

GLOBE UNITY: AUSTRIA



I Am The Wind
Katja Cruz (Unit)
Natural Time
Muriel Grossmann (Dreamland)
Film Still
Trio Trara (Jazzwerkstatt)
 by Tom Greenland

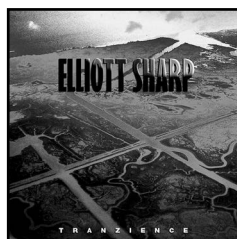
Think of Austria and music and those famous names (Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Strauss, Schönberg...) inevitably come to mind. Think jazz and the list (Hans Koller, Joe Zawinul, Radu Malfatti...) will probably be shorter. Nonetheless, a new generation of well-trained, forward-thinking improvisers suggests that the second list is growing.

Graz-born and -based vocalist Katja Cruz has the technique and strength of personality to rivet an audience, especially when teamed with her then-husband/drummer Howard Curtis and New York-based alto saxophonist Darius Jones. *I Am The Wind*, recorded May 2015 at Vienna's Porgy & Bess, is subdued but persuasive, a testament to the empathy among its members. Cruz tends to avoid lyrics, or any overt references for that matter, preferring warbled hums, whispered pseudo-words or smoothly elided vowel sounds, even improvising 'arias' that sound pre-composed. On the title track and "The Wild" the group interplay is especially subtle, instinctual, each musician navigating the collective hills and valleys as if tracking a well-charted course. "Laughing" and "The Ancestors' Dance with the Wind" suggest a sense of play, of we're-not-going-to-take-ourselves-so-seriously-that-it's-no-fun.

Saxophonist Muriel Grossmann grew up in Vienna but has lived in Ibiza for over a decade, recording eight albums there, all but one with guitarist Radomir Milojkovic; her latest, *Natural Time*, enlists Viennese bassist Gina Schwarz and drummer Uros Stamenkovic (who, like Milojkovic, is from Belgrade). Over the course of their partnership Grossmann and Milojkovic have developed a signature aesthetic based on modal centers, pentatonic melodies and polyphonic drones, a Spartan approach provoking interest through its meditative quality. The drones are thickened with discreet tambura (or shruti box), sarangi, whistles and chimes. Milojkovic's trilling obbligato parts are often layered and panned, with a third guitar holding chords, while bass and drums keep time. Grossmann, at the center, supplies cool passion.

Vienna-based Trio Trara, consisting of violinist Klemens Lendl, guitarist Peter Rom and bassist Manu Mayr, combines compositional and improvisational sensibilities on their debut *Film Still*. Each of the nine tracks in this brief set is tautly constructed and succinct while retaining a certain amount of freedom. The acoustic and electric tonalities are tessellated, violin (often plucked) and bass enhanced by subtle electronic effects and/or sliding attacks, overlapping with processed guitar sounds to produce a well-balanced sonic palette. In spite of their brevity, the tracks typically have a strong narrative, with clear beginnings, middles and ends, evoking a suitable variety of moods and textures, from minimalism to scratchy 'funk'. A cameo by musical saw player David Müller on "Free Fall" and Lendl's vocal turn on "Stumm" add further variety.

For more information, visit unitrecords.com, murielgrossmann.com and jazzwerkstatt.at



Tranzience

Elliott Sharp (New World)

Rub Out The Word

Steve Buscemi and Elliott Sharp (Infrequent Seams)
 by Tyran Grillo

Coming up on four decades as composer and performer, New York's Downtown deacon Elliott Sharp is at a creative peak. *Tranzience* documents four semi-recent chamber pieces, the earliest being *Approaching the Arches of Corti* (1997). Scored for four soprano saxophones (the New Thread Quartet of Geoffrey Landman, Kristen McKeon, Erin Rogers and Zach Herchen) and making use of Steve Lacy's 'leg-mute' technique, it sounds at times like a congregation of geese, at others a pipe organ running out of air and leans nicely into 2008's *Homage Leroy Jenkins*. Alongside clarinetist Joshua Rubin and pianist Jenny Lin, violinist Rachel Golub evokes the scrapes and squeals of the legendary dedicatee, whom Sharp counts, along with the larger AACM family, among his early influences. *Venus & Jupiter* (2012) features the ensemble Either/Or conducted by Richard Carrick and Sharp himself on electroacoustic guitar. Around a pulsing piano, this largely improvised masterwork spins a drone of strings, brass, winds and percussion drawing even more explicitly from the AACM well. The 2013 title composition features the JACK Quartet (Chris Otto, violin; Austin Wulliman, violin; John Pickford Richards, viola; Jay Campbell, cello), who recently brought their talents to bear on *The Boreal - Starkland* (2015). Where that recording employed bows strung with ball-bearing chains, here the musicians use so-called "tube bows" fashioned from aluminum in addition to the standard hair. The music is consistently inventive across its 28-minute duration and inhabits a sound world that can only be described as nanotechnological.

