playing with, but for this one, he let himself write what struck him.



"These tunes aren't a suite, where it's just one piece with different movements, but they are related," he said. "A lot of these tunes are dealing with where I grew up in Wisconsin, thinking back to that, and also thinking of places in college, where I felt like there was a good vibe for writing and creating music."

"Star Prairie" is named for the village next to the one where the 37-year-old grew up.

The village is so small, it might even be unincorporated, Slocum said with a laugh.

He revised that tune after hearing it in rehearsal. "It was cool to have to do that quickly, and hear it take shape in a way that I then dug," he said.



The "Sanctuary" trio: pianist Gerald Clayton, bass player Larry Grenadier, and drummer Matt Slocum.  
COURTESY RICHARD CONDE

Slocum wrote most of the eight tracks on the CD, composing on piano. He studied piano as a child, because it was a prerequisite for students who wanted to take percussion.

"My parents made all of us play piano. I'm glad they did. It's a foundation for whatever instrument you end up pursuing," he said.

What first attracted him about drums were the cadences in the marching band, and snare drums. "I was intrigued by the rhythmic energy and drive," he said. "I was very curious about learning it. Then I got into jazz, then it was like complete... I became more immersed. I'm really interested in musicians interacting and improvising in real time."

He began studying with drummer Phil Hey in Minneapolis, and went to the University of Southern California on a music scholarship. He stayed in California until 2007, playing with pianists Josh Nelson and Bill Cunliffe.

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He's earned critical raves since then: JazzTimes has called him "a tastefully polyrhythmic drummer with a penchant for melodicism."

Something unusual about "Sanctuary" is that it's available not only as a CD, but also on vinyl. While it's a digital pressing, not an analog recording, it was made at a studio that is a master at pressing, Slocum explained.

"I like the listening experience on vinyl," he said. "There's something tangible." He likes the limitations of staying to 20 minutes a side, the way the medium shapes the music. And then, too, the uncompressed music simply sounds better.

"I remember the first time I tried to transcribe off an iPod, rather than from speakers with CDs. It's the sound of drums where you notice the difference the most, when you're dealing with compressed files."

If it was snare drums that first attracted him to drumming, it was their variety of sound that made him fall in love with them., he said. "I love all the textures you can create with a drum set — the brushes, mallets, layers of sound, the choices, the cymbals.

"The drummer in any group has the most ability to easily mess things up and ruin it for everyone.

"Finding these ways and subtleties to shade whatever the song needs is what I'm interested in discovering."



## Montclair Basketball: Immaculate girls rain 3-pointers in 77-53 win



*ICHS senior guard Taylor Williams takes to the air for a layup during Immaculate's 77-53 win over Newark Academy on Jan. 24.  
PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

by Andrew Garda

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Three-point shots rained down in the Immaculate Conception High School gym during the girls basketball game against Newark Academy last Thursday resulting in a 77-53 win for the Lions. It would happen again two days later, Jan 26, as the Lions beat Bloomfield, 70-51, pulling their record to 11-4 overall and 9-0 in SEC-Liberty.

All told over the course of the last three games, which included a 65-37 win on the road at Columbia, the Lions have scored 24 three-point shots.

ICHS doesn't hesitate to bomb the opposition from long range, a mentality which head coach Joe Whalen is

just fine with.

“We’ll shoot threes in transition,” he said after the win over Newark Academy. “We’ll come up the floor, and shoot threes because that’s a good shot to take. It’s a great opportunity for offensive rebounds. Because we’re crashing the boards and they’re back on their heels and don’t know what to do.”

Along with assistant coaches Chez Williams and Trinette Carruthers, Whalen has his team shoot threes every practice. Their main drill is to hit 100 three-point shots in just five minutes.

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“This summer, it took us twelve minutes, and now we’ve got it down to five minutes. I think we’ve only missed that mark once in the last month.”

The Lions are ready, willing and able to take shots from long distance, and have the freedom to try.

