



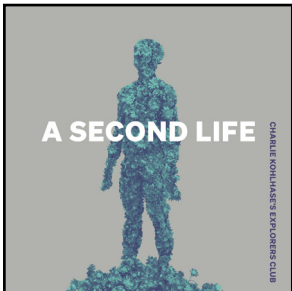
The Surrounding Green
Fred Hersch, Drew Gress, Joey Baron (ECM)
by Andrew Schindler

Fred Hersch, one of the great modern jazz pianists, returns with his third ECM album, *The Surrounding Green*—and it is stunning. A combination of originals and interpretations of standards and lesser-known classics, the recording already stands as one of this year’s stronger releases and could wind up as one of the standouts of Hersch’s long, storied career. Produced by legendary ECM founder Manfred Eicher, the album elicits a complex emotional response: pleasure derived from its pure beauty, yet with a haunting undercurrent—in a sense the sonic equivalent of finding beauty and joyfulness in an overcast sky.

Hersch’s trio includes Drew Gress (bass) and Joey Baron (drums), each of whom he has performed with since the ’80s, but this represents their first recording together, reflecting a chemistry that can only be achieved by decades of playing cooperatively. Moreover, no one musician dominates or runs away with the album. The covers and originals are given equal weight, and the originals are strong enough to hold their own against the pantheon of the genre. The title track, in particular, tightly encapsulates the album’s atmospheric qualities by freely meandering along a gorgeous pathway of silkiness. Opener “Plainsong”, which first appeared on Hersch’s 2017 solo *Open Book*, finds Gress and Baron’s additions completing the piece, making the original seem like a strong first draft. After the melancholic beginning, the trio then zig-zags to mid-period Ornette Coleman with a cover of the free jazz classic “Law Years”. On this track they straight-up jam, Hersch melding Coleman’s saxophone musings into tones befitting a more straight-ahead, classically influenced identity—a brilliantly original interpretation of a standard usually reserved for woodwind players.

As unlikely it may seem, there was room for another interpretation of the Gershwins’ popular “Embraceable You”. The trio takes plenty of liberties with the classic, offering a refreshing take on a song that could easily seem tired and overdone. This version is uncommonly up-tempo and bouncy, and while they play around the margins for much of the cover, the full, familiar chorus doesn’t appear until the last minute of the song. By then, the listener has almost forgotten they are hearing a Gershwin classic. The trio has taken the standard to places it rarely goes.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com. Hersch is at Village Vanguard June 10-15. See Calendar.



A Second Life
Charlie Kohlase’s Explorer’s Club (Mandorla Music)
by Jeff Cebulski

One way to understand the creative process of baritone saxophonist and bandleader Charlie Kohlase

is to listen to “Lennette”, the third piece on his latest album, *A Second Life*, which features his Explorer’s Club octet. The tune is an attempt to meld two unlikely-matched jazz savants, Lennie Tristano and Ornette Coleman. What emerges is a two-note ying figure that is passed around the ensemble, Tristano-like, before an asymmetric section of free playing provides the Coleman-ish yang. Certainly, “Lennette” fits in with the whimsical arrangement approach he inherited from his time in the Boston-area’s Either/Orchestra. Fans of the saxophonist’s work and of the ensembles he has led or inhabited—including the Charlie Kohlase Quintet, the Saxophone Support Group, The Makanda Project and the since defunct Mandala Octet—are grateful for the whimsy, given his story. In 2015, Kohlase, who in the last several years has been open about being gay, learned that he was infected with HIV. Realizing he was indeed fortunate to avoid full-blown AIDS, something friends and acquaintances had become unwitting victims of prior to advanced medicine, he crafted this musical statement as a remembrance of those lost, as well as gratitude for those who’ve influenced him musically and for his medical care. *A Second Life* represents the joy of a second chance.

Two major influences represented in the album are former collaborators in saxophonist John Tchicai (1936-2012) and trombonist Roswell Rudd (1935-2017). Tchicai’s “Berlin Ballad” receives a chamber horn treatment. Part of the melody is reminiscent of “In a Sentimental Mood”, but the song turns into a free interplay with staunch support by drummer Curt Newton. Rudd’s tribute to Pythagoras, “Tetraktys”, is playfully rendered, with swinging instrumentation. Meanwhile, Kohlase has his own fun. “Character Building Blues” is an inside joke about a blues played in A, with a confident baritone leading a trifecta of horn solos; “No Such Explorer” is built on a Burundi tune, featuring a pleasantly bleating tuba from Josiah Reibstein and a funky display from Kohlase; “Airport Station” is the leader’s take on an “accidental” rhythm derived from escalators at the Boston airport. Newton’s rim work here, as on “Explorer”, creates an infectious percussive edge.

Thanks go to doctors, medicine...and Charlie Kohlase’s indomitable spirit for *A Second Life* and the continuance of his intoxicating postmodern orchestrations.

For more info visit mandorlamusic.net



ØKSE
ØKSE (Mette Rasmussen, Val Jeanty, Petter Eldh, Savannah Harris) (Backwoodz Studioz)
by Stuart Broomer

“ØKSE” means axe in Danish, a fundamental tool for chopping, yet it’s also a word with many additional connotations, such as “Ashe”: the life-force that runs through all things, living and inanimate, including a current or flow—the groove that initiates can channel so that it carries them along the road of life. That radical and contradictory aesthetic, chopping up as continuum, an uncanny compound of free jazz, studio tech and hip-hop, makes this quartet a signal contemporary band, residing at a compound frontier. “ØKSE” consists of Norwegian Mette Rasmussen (alto),

Swedish Petter Eldh (bass, synthesizer, sampler), NYC-based Savannah Harris (drums) and Haitian Val Jeanty (electronics). Half of the album (in LP format) consists of eight tracks featuring vocals, whether rappers or singers. Multi-tracking, looping and foregrounded editing is everywhere, not a knