

BOXED SET



The Heraclitean Two-Step, etc.
Evan Parker (False Walls)
by Stuart Broomer

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Evan Parker's first recording of solo saxophone music, *Saxophone Solos* (Incus). More than just a rare solo wind recording of free improvisations, it was also an essential building block. *The Heraclitean Two-Step, etc.* (released late last year in honor of Parker's 80th birthday) represents the most recent flowering.

Along with four CDs of solo improvisations, the slip-cased set includes a 120-page book that collects the memories and insights of Parker (who turns 81 this month), as well as several of those who have been especially close to his music. Among them are Parker's extended conversations with Martin Davidson (of Emanem Records) and Hans Falb (founder of the Konfrontationen Festival), as well as Chicago writer John Corbett's memories of meeting and recording Parker. Parker's own contributions include a lecture, "Practise/ Practice/ Praxis" and a far-ranging, 20-page conclusion, "Time Shifts", that's characteristically generous and erudite, of thoughts on his process that chart immediate experience while incorporating quotations from Marcus Aurelius, Booker Little, Plato, Arthur Koestler, Jorge Luis Borges and Laurence Sterne, among many. There's also a graphic segment that includes photos, brass rubbings and Parker's collages from the COVID-19 lockdown—colored geometrical forms over the visible times of a blank date planner, works that might represent the architectural and conceptual forms of his improvisations.

While such giants as Coleman Hawkins, Sonny Rollins, Eric Dolphy and Anthony Braxton recorded saxophone solos, Parker expanded the practice, essentially reinventing the instrument by combining circular breathing, false fingerings and room resonance to create strings of sound like an organ or synthesizer. It's hardly a stunt. Amassing technical possibilities and pressing them further, Parker has achieved a music rich in complexity with expanding depths. The highest compliment I've heard it paid came at the conclusion of a solo at a 2003 memorial tribute to the poet Paul Haines at the Guelph Jazz Festival: a listener of Buddhist orientation exclaimed to me, "It's illumination in sound!" While any gathering of Parker's music is significant, this set celebrates his satisfaction with solo recordings from two special sites. In 1994 he performed a solo piece in the Unitarian Chapel in Warwick (England) that he long valued for its special acoustic properties. Part of a concert of mixed ensembles, he thought it too short to release. In 2023, he revisited the chapel to further explore its sounds, gathering material to add to the 23-minute piece now called "Avon", for the nearby river, recording a series of short pieces named for other rivers, local or epic: Niger, Orwell (source of Eric Blair's pen name), Nile, Yangtze, Mississippi, Selenga. Though Parker chooses this as his titular Heraclitean moment, feeling that he *couldn't* step into the same river twice, these recordings possess their

own distinctive qualities.

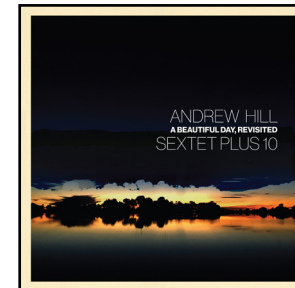
The other three CDs were recorded (between 2018-24) at Felipe Gomes' Arco Barco studio in Ramsgate Harbour, Kent. Introduced to the studio by Matthew Wright, his partner in the project Trance Map, Parker developed a special relationship with both the space and Gomes, including microphone placements that pick up the sounds of each hand's fingerings. In Gomes' contribution here, "Reflections and Resonances", he recalls his first experience recording Parker: "I heard... a layer of sound that didn't belong, a ghostly feedback that seemed to hover above his performance. Heart pounding, I rose from the chair, ready to stop the performance and explore the technical glitch. But as I reached the door, another tone emerged, harmonizing with the first. It was then I realized: this was no accident. Evan was playing the room as much as his saxophone, conjuring tones that danced with the acoustics of the space. He was orchestrating a symphony of reflections and refractions." The first of the Arco Barco discs (Disc 2), "The Path Is Made by Walking", is a half-hour piece, so singular that it gets a disc to itself. First titled "The Honest Journey", the pauses between segments are literally recorded pauses, rather than digital space. Individual segments vary in length, but each is a model of clarity, usually distinct in sound, functioning at once as segment in a continuum, but also as crystalline miniature, sometimes suggesting flute music.

