

GLOBE UNITY



Unburying, From Liminals, Emerging

Matt Choboter (ILK Music)

Anatomical Heart

Erik Griswold, Helen Svoboda, Chloe Kim

(Earshift Music)

Ensemble A

Ignaz Schick, Anaïs Tuerlinckx, Joachim Zoepf

(Confront)

by Daniel A. Brown

American avant garde composer-pedagogue John Cage debuted the prepared piano with his 1940 piece, *Bacchanale*. Auspiciously, in that same year Duke Ellington released swing standard “Ko Ko” and firebrand free jazz pianist Dave Burrell was born. Prepared piano involves sticking objects into the exposed strings of the instrument, including metal hardware, rubber erasers and other items to create previously-unheard pitches, timbres and textures, and offers potential for some weird “swinging” indeed. A trio of recent releases feature prepared piano and reveal the current overlap of experimental composition, electroacoustic ideas, outer-ring-jazz,

and unbridled improvisation.

Inspired by the subconscious, South Indian classical and Balinese gamelan musics, and a “dream diary,” the six pieces comprising *Unburying, from Liminals, Emerging* are a musical travelogue from Denmark-based, Canadian pianist-composer Matt Choboter. Leading his ensemble—Michal Biel (baritone), Calum Builder (alto), Miguel Crozzoli (tenor), Jan Kadereit (percussion)—via microtonal prepared piano, Choboter uses simple albeit haunting motifs as devices to tether this collection of haunting music. The shimmering clangs and metallic clusters of “Sumerian Rock Tapestry” and “Moon’s Iced Glades” are akin to Erik Satie coming down from an entheogenic retreat; the weeping, unison horn-lines of “Pupa Karma” dip into the mystical while the cosmic gamelan of “Wayang Kulit” only deepens the album’s eeriness. The instruments of this session were “re-amped” and processed through places and objects including Denmark’s urban site Tunnelfabriken, bass drum, cymbals and oil barrels adding to the winning conceptualism of the listening experience.

The Australian trio of Erik Griswold (prepared piano), Helen Svoboda (contrabass) and Chloe Kim (drums), push a standard jazz combo-format into enjoyable excursions with *Anatomical Heart*. Inspired by bush-walks in the bucolic north New South Wales, pieces such as “Anatomical Blues” and “Rock Song”

boast a just-recognizable sense of jazz-like structure, balanced by the overtone-and-glissando-rich experience of “The Mouse” and “Bowed”. Buffeted by the empathic playing of Svoboda and Kim over the course of these eight pieces, the shimmering sound of Griswold’s piano lines refrain from degrading into a conceptual gimmick, instead underpinning a set of impressive group improvisations.

Consisting of two lengthy pieces, *Ensemble A* is a showcase for the spontaneous compositional talents of the Berlin-based trio of Ignaz Schick (turntable, sampler), Anaïs Tuerlinckx (prepared piano) and Joachim Zoepf (bass clarinet, soprano). Clocking in at 30 minutes, the sprawling “Electroacoustic Kaleidoscope” sounds as advertised: a sonic prism that is impressive in both its fearless reach and seeming avoidance of working with familiar acoustical timbres. Shards of sound rise and fall throughout the duration; at a specific juncture, Tuerlinckx seems to gleefully hit the piano as *one giant key*. The 20-minute “Turntableturn” is a marriage of electronic swirls and creaks from Schick and a constant, machine-like drone courtesy of Tuerlinckx’ arcane piano modifications in tandem with this auditory sprawl, while Zoepf emits a volley of extended-technique sounds, moving from soft coos to the guttural.

For more info visit ilkmusic.com, earshift.com and confrontrecordings.bandcamp.com



Alegria

Shelly Berg (ArtistShare)

by Ken Dryden

Throughout much of his career, pianist Shelly Berg has been known primarily as a bop, stride and swing master, and for his many recordings with vocalist Lorraine Feather. But his interest in Latin music has long been part of his resume as well, as he has arranged, orchestrated and recorded with Arturo Sandoval, Gloria Estefan and others. The focus of his new album *Alegria* is upbeat Latin music, mostly composed by the pianist and performed with two of his longtime collaborators: Carlitos Del Puerto (bass), who toured with Chick Corea, and veteran Dafnis Prieto (drums), who is also well known as a bandleader and composer himself.