“They can all shoot threes,” Whalen said. “And they all have license to shoot.”

Junior Nasira Williams’ five three-point shots were the most on the team, and helped her to a team-leading 21 points on the night. Seniors Jordan Hill and Taylor Williams had the next most points with 17 and 14 respectively, six of Hill’s points coming on a pair of threes. Taylor Williams also had four rebounds, five assists and three steals, while Hill had a pair of rebounds, steals and blocks each.



*ICHS senior guard Taylor Williams takes to the air for a layup during Immaculate's 77-53 win over Newark Academy on Jan. 24.  
PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

As it was also Senior Night on Thursday, it was fitting that Hill and Williams carried the load they did.

"Jordan's the glue, I call her our Swiss Army Knife. She does everything. She'll bring the ball up, she'll shoot it, she'll defend," Whalen said. "Taylor can get to the rim. You really have to know where she is on the floor. Other teams make it a point to try and take her out of her game and right now she and Kendra [Lawrence] are our best defenders. When we play really, really good teams, we'll put Taylor on their best player."

They'll need both Nasira and Taylor Williams, Hill and Lawrence as well as the rest of the team on point as they head into the Essex County Tournament as the fifth seed. They'll have time off until Feb. 9 when they face either 12-seeded Bloomfield or the winner of the play-in game between No. 21-seeded Golda Och and 28-seeded Montclair Kimberley Academy.



*Immaculate senior guard Jordan Hill drives through the defense to the basket for two of her 17 points against Newark Academy.*  
*PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

No matter who they face, Immaculate is going to be a hard team to beat, not only because of the talent they have on the floor, but because they made sure to schedule some tough teams out of conference. Games against Trenton Catholic, Archbishop Carroll (PA) and Midwood (NY), as well as an upcoming game against Long Island Lutheran on February 2, should help sharpen the Lions before they hit the County and State Tournaments.

Despite that, ICHS hasn't lost two games in a row this year, bouncing back every time they have stumbled.

With just four losses, those stumbles are few and far between.

"We're a tough out," Whalen said. "We're going to be a tough out."

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## Montclair Basketball: MKA Cougars hammer Newark Academy, 76-56 in Prep Tourney



*MKAMCNEALNEWARK1 ESSEX MONTCLAIR 02/04/2018*  
*MKA's Carter McNeal looks to distribute the ball during the Cougars' 76-56 win over Newark Academy on Sunday, Feb. 4.*  
*PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

by Andrew Garda

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If a team is going to get hot, heading into a tournament is the right time to do it.

Montclair Kimberley Academy's boys basketball team definitely fits that bill, as they extended their winning streak to seven with a 76-56 victory on Sunday against Newark Academy in the opening round of the Prep B Tournament. The last time MKA lost was in this same building, a 67-58 loss to crosstown rival Montclair High School, and while there have been some close calls — a 65-60 win over Glen Ridge on Jan. 30 and a close 83-78 victory the night before against Weequahic — mostly the Cougars have been rolling.

Despite the lopsided victory on Sunday, head coach Tony Jones wasn't quite satisfied.

"We were a bit sloppy," Jones said after the game. "We were a little uneven. I don't think we executed as well as we'd like to but, playing a back to back — we had a really tough game yesterday."

If MKA was still winded from that game, it didn't show early on as they ran out to an 11-0 lead. Newark Academy didn't score until there was just 3:07 left in the first quarter, as their shots consistently fell short or clanked off the rim. Even once they got going, the Minutemen couldn't gain ground as MKA kept pouring the offensive pressure on, eventually outscoring NA 20-11 to end the quarter.

Along with poor shots, the Minutemen offense was consistently disrupted by Carter McNeal. Whenever Newark Academy tried to toss a quick outlet pass or throw the ball down the court to generate a fast break, McNeal seemed to be there to knock the ball away. He showed a great nose for causing trouble and a tremendous wingspan, reaching high for the ball and knocking it out of bounds when he couldn't deflect it to a teammate.

