

# Buonissimo, 'Balladismo!'

## HEADLESS HOUSEHOLD RETURNS WITH NEW ALBUM AND A RARE GIG

By Ted Mills,  
News-Press Correspondent



### Headless Household CD Release Wingding

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday  
**Where:** Center Stage Theater,  
751 Paseo Nuevo  
**Cost:** \$12-\$17  
**Information:** 963-0408  
centerstagetheater.org

**M**eeting a musician under the arches of the County Courthouse is not an usual thing for a journalist, but then Josef Woodard is not an ordinary musician. (For one thing, he's also a journalist for this paper). But he'd just been rehearsing in the Sunken Gardens with Nicole Lvoff, local jazz singer, and one of the guests on Headless Household's new album.

Household's ninth album in 32 years of playing avant-jazz is also their first since 2010. Things move slowly in the Household world, so their upcoming gig at Center Stage Theater — on a Saturday, from a group that perversely liked to play Mondays — will be our one chance to see the group before they disappear again, leaving a CD release in their wake.

"Headless Household has always been this weird, amorphous thing anyway," Mr. Woodard says, as he details the bringing together of its disparate elements. There's Mr. Woodard, the songwriter and guitarist; Tom Lackner, the drummer, who these days spends his time on the road with Jeff Bridges; and Dick Dunlap, their keyboardist. Their original bass player, Chris Symer, is returning for both album and gig, having moved to Seattle. Then there's a regularly circling set of guest artists that stay in orbit: singers Glenn Phillips and Julie Christensen, trumpeter Nate Birkey, David Binney on alto sax, Tom Buckner on sax, and David Piltch on bass.

The new album on the band's own label Household Inc. is



Headless Household's new album, "Balladismo," brings them to Center Stage Theater for a CD release gig on Saturday. The band includes, from left, Dick Dunlap, Joe Woodard and Tom Lackner.

called "Balladismo" and features six songs by Mr. Woodard and nine instrumentals. They started recording it two years ago, and hopes were high after one day's full session that produced six tracks.

"I thought it's going to be like a jazz album, that we're going to get it done in a couple of sessions," Mr. Woodard says. "But no."

Life intruded, and though they raised money through a Kickstarter campaign — they raised \$1,500 for packaging and design — they took time getting back to the record.

"I'm always the one pushing people," Mr. Woodard continues. "I had all these ballads in my head, and the only way to get them out is to record them." The

image of Jean Harlow graces the cover of the album, as it was a photo of her that graced their work page when the group was sharing files. She's the album's guardian angel, so to speak.

Other women do get a shout-out on the album. "How the Mighty Folly" is dedicated to Clare Rabe, a local poet who passed away some years ago, but who used to run Baudelaire's, the hip '80s

club in town that gave Headless Household its first gig. "She encouraged us, where all the other clubs said what the hell is this," Mr. Woodard says.

The new album is classic late-period Household: assured in its place in the jazz continuum, calling back to the standard songbook progressions, but

making all sorts of odd detours. There's nothing smooth about their jazz, though it is polished. Melancholia wraps the album like a blanket.

Mr. Woodard and company have gigged in all sorts of weird places in town, like the Chicago Rib Broker (a restaurant long gone) where they opened for John Zorn. ("I don't know how they managed to book him," he says.) As the spaces between gigs became fewer, they settled down to a fairly regular schedule: CD or no CD, they played a Christmas gig. Now even that's changed. The new album can't wait that long.

Household Ink has been doing very well as a label, he says. They recently released Nate Birkey's album, which got a nice review from DownBeat Magazine, and have just signed their first European artist, saxophonist Nicole Johäentgen. Mr. Woodard travels to Scandinavia often to report on jazz festivals, and their jazz scene is very healthy.

Before we wrap up the interview, Mr. Woodard makes sure I have a copy of the album, magically producing one from his pocket.

"If I had my druthers we'd do an album every other year, but we don't want to flood the market," says Mr. Woodard with a wry smile.



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