STEPHAN CRUMP
Rhombal

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Stephan Crump is best known as Vijay Iyer's bassist, but he has now made 10 records of his own. *Rhombal* is a form of eulogy. Crump lost his brother to cancer, and composed this music to embody the spiritual evolution the two of them shared in their last days together.

The album never feels exclusively sad. Songs like "Skippaningam" and "Birdwhistle" are animated, quick, and constantly shifting. "How Close Are You" and "Pulling Pillars (Outro for Patty)" are solemn contemplations. Their bare poignance is very moving. In fact, all of this album is constantly shifting. It is a journey over the most challenging emotional terrain—a path, sometimes through darkness, to resolutions including acceptance.

Crump's new band contains two rising stars, drummer Tyshawn Sorey and 22-year-old trumpet phenom Adam O'Farrill, and an eminent veteran of the jazz avant-garde, Ellery Eskelin. All sound selflessly immersed in Crump's story, and the search is communal. O'Farrill and Eskelin each have vivid personal moments that expand Crump's ideas, such as O'Farrill's spattering free foray in "Loose Bay," and Eskelin's twisting, veering course through "NoD for Nelson."

But *Rhombal* is Crump's album. His compositions possess an austere, haunting resonance. His open creative frameworks inspire all four players to dig deep—on every piece, Crump's introductions and solos establish the atmosphere. His bass, beautifully recorded here, becomes a powerful presence, a physical and spiritual force that looms over this music.—**Thomas Conrad**