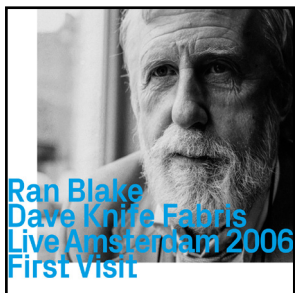


Taken at an even brisker tempo is the 28+ minute group-composed “Taking Off” (another side-long performance). In the opening melody, Tyner interjects counterpoint, which he maintains for Henderson’s wild solo. Talk about steady: Grimes and DeJohnette never budge an inch no matter how many bombs are dropped, and with Tyner the rhythm section is always propelling the quartet to new heights without losing control. The saxophonist plays a long stretch (sans piano) as he investigates scales from far-away lands. After an intense musical exchange, Grimes and DeJohnette get right back to business, and you can hear the drummer keeping the band honest on the time, too. They sometimes dip in tempo just a tad, but he shows them right where it is and should be. The thunderous bass playing of Grimes can be heard as the pianist climbs and morphs into an odd rhythm, which DeJohnette hops right on and smashes on beat one. The masterful drummer also gets a wild extended solo. Tyner’s composition “The Believer” (which accompanies the Henderson classic, “Isotope”, for Side D) is a swinging waltz with unusual turnaround and interspersed hits in the melody. Henderson blows first, echoing the melody, then adding overblown harmonics and humorous musical surprises. DeJohnette is swinging hard with Grimes holding it down as usual. Laser-like right hand lines spill out from the pianist on his solo.

Forces of Nature is a great showcase of all these artists in their prime in a live environment—a lovely recording that’s the perfect missing link to and companion for Henderson and Tyner’s studio albums together.

For more info visit bluenote.com



Live in Amsterdam 2006, First Visit
Ran Blake/Dave Knife Fabris (ezz-thetics/Hat Hut)
by Ken Waxman

Often described as cold, difficult and idiosyncratic, the music of pianist Ran Blake (who turns 89 this month) revels in the third adjective but doesn’t warrant the others. That’s confirmed on this album of never-before-heard material, recorded 19 years ago this month for Hat Hut Records’ ezz-thetics imprint (Hat Hut currently is celebrating its half-centenary).

First chairman of the New England Conservatory’s Third Stream department in 1973, the pianist instructed the way he improvises, illustrated here in *Live in Amsterdam 2006, First Visit* (which also features guitarist Dave “Knife” Fabris). Mixing free jazz, gospel, movie themes and notated music, the numbers are pared to the bone, allowing him to perform 17 selections in less than 57 minutes, with most in the two-minute range. Blake can swing when he wants to; for instance, he ends Abbey Lincoln’s “Throw It Away” with a bluesy cadenza after stretching the melody at a pseudo-tango tempo. “Drop Me Off in Harlem/Night and Day”, which combines the Duke Ellington and Cole Porter songs on the disc’s longest track, starts off with quiet precise key plinks, then pivots to almost pure honky-tonk rhythms before adding flowery coloration to Porter’s familiar melody.

Creating his own versions of tunes as different as those from big-band arranger Pete Rugolo and film composer Bernard Herrmann, Blake reduces most theme statements by mixing precise intonation and rhythmic undertones. “Paris” (the pianist’s one original on this release) is a contrafact of “I Love Paris” that vibrates the soundboard away from the melody towards harsh

key cracks. Additional scope is given to the final eight tunes when Blake is joined by Fabris, a former student who has played everything from trad jazz to funk and whose nickname came from the pianist. With resonating thumb plucks, vibrating frails and reverberating twangs, Fabris adds connective comping and colorful sound tinctures to taunt piano forays on cinema themes. Together they nearly attain a funky groove playing Horace Silver’s “Soulville”, with antiphonic riffs between key clunks and string stings. Louder and high-pitched guitar frails meet contrapuntal piano repetition on Ornette Coleman’s “Sadness/Space Church”, giving those melodies even more unique twists.

First Visit is a fine introduction to Blake’s oeuvre for the novice and confirmation of his skill for the initiated.

For more info visit werners-ezzthetics.bandcamp.com



Flow
Jihee Heo (OA2)
by Terrell K. Holmes

From the moment she entered the jazz world in the aughts, South Korean pianist Jihee Heo (pronounced “jee-hee”) has earned a reputation as one of the most fiercely swinging and talented players on the scene. Her new album, *Flow*, with Alex Claffy (bass) and Joe Farnsworth (drums) confirms that reputation.

