

Roth creates an alien free-improv world. The strangeness of his music is particularly striking, as he uses neither effects pedals nor prepared guitar modifications: all of the percussive, glitchy and esoteric soundscapes come from extended techniques of picking and fingering.

Most of the eleven tracks are quite short (only three are over five minutes), but all feel much longer. These improvisations are essentially miniature suites in which Roth jumps playfully between textures in tiny, juxtaposed episodes. “Channelsurf” is an apt description of the entire album. Even tracks that focus on a particular technique, such as pick scrapes in “Flossin’ The Bronchioles” and slide-guitar jangling in “The Time Is Now 3:58am”, maintain this non-linear stop-and-start pattern. The constant shifts, coupled with often quiet dynamic levels, give these selections an intensely focused, close-up sound and a nocturnal mood—reflected fittingly by the times included in several of the titles.

The appeal of this album is in the occasional glimmers of pulse and tonality that peek through, only to be tantalizingly obscured in clouds of abstraction. There is definitely an overarching form, though it may be tricky to discern at first. Roth begins many tracks at a contrasting level of intensity from where he left off, and the distortion-packed, scrambling closer “Thank You So Much” is a strong conclusion that helps to tie the album together.

Document 1 is a challenging listen, but these hidden melodies, harmonies and structural elements help to hold the listener’s attention. Roth’s music is a unique, alternate universe, with just a few well-placed parallels to the one we live in.

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UNEARTHED GEM



Irène's Hot Four
Irène Schweizer (Intakt)
by Ken Waxman

An uncut gem but still shining from 1981, *Irène's Hot Four* showcases a live Zürich jazz festival date when free jazz was at its wildest and wooliest period. The sizzling band included Swiss pianist Irène Schweizer (1941-2024), and German saxophonist-clarinetist-accordionist Rüdiger Carl, with added heat applied by Dutch drummer Han Bennink, plus South African bassist Johnny Dyani (1945-1986). The group/album name invokes the passion exhibited by earlier jazz combos, yet the performance mixes spontaneity with control. Carl’s improvising encompasses tremolo accordion pumps and altissimo reed split tones or scooped squawks; Bennink smashes, slaps and shakes every idiophone available; and Schweizer’s dynamic output includes linear expositions, emphasized glissandi and internal string judders. Only Dyani’s string pumps and stops steady the program. This is

especially evident when keyboard patterns and stabs approximated broken-chord freedom and boogie-woogie freneticism in turn.

The peak of all this intensity occurs on “All Inclusive”, the extended pre-encore concert climax. As the saxophonist overblows harsh tones of bar-walking-style honks and triple tongued screams, Bennink responds in kind with rim shot clips and echoing pops augmented with triangle clanks, gearwheel ratchets, kazoo squeaks and megaphone-amplified yells; even the bassist augments his thumps and adds some *sotte voce* vocalizing. Switching from prestissimo chording with pseudo-ragtime syncopation to emphasize a swing groove, Schweizer (aided by Carl’s flowing accordion wails) uses key stops and jerks to guide everyone into a rousing finish. Early and later amplification of heightened moments confirms the extreme malleability of the program. This also confirms how in-the-moment improvisations can moderate any excesses—usually on Bennink’s part—to propel all timbres into group tandem evolution.

A dedicated champion of feminist responses to too-assertive male domination of free music, Schweizer, who passed away almost a year ago and would have been 84 this month, explored numerous avenues of creative sounds—both metered and completely spontaneous. This never-before-released performance remains one highpoint of her accommodation with ferocious free improvising.

For more info visit intaktrec.ch

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