To this solar system, *Rub Out The Word* may seem like a distant satellite, but its heart shares the same blood. Here Sharp (on guitar and electronics) joins actor Steve Buscemi (of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Fargo* fame) to celebrate the writings of Beat Generation guru William S. Burroughs in one of the most delicious spoken word recordings to come out in recent memory. Not only for Burroughs, who managed to make even the most abstract streams of consciousness feel coherent, but also for Buscemi's adenoidal charm and Sharp's accompaniment, which, like the words, evokes a viral network that responds to, even as it anticipates, hidden messages in the texts. Said texts are quintessential Burroughs, threading needles of incontrovertible (if sometimes perverse) cynicism through a social cloth he understood in ways few others of his generation did. "The use of cut-up is a key," narrates Buscemi and one can't help but feel that he and Sharp embody this very aesthetic in their collaboration. What follows is a string of meditations on writing, obsession, evil, bureaucracy, war, morality, human interactions and the occasional nod to silence thrown in for good measure. This is no naked lunch, but a fully clothed dinner after which dessert is served raw and dripping. And while it may not appeal to straightahead jazz heads, anyone who has enjoyed Sharp's fantastic voyage (no small task with a discography of over 300 albums) for any length of time is sure to be enthralled.

For more information, visit newworldrecords.org and infrequentseams.com. Sharp is at Issue Project Room Sep. 13th with Steve Buscemi and Roulette Sep. 15th. See Calendar.



Live in Tokyo

Barry Harris (Xanadu-Elemental Music)

Notes from New York

Bill Charlap Trio (Impulse!/Verve)

Natural Essence

Cyrus Chestnut (HighNote)

by Scott Yanow

Last November was the 80th anniversary of what was probably the first piano-bass-drums trio jazz recording. On Nov. 15th, 1935, pianist Jess Stacy, bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Gene Krupa recorded "The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise" and "Barrelhouse". While the piano-guitar-bass trio would initially be more popular, by the mid '50s, guitar was being replaced by drums. These CDs all feature established pianists in that setting.

Throughout his career Barry Harris has championed high-quality bebop, often interpreting the pieces of its progenitors Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk and Tadd Dameron. After leading just one album during 1970-74, Harris headed four records for Xanadu during 1975-78. *Live In Tokyo*, recorded Apr. 1st, 12th and 14th, 1976, includes the original seven selections plus two of the four performances released on Harris' *Tokyo 1976* album. The pianist is heard in prime form, digging into his "A Soft Spot" (based on the Gershwin's "S Wonderful"), Vincent Youmans-Irving Caesar's "Tea For Two" (very much in Powell's style), a gentle take on Jimmy Van Heusen-Johnny Burke's "Like Someone In Love" and two takes of Charlie Parker's "Ornithology". With fine support and occasional solos from bassist Sam Jones and drummer Leroy Williams, Harris never runs out of creative ideas.

The Bill Charlap Trio with bassist Peter Washington and drummer Kenny Washington has been together since 1997. Charlap is in his usual impeccable form on straightforward and tasteful treatments of standards and obscurities. The unit's creativity is subtle, their musical communication is tight and they are predictable in their consistent excellence. On the other hand, little new ground is broken. Some of the renditions on *Notes from New York* are so laidback as to be sleepy, particularly Alan Jay Lerner-Burton Lane's "Too Late Now" and a rather desolate version of Jimmy McHugh-Dorothy Fields' "On The Sunny Side of The Street". On the brighter side are an uptempo version of Vernon Duke-John Latouche's "Not A Care In The World", "A Sleepin' Bee" (Truman Capote's greatest hit) and a revival of "Tiny's Tempo" (which was immortalized by the 1944 Tiny Grimes/Charlie Parker recording).

The trio of pianist Cyrus Chestnut, bassist Buster Williams and drummer Lenny White sounds like a working band rather than an allstar group. Williams and White get their chances to share the solo honors with Chestnut and the group pays close attention to dynamics, mood and tempo variations. Chestnut's music is always filled with happiness, even the ballads. The trio performs four standards (including an effective medium-slow version of Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart's "My Romance"), Joe Henderson's soulful "Mamacita" and four originals. Chestnut's "Faith Amongst The Unknown" sounds like a timeless spiritual while his "I Remember" is a modal jazz waltz that finds the pianist hinting at McCoy Tyner in his chord voicings. Another high-point is White's warm and memorable ballad "Dedication". *Natural Essence* is an excellent example of a modern yet traditional jazz piano trio.

For more information, visit elemental-music.com, impulse-label.com and jazzdepot.com. Charlap is at Village Vanguard Sep. 13th-18th and 20th-25th. Chestnut is at Smoke Sep. 16th-18th. See Calendar.