Disc 3 consists of numerous shorter pieces, several of them vigorous, insistently rhythmic and repetitious. The initial "Traffic (for Steve Winwood)" has a kind of living loop that suggests "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B" (at least for this listener) while "Straight v Strait (for Steve Lacy)" achieves stunning levels of complex interactivity between horn and walls. Like a series of distinct rooms, each piece here establishes its own repertoire of sounds (bright, muffled or other, or alternating closely) and phrases (short, long, open, closed) within the patterns of cyclical repetition. Within this grouping, "The Ostend Ferry" (aka "The Solo (for Paul Rutherford)") can suggest a "Parlement of foules", while "Blériot's Handshake (for Anthony Corteel)" is stunningly beautiful. The episodic "Straight and Narrow" has epic pitch bends worthy of Bismillah Khan's shehnai. "Time Shifts", the extended centerpiece of Disc 4, returns to the practice of "The Honest Journey", pauses not digital but "live," reflective moments in the sustained journey, here matched to a softer, warmer tone that will sometimes reduce its volume to an embrace of air rather than a push. With a shift in speed will come a shift in envelope, notes suddenly pressed to another pause, this time followed by whispers and swirls against a drone not quite heard, moving toward a more declamatory, yet still circulating, certainty.

Exploring multiple techniques, Parker has combined the expressive flexibility of a wind instrument with some of the keyboard complexity of Olivier Messiaen or Terry Riley. His explorations have been as influential as John Cage's prepared piano and are implicit in the work of major figures such as saxophonist John Butcher, trumpeters Axel Dörner and Peter Evans and the brilliant French quintet Hubbub, where two circular-breathing saxophones and bowed guitar, piano strings and cymbals compound complex, hypnotic drones.

The Heraclitean Two-Step, etc. is a joyous invitation to celebrate Parker's unique achievement.

For more info visit falsewalls.co.uk



A Beautiful Day, Revisited
Andrew Hill Sextet Plus Ten (Palmetto)
by Fred Bouchard

Andrew Hill (who passed away 18 years ago this month) forged his indelibly powerful career trajectory in 1960s small band dates with bassist Richard Davis on Blue Note: *Black Fire*, *Smoke Stack*, *Point of Departure*, *Pax*, *Compulsion!!!!*. In Europe (1970-74) he earned accolades and made fine albums (for Soul Note and SteepleChase), then went to the West Coast in 1976 with a productive tenure teaching at Portland State University. Hill was avant-Monk: a brilliantly original pianist, iconoclastic and inspiring leader, and sturdy composer, if no orchestrator—a modest check uncovered no dates exceeding octets, nor previous big band charts. His music was even counter-Monk: lucid, but dark; ominous yet visionary, not joyful; eclectic, not parochial; dense and thorny, not dancing. *Dusk* was Hill's millennial comeback with a sextet on Matt Balitsaris' Palmetto label; it won 2001 Album of the Year in a rare concordance of *DownBeat* and *JazzTimes*.

Yet *Dusk*, curiously contemplative and rhapsodic, does not prepare us for the sinuous power and drive unleashed in these January 2002 live at Birdland sessions found on *A Beautiful Day, Revisited*, recently reissued with extended edits and remastered as a double-LP with the addition of a bonus track. To the fore again is Hill's *Dusk* sextet: multi-reed wizards Marty Ehrlich (alto, bass clarinet) and Greg Tardy (tenor, clarinet, bass clarinet, flute), along with Ron Horton (trumpet), Scott Colley (bass) and Nasheet Waits (drums, replacing Billy Drummond), now bundled on seasoned reed and brass sections. Horton serves as music director, conductor and nominal arranger for *le tout ensemble*, richly, and often intuitively, augmented by reedmen Aaron Stewart, John Savage, JD Parran, plus Dave Ballou, Laurie Frink and Bruce Staelens (trumpets), José Davila (tuba) and Charlie Gordon, Joe Fiedler and Mike Fahn (trombones).

Horton sets a high bar with his opening fervid, antiphonal "Divine Revelation"; thereafter Hill's sketches, vamps and chorales take over. The trumpeter-music director explains the leader's roll-the-dice-and-angels-take-all creative process: Hill's inchoate horn section kernels were to be cued in, but he mischievously pulled the charts as the lights went down. He just wanted everyone to go all-in with gut and heart. Amazingly fluid, protean sets unfurled nightly, here distilled into 84 minutes. Heart-stopping a cappella breakouts—cascading winds, sketched and/or improvised—eerily echo Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*. Hear wild duos: Stewart/Tardy tenor duels; cobra-dance flutes and Ehrlich's bass clarinet soul-tour ("Faded Beauty"); a ruminative Horton/Davila face-off ("Bellezza"); and rumbustious Parran amok ("J Di"). Do parse the striking evolution of the title piece in evolved epic versions: I won't spoil your fun!

Hill, then 70, called out closing nods to each player over a rollicking full-bore vamp in "11/8", and wrapped it in a smile: "Hope you heard something you enjoyed; if so, tell the world about us." Studio magic let Balitsaris refix the mix to focus mics, unclutter tracks, then rightly decide it was all worth retelling... Amen.

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