"Carter is a guy we depend on to disrupt what teams do offensively," Jones said. "We love his penetration and he usually really draws a lot of defenders when he penetrates. I think yesterday [vs. Wee] he had about 18 points and today he doesn't score as much but he always gives us energy."

McNeal finished the game with just 12 points, but his constant presence on defense was far more impactful than any basket he could make.

Jones said that both McNeal and Trey Wilson were an integral part of the offense.

"We need Carter and Trey to kind of be guys who are going to move us offensively," Jones said. "The other guys are really finishers, for lack of a better word. And [McNeal and Wilson] really generate some offense for us."



*MSophomore Luke Kolaja (00) battles his way through Newark Academy defenders as he scores one of his 11 baskets. Kolaja would score 23 points during MKA's 76-56 win over the Minutemen. PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

Another source of offense continues to be Luke Kolaja, who seems cut very much from the cloth of the new basketball big man. Once upon a time, a large center like Kolaja would merely be an interior presence. Now, a guy like him is expected to be able to score from the perimeter as well, which he does with frequency. Of his 26 points, 12 came off three-point shots, and all three of his baskets in the fourth quarter came beyond the arc.

"We try to allow him to do it because that's really effective for us," Jones said of his sophomore. "We're still working on his inside stuff. We tell him all the time, you're 6-8, who's going to block your shot at this level? If there's a big guy, you're mobile enough to dribble around him. He's really fully understanding that."

Kolaja has improved greatly over the course of the season, Jones said.

"Luke's grown a lot," Jones said. "His shooting is much more consistent, he's understanding what teams are trying to do. He's passing when he should. It's my job to keep pushing him, so that's what I try and do."

While the Cougars only outscored the Minutemen by a basket in the last quarter — they scored 22 to NA's 20 — that was because they had generated such a lead that Jones was able to get some of his bench in and give some kids a chance to score who never had.

“A lot of the guys don’t play a lot,” he said. “Like Michael Butler. Michael is a senior and he hasn’t scored. So we’re just trying to get him a bucket because we don’t know when he’ll play again. Robbie Hollander, he’s the same way. These guys come to every practice, they work hard. And when we get a chance for him to play, we just give them a look if we can.”

MKA played Weequahic again on Tuesday, and faces Bloomfield Tech in the preliminary round of the Essex County Tournament on Thursday. They will play Pennington in the next round of the Prep Tournament.



## Wrestling: Mounties off to a fast start to the season



*MHS junior Terrell White scores another point in his match on Friday, December 22.*

*ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

by Andrew Garda

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Montclair High School wrestling coach Eugene Kline told his team before the first match of the season that the best way to get people interested in high school wrestling was to win.

So far, so good.

Entering into the MHS gym with AC/DC pumping over the loudspeakers, the Mounties were filled with confidence for their match against Newark Academy on Friday afternoon. They went on to defeat the Minutemen 54-21, moving their record to 2-0 for the season. They were able to keep things perfect Saturday morning when they beat Weequahic 66-6.

Add in their 43-30 win over Millburn to start the week off on Wednesday and the Mounties are off and running.

That's not to say things can't be improved upon. Montclair was boosted in their victory by several Newark Academy forfeits, which helped them overcome some struggles on the mat.

"Where they had experienced kids, we had some new guys," Kline said after the match.

He liked what he saw overall, though.

"I must say the effort is always there. There's never a time when I am questioning that they are giving all they have,"

Kline said that goes for all the wrestlers, including the less experienced guys,

"They want to go there and win just like the next guy," Kline pointed out. "So they fight, and it's a technical and experience thing. Once they get more opportunities to get on the mat, see what it feels like and see what they're good at, then they'll start making strides."

Even when they don't win, getting that experience is huge, especially when the Mounties are bolstered by forfeits and the pressure isn't as great. Kline especially liked the effort and improvement he saw in sophomore Jeremy Smullyan as well as freshmen Donovan Walton and Caleb Johnson.