From the top, the trio captures the energy and rhythm of this sometimes maddening city on the muscular swinger “New Yorker Step”. Heo sparkles on the keys, delivering jolting clusters of crisp notes with dexterity and confidence. Farnsworth scampers on brushes and Claffy delivers a supple pizzicato. The pianist shows an impressive command of the blues as she struts on tunes such as “I Can See Only One Step Ahead” and “Extreme Noise Blocker”. On the elegant waltz “Opening the New Door”, Heo displays a lovely touch, exploring repeated figures as she builds challenging variations on them.

Another excellent plucked solo by Claffy, with Farnsworth’s lush cymbals, completes the vivid palette on the soft breezes of “Aquellos Ojos Verdes”. The redoubtable alto saxophone master Vincent Herring enhances any group he plays with, and he complements the trio perfectly on a pair of tunes: the bossa nova “The Hidden Giant” and the vigorous “The Late Bloomer”. He adds depth and color to the ensemble with concise, dynamic solos that burst with harmonic invention.

The trio’s shimmering version of Duke Ellington’s timeless ballad “In a Sentimental Mood” is the album’s highlight. After a ruminative opening, enhanced by Farnsworth’s whispering brushstrokes and Claffy’s modulated bass heartbeat, Heo doesn’t merely interpret this evergreen, she deconstructs it and explores its nuances, taking it into unusual harmonic territory. The pianist transcends the usual prescribed paths, striving not to always pause at the melodic yellow lights. Because of her creativity and talent, one will encounter this classic song as if hearing it for the first time. And that’s one of the skills that makes Heo a now first-call pianist: no matter what song she plays, or where her excursions begin or end, she always takes you to interesting and unexpected places, and this ability is what makes *Flow* a triumph.

For more info visit originarts.com. Heo is at Mezzrow Apr. 9. See Calendar.

ON SCREEN



A Bright Nowhere – Journeying into Improvisation
Stewart Morgan Hajdukiewicz
(HajduKino Productions)

by Paul Gaita

One does not have to be familiar with soon-to-be 83-year-old U.K. percussionist Eddie Prévost to appreciate Stewart Morgan Hajdukiewicz’ documentary *A Bright Nowhere – Journeying into Improvisation*. The standard punchline for such a sentence is, “...but it helps.” Yet, to know Prévost’s long career as a founding member of the storied free improvisation group AMM, as the central force behind the London Improvisation Workshop and Matchless Recordings, and as a composer and recording artist, does provide context. Moreover, one also does not need to be familiar with improvisational jazz to enjoy this stately and affectionate documentary, which focuses on a series of four concerts given at London’s Cafe OTO to celebrate what was Prévost’s 80th birthday in 2022. Hajdukiewicz wisely lets the music do much of the talking, and what it has to say is haunting, complex and quite frequently beautiful.

For those who are familiar with Prévost’s career, the highlight of *A Bright Nowhere* may be a last-ever performance by AMM, in which the percussionist reteams with Keith Rowe, whose Parkinson’s diagnosis prevents him from wielding a guitar; he instead employs a barrage of densely structured tapes and loops over the drone of Prévost’s bowed cymbals before concluding with a home recording by pianist John Tilbury, who was absent from the performance due to illness. For improvisational aficionados, the footage here is historic and elegiac, but the other performances are remarkable in their own right. Each of the four concerts were loosely anchored around ideas: Prévost engages with a thunderous brace of saxophonists, including Alan Wilkinson and Susan Lynch; links with Ute Kanngiesser (cello) and Marjolaine Charbin (piano) for a sonorous exploration into melancholy drone; and teams with no less than 15 musicians, including Iris Ederer and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé (vocals), Tom Mills (theremin) and Ross Lambert and James O’Sullivan (guitars), for a ferocious celebration of the Workshop’s adventurous explorations.

Interviews with Prévost, Tilbury and many of the aforementioned performers avoid the laudatory tone taken by commemorative documentaries; instead, they mull over their personal experiences in improvisational music. The general public’s hesitancy over non-traditional music is addressed (Kanngiesser advises to think of it as a painting to observe and connect with rather than music to decipher), but the most memorable comment comes from Prévost himself, who voices what must be every improvisational artist’s concern: can I find the inspiration this music needs? As evidenced by this documentary, Prévost can allay those fears.

For more info visit matchlessrecordings.com or vimeo.com/ondemand/abrightnowherefilm