



**Jazz at Berlin Philharmonic XVII:
Gnawa World Blues**
Majid Bekkas, Nguyễn Lê, Hamid Drake (ACT)
Lhasa
Pasquale Mirra/Hamid Drake (Parco Della Musica)
Cosmic Waves
Albert Beger, Ziv Taubenfeld, Shay Hazan,
Hamid Drake (NoBusiness)
by Bill Meyer

This August drummer-percussionist Hamid Drake turns 70, but he shows no signs of looking back. Although strongly associated with Chicago, where he was raised, he's currently based in Italy and these three recently released recordings reflect his connections with musicians based in Europe as well as around the Mediterranean. Taken together, they display the breadth of his rhythmic acumen: no matter who he plays with, he can meet them where they're at stylistically, energize the action and then introduce an idea that seamlessly moves the music somewhere else.

Jazz at Berlin Philharmonic XVII: Gnawa World Blues is the most international project of the three, but also the one that is closest to Drake's roots. While he grew up under the same multi-unit roof as the storied saxophonist Fred Anderson, the youthful Drake didn't just play jazz (there was plenty of funk, rock, blues, reggae, Gambian griot music, even a stint with Chicago Irish songsters the Dooley Brothers). Moroccan Majid Bekkas (oud, guembri) and Franco-Vietnamese Nguyễn Lê (guitar) bring some range of their own to this

release. The former has stirred jazz and blues into his Gnanan roots (and previously appeared with Drake and German saxophonist Peter Brötzmann at Jazzfest Berlin), while the latter has an extensive background in electric jazz and pop, including tributes to Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix. This music feels like it was conceived for world music festival stages; both string players get plenty of room to shred, the stylistic combinations are cleanly joined, and the effects-laden guitar sometimes casts a too-sparkly sheen. Drake delivers precisely what is required throughout, from delicate kalimba filigree on the spacy travelogue "Ascending Dragon" to wall-to-wall bashing on "Purple Haze".

Lhasa is a duo with Italian vibraphonist Pasquale Mirra, a member of Drake's European Alice Coltrane tribute project. Recorded in concert in Rome, it is simultaneously much looser and yet more focused than the above album. The program is split between jointly-conceived originals and themes by Don Cherry and Sun Ra that get stretched, diffused and reconstituted with a winning sense of play; the two players sound joyously in sync, although it's clear that Drake's hands are on the steering wheel. Most of the album's pieces are near twenty minutes in length, and that duration, plus the transparent instrumentation make it easy to hear how his constant shifts in tempo, emphasis and ornamentation guide the music over time. On "Love In Outer Space/Brown Rice", for example, he gradually morphs a Curtis Mayfield-worthy groove into a dancing, Ed Blackwell-style breakdown, and then rockets to the finish with gentle but undeniable insistence.

Cosmic Waves hits hard out of the gate, with a sandblasting first salvo from Albert Beger (tenor) and Ziv Taubenfeld (bass clarinet) cleaving through Drake and Shay Hazan's (bass) collapsing field of rhythm. Then the drums turn up the heat and the whole combo steams ahead. The web of connections between the players contributes to a strong rapport, so that even though the credits suggest that the music is completely improvised, the scimmages resolve into solemn, cohesive melodies. Of the three recordings on review here, *Cosmic Waves* is the most intense, hewing exclusively to a free-jazz aesthetic. But within its chosen zone, there's plenty of variety, much of it coming from Taubenfeld and Beger's ability to resolve contrasting attacks with solemn joint statements.

For more info visit actmusic.com, auditorium.com and nobusinessrecords.com. Drake is at Roulette Jun. 4 and 7 (part of Vision Festival), and David Rubinstein Atrium Jun. 13 (part of Jazztopad Festival). See Calendar.



The Salerno Concert
Bob Mover/Walter Davis Jr. (Reel to Real)
by Ken Dryden

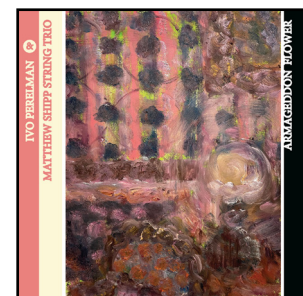
Septuagenarian alto saxophonist Bob Mover and pianist Walter Davis Jr. worked together over a period of several years prior to Davis' untimely death in 1990 at age 57 (this month marks his 35-year deathaversary), and Mover appeared on one European album by the pianist (*Illumination*, 1988). Yet both record labels and New York venues consistently overlooked them.

This previously unknown recording from 1989, *The Salerno Concert* (made at Le Botteghe in Salerno, Italy) doesn't seem to be professionally made, due to the over-modulation of both artists' instruments and the

somewhat distant sound of the piano, but it captures the essence of their incredible chemistry together. The set list includes a healthy mix of jazz favorites and standards, kicking off with a fiery exploration of Gigi Gryce's under-appreciated gem "Nica's Tempo". Mover's lightning-like runs and imaginative lines in "Star Eyes" provoke laughter from the pianist at one point, while Davis' insertion of numerous twists to its theme seems effortless. The pianist introduces "Donna Lee" by playing its harmonic source ("Indiana") before Mover makes his entrance, as the saxophonist displays his lyricism extrapolating on its theme in new ways, followed by Davis' quote-filled solo that must have had everyone wearing a broad grin.

The extended performances showcase the duo's total mastery of ballads and effective utilization of space. "You Don't Know What Love Is" is a masterclass in telling a story without lyrics, as Mover's expressive, bittersweet alto is beautifully supported by the pianist's creative backing, while his featured solo combines a bit of brief pyrotechnics without distracting from the mood of the piece. "All the Things You Are" starts with a bit of humor as they play Dizzy Gillespie's trademark introduction to this Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II work, then continue the fun by adding a hilarious tango-flavored detour into "How Are Things in Glocca Morra" by another classic writing team, Burton Lane and E.Y. Harburg. Mover's free-spirited playing and Davis' jaunty piano with additional whimsical quotes make this medley a highlight of the date, as they segue into a brief rendition of Kenny Dorham's "Lotus Blossom" (not to be confused with the Billy Strayhorn composition) to wrap the track. Their explosive run through "Salt Peanuts" left the audience wanting more, so they responded with a daredevil setting of Charlie Parker's demanding bop classic "Bird Feathers".

For more info visit cellarlive.com



Armageddon Flower
Ivo Perelman/Matthew Shipp String Trio
(TAO Forms)
by Ken Waxman

Despite its quasi-apocalyptic album title, the group improvisation on *Armageddon Flower* doesn't reference world destruction following a good vs. evil battle, but instead posits the flowering of hope in these agitated times. While dramatic and discordant, the program also contains instances of cooperation, since the group combines two ensembles that have each flourished for nearly three decades. One is the duo of Ivo Perelman (tenor) and Matthew Shipp (piano), the other the Shipp String Trio with William Parker (bass) and Mat Maneri (viola). Because of the cross-fertilization of creative music, none are strangers to one another. Besides the saxophonist's 46 album partnership with the pianist, Perelman has often worked with the bassist and violist.

And just as Perelman is no traditional saxophonist, the trio is anything but a conventional string group. Beside the atypical configuration, the piano and strings aren't there to sweeten or accompany the saxophone's lead. All players function as full partners, with group improvising the aim. Both antiphonic and aleatoric, the sound depends on distinctive statements from each—although the saxophonist has the edge—with