



FROM THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR

With his brother's passing in mind, STEPHAN CRUMP turns sadness into art.

BY SHAUN BRADY

PHOTO BY LENA ADASHEVA

From his Brooklyn rooftop, bassist STEPHAN CRUMP watched the World Trade Center buildings fall on 9/11 and knew that his music was bound to change in response. A few years later, he formed the Rosetta Trio, an acoustic string ensemble with guitarists Liberty Ellman and Jamie Fox. For the next decade he recorded as a leader only with Rosetta or in duo settings, forsaking drums and more traditional full-band settings for these more intimate projects.

That changes with his latest band and album, both named *Rhombal*, which features the return of drums to Crump's music in the person of long-time collaborator Tyshawn Sorey, in addition to the two-horn frontline of saxophonist Ellery Eskelin and trumpeter Adam O'Farrill. Sadly, the music on *Rhombal* was penned in response to another tragedy, this one much more personal: the death of Crump's older brother Patrick, who lost his battle with a rare sarcoma in May 2014.

"We had a really difficult relationship,



Stephan Crump says that recording *Rhombal* over two days last winter was "one of the most profound and moving experiences of my life."

but we grew up learning to love music together," Crump says of his brother. "This music started coming out of me even before he passed. I watched as he was literally being eaten by the tumors and he became this purer and purer version of himself. It was like his spirit was expanding at the same time as his body was disappearing."

The music on *Rhombal* isn't saturated with the sense of pain and loss one might expect. Instead, Crump takes his cues from the spiritual transcendence that he witnessed in his brother's final weeks, crafting at times discordant but blissfully moving melodies that surge with Sorey's complex but muscular drumming. The latter was key, as Patrick Crump had a lifelong love of great drummers and played in a local Memphis rock band from the time the brothers were children.

"He started playing rock and roll before I did," Crump recalls, "and his influence and fascination took me to another level. It was magical to see those sounds being made in the house."

The Rosetta Trio was a visceral response to a singular event, but became such a special project that, to date, it has released three albums with a fourth planned for next year. At the moment Crump still wrestles with whether *Rhombal* will enjoy a similar fate. "The group is so special; I want to keep it growing," he says. "But at the same time the journey that we went on together was so powerful and obviously unique. It's kind of hard to imagine where to go from here, at least from where I'm standing right now." **J**