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Jazz & Improv
by Stewart Smith

Consorts

Distinctions

Spoonhunt CD/DL

For his 40th birthday bash at London's Cafe Oto, Dominic Lash created the largest iteration of Consorts to date, a 20-strong ensemble of improvisors including Steve Beresford, Phil Durrant, Hannah Marshall, Angharad Davies and Alex Ward. Using the flexible ensembles of Renaissance courts as "a usefully ambitious model", Lash explores sustained tones, improvisation and the relationship between acoustic and amplified sound. His orchestral approach is inspired, with a focus on particular combinations of voices – bowed strings, bass clarinet, mysterious amplified scratches at one point, fluttering electronics and braying baritone saxophones at another – while the combined mass of the full ensemble looms in and out of view.

Simão Costa

Beat With Out Byte

Cipsela CD/DL

A beautiful set of piano improvisations from Lisbon based composer-improviser Simão Costa. Applying E-bows to piano strings is a common enough technique in experimental music, but it's fascinating to hear it explored at length in an improvised context. On "Beat", Costa patiently layers long tones and harmonics, the vibration of the magnetised strings creating rhythmic pulses and phasing effects. When he moves to the keyboard, a combination of prepared strings and magnets extends the timbral range: gamelan-like tones on "With" and clattering locomotive riffs on "Out". "Byte" sits somewhere between New York minimalism and railroad blues, its relentless march skewed by swirling clouds of metallic dissonance.

Sam Gendel & Sam Wilkes

Music For Saxophone & Bass Guitar – More Songs

Leaving DL/LP/MC

Contemporary West Coast jazz meets vaporwave on Sam Gendel and Sam Wilkes's follow-up to 2018's *Music For Saxophone & Bass Guitar*. Melodies and grooves come swathed in a warm glow of reverb and degraded tape haze. Gendel often plays his alto through a harmoniser, giving his lines a slightly otherworldly quality. His unprocessed tone is delicately controlled, notably on a cover of The Beach Boys' "Caroline, No". Coming

across like a less hyperactive Thundercat, Wilkes's parts are deliberately squashed in the mix, combining with the beats to create a murky beat tape feel. The duo sustain the blissful mood, bringing just the right amount of wonkiness to stop the music slipping into blandness.

Maria Grand

Reciprocity

Biophilia DL

Maria Grand's 2018 debut *Magdalena* showcased the saxophonist and singer across a range of settings, from group performances to duets with guitarist Mary Halvorson. *Reciprocity* features her working trio with bassist Kanoa Mendenhall and drummer Savannah Harris. All three contribute vocals. Written and recorded during Grand's pregnancy, *Reciprocity* explores the mother-child bond across a series of richly melodic yet exploratory compositions, taking inspiration from the idea of her son dancing in the womb. Her trio are superb, making often complex pieces sound warm and natural. Tunes like "Whabri" and "Creation: Superbear" are both fluid and knotty, as Grand's tenor courses over Harris's supple polyrhythms. On the two-part "Fundamental", drones and chants bloom into buoyant post-bop, while "Canto Manta" is a gem of a song.

Corey Mwamba

Shared Spaces: One

Bandcamp DL

On *Shared Spaces: One*, Corey Mwamba explores notions of belonging for Black diaspora communities and the idea of sharing. Well known as a vibraphonist, he gives free rein to his instrumental talents here, playing piano, junior drums, bass ukulele, synth, bells, baoding balls and trolley lip gong. The opening two tracks utilise portions of a longer solo drum piece. On "and yet you keep coming for us", he layers real-time vibraphone improvisations, lo-fi piano, croaking electronics and rubbery bass over fluttering snares and clattering metal. Using only overdubs, "always fight the monolith" is sparser, Mwamba's vibraphone feeling out the space above bass synth and disjointed percussion.

William Parker

Mayan Space Station

AUM Fidelity CD/DL

Painters Winter

AUM Fidelity CD/DL

With rising guitar ace Ava Mendoza and drummer Gerald Cleaver on board, bassist William Parker's *Mayan Spaceship* burns through the stratosphere. Channelling Mahavishnu-worthy jazz rock chops through an effects-saturated avant-punk sensibility, Mendoza scorches, ripples and soars. Yet for all the fusion echoes, this is very much a jazz record, with Parker and Cleaver laying down fleet-footed grooves without a hint of bombast. A belated sequel to 2000's *Painter's Spring*,

Painter's Winter reunites Parker with percussionist Hamid Drake and Daniel Carter, who shows exquisite restraint as he places dabs and swirls of alto sax, muted trumpet and clarinet around the rhythm section's free grooves and abstract gambits. Shakuhachi, flute and trombone add further tonal colour.

Barre Phillips/John Butcher/Ståle Liavik Solberg

We Met – And Then

Relative Pitch CD/DL

An inspired debut from the trio of veteran bassist Barre Phillips, saxophonist John Butcher and percussionist Ståle Liavik Solberg. Drawn from their two gigs to date, the album opens with an 18 minute improvisation built around short, trilling phrases and sustained tones, with Phillips mostly playing arco and Butcher investigating a range of extended techniques. Solberg drops short bursts of pattering snares and skittering hi-hats into well-defined spaces, creating a sense of movement and flight. Phillips responds with tremolo phrases and col legno taps, creating rhythmic momentum and percussive timbres while Butcher evokes roosting pigeons and braying geese with flutter tonguing and multiphonics.

Rodrigo Pinheiro & Pedro Carneiro

Kinetic Études

Phonogram Unit CD/DL

Exploratory chamber improv from the Portuguese duo of pianist Rodrigo Pinheiro and percussionist Pedro Carneiro. Across six études, Carneiro plays marimba with a quarter-tone extension, allowing him to slip into spaces between the piano notes. That's particularly apparent on "Étude 2: On Velocity And Acceleration", where Carneiro's marimba scurries around a maze of piano, scaling the walls and zig-zagging around corners. On "Étude 2: On Shadows And Resonances", they temper the pace, as Pinheiro's deadened piano stalks Carneiro's bowed harmonics and scraped bars. "Étude 5: On Resistance And Mass" finds Carneiro working the marimba's low and mid-range, creating clouds of tone behind Pinheiro's agitated piano.

Vernacular

The Little Bird

Astral Spirits DL/MC

All praise to Astral Spirits for reissuing this Cleveland underground classic from 2004. Featuring Lawrence Daniel Kaswell on bass and vocals, Chris Kulcsar on drums, and RA Washington on trumpet, Vernacular join the dots between free jazz, blues and punk. A cover of "The Blood" from Sam Waymon's *Ganja & Hess* soundtrack sets the tone, with Kaswell testifying over slow burning bass and mournful yet defiant trumpet. Marrying punk grind and fire music clamour to sombre post-hardcore blues, "The Voodoo Runs Rafeeq Down" and "Memphis (First Song)" are powerful extensions of the Black radical tradition. □

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