“Home With You”, co-written with Feather and although *sans* lyric, is an upbeat work, arranged as a lively, brisk samba and showcases all three musicians very effectively. “Martina Sunset” is a romantic, leisurely bossa nova that reveals new facets with each chorus. If Berg’s danceable title track doesn’t yet have a lyric, it deserves one. The melody sticks in the mind and Del Puerto’s phenomenal chops fuel this engaging song. “Meatballs and Apple Pie” is a greasy, soulful number blending a bluesy air with its Latin rhythm, adding tenor saxophonist Melvin Butler and a vocal chant by the trio with a few guests (including Berg’s wife Julia). The pianist’s bossa nova “The Joy” has jazz standard written all over it, with its hypnotic theme and swaying rhythm, another work which merits a lyric. The pianist grew up while The Beatles dominated the

charts, so it is no surprise that he’s a fan of their music. His arrangement of “I’ll Follow the Sun” has a Latin air, though Berg delves into a country-like sound along with a few bluesy licks, while never losing sight of the song’s potent melody. The soft, lyrical interpretation of Leonard Bernstein’s “Somewhere” suggests a lullaby, with the rhythm section adding just enough to complement the leader’s glistening piano playing.

Shelly Berg should be considered a national treasure and *Alegria* is a valuable addition to his discography.

For more info visit artistshare.com. The album release concert is at Birdland May 6. See Calendar.



Downtown Castles Can Never Block the Sun
Ben LaMar Gay (International Anthem)

by Sophia Valera Heinecke

The International Anthem record label has been reflecting on and reissuing essential listening based on its mission. More of the future than of the past, this timely reiteration and new LP reissue of 2018’s *Downtown Castles Can Never Block The Sun* from Chicago native Ben LaMar Gay enlivens the body through beat and rhythm while still holding gripping emotional weight.

Every track (Gay’s credits include cornet, synth, voice, flute and other instruments) is an unexpected conversation that feels certain in the individual choices and across the vivid sequence. Five added tracks further the album’s cohesion, underscoring something reflexive across their sweeping scope. His friend and photographer, Maren Celest, remembers the original

release was created from “things [Ben] never thought he’d release.”

More a convocation than a compilation, these songs were initially assembled from seven unreleased albums made over seven years, with featured musicians ranging from Rob Frye (bass clarinet, flute), Jayve Montgomery (tenor) and Joshua Sirotiak (tuba, flute) to Will Faber (guitar, synth, flute) and Tommaso Moretti (drums, flute). The selections represent a cross-section of sonic landscapes that vary in length, tone, instrumentation, cultural influence, rhythm and style, some including lyrical singing and vocalizing (guest vocalists include Gira Dahnee and Zuzu Fé), anticipating needs for heightened intensity or reprieve. Percussive elements seduce the body into easeful engagement, so when rhythm disappears entirely, as in the lead-out “Lapsus (excerpt)” or “Seventh Stanza”, we are haunted by the loss of its anchor but never disengaged. “Seventh Stanza” is a vessel for a story. When narrative is directly invoked across the album, the details keep us face-to-face with reality, making us feel known.

By the album’s close, we expect subversion from different instruments and genres. It is a winding road that articulates a quest for freedom, birthing new forms of expression. This is poignantly felt on “Galveston”, a modern-day classic crafted to articulate the feeling of a new world being opened in the real world of Galveston, TX, honoring the news of Emancipation arriving in June 1865. Gay’s longtime collaborator Dahnee affirms that “the album perfectly ties the experiences of people of African descent in the ‘new world,’ North and South America...it’s a chronicle of growth, patience, and eventual release.”

Fulfilling International Anthem’s desire to “revisit and revivify music and memories,” *Downtown Castles Can Never Block the Sun* is imbued with new and deeper meaning; Gay’s selections reinvigorate his reputation for being uncategorizable, as this work invites a great time and a deeper listen into what his catalog can enkindle for future projects.

For more info visit intlanthem.com. Gay is at Public Records May 4 (part of Long Play Festival). See Calendar.