Kline is very high on Johnson.

"He was very competitive in his match and he has been [this season] and he's a first year kid," Kline said. "He's still learning, especially how moves feel on him, so I've looking forward to him contributing. He is going to be very competitive for us."

The high point of the match for the Mounties was junior Terrell White's pin of Newark Academy's David Afolabi. White came out hard and moved well, scoring six points before pinning his opponent at 4:56.

Overall, Kline was pleased with the toughness and determination of his wrestlers but knows there is a lot more work to do. The veterans can get more sound technique while the younger guys will continue to learn as they get more experience.

Some other boys will be joining the group as well now that their paperwork and medical issues have been dealt with.

"We have some more guys cleared so we'll have more competition in the room," Kline said. "More guys at our

disposal, who can help us out on match days, Things will get better as time goes on, but we don't have a lot of returners so it's a process."

So far, that process is going pretty well.



## Volleyball: Mounties beat Newark Academy in second meeting, 2-0



*Senior Rebecca Herrick sends a shot over the net for a point during the Mounties 25-17 second set against Newark Academy Tuesday afternoon. MHS would win the match 2-0.*

*PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

by Andrew Garda

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When the Montclair High School girls volleyball team took the second set 25-17, completing a 2-0 sweep of Newark Academy on Tuesday, they took a little more relish in the victory than they usually did when finishing off an opponent.

“Revenge is a dish best served cold,” head coach Pam Reilly said after the win.

Reilly and her squad had circled this game since the two met on Sept. 9, a game the Mounties still feel they let get away. On that occasion, the Mounties had decisively won the first game, 25-14 and looked like they were ready to sweep through the second.

It didn’t turn out that way.

“We went up there [to Newark] and we had a 9-0 lead,” Reilly recalled. “They took a time out, and we started to implode. [Newark] began to get confidence.”

That confidence turned 25-17 and 25-16 wins for Newark and a “what could have been” for the Mounties.

Reilly knew her team could have taken that match, and wanted to leave no doubt by the end of the second meeting between the two teams.

“We wanted to come in here and beat them in two,” Reilly said. “Absolutely beat them in two.”

While the Minutemen were able make some noise in both games Tuesday, each time they closed on the Mounties, Reilly’s team kicked their efforts into overdrive and pulled away.

Preparation was the key, and Reilly made sure the Mounties had learned from their mistakes.

“I told them some things I was anticipating [Newark] would do a lot of [based on] our first contest,” Reilly said. “We made some adjustments defensively, but we were kind of feeling a little bit more confident in [ourselves].”

That confidence translated to success on the court and that allowed Reilly to play with the lineup a little more.



*Mounties senior Zelided Castillo serves up an ace during MHS’s 2-0 sweep of Newark Academy Tuesday afternoon.*  
PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF

“We can just do so many things with the lineup, which is a blessing,” she explained. “There’s a lot of people who play multiple positions. And [the team is] finally buying in. There’s a lot of people here but if we do what we’re supposed to, everyone can get in [games].”

Now that the team is well into the second half of their season, they have finally caught their rhythm. With tournament play just around the corner, they seem to be peaking, and the timing is perfect.

That’s not to say their play is, though, at least as far as their coach is concerned. For Reilly, there is always room to improve.

“I’d like us to make a huge defensive adjustment,” Reilly said. “We’re moving in that direction, but I want us to be enthused about playing better defense. I’m a firm believer that your offense is generated through the way you played defense. In any sport.”

Reilly says that while they have a tremendous amount of offensive talent, it’s defense that really tilts the balance in games.

“Because you have to keep hitting over a player who is 6-foot-2-inch, 6-foot-2 ½ or whatever, it gets frustrating. It gets in your head after a while. Then you have to alter your hitting process — try to tip [the ball] or hit around [blockers] or whatever. Defense wins championships. It’s trite but true.”

Thursday afternoon brings another opportunity for revenge when Bloomfield, who beat the Mounties last month, visits MHS on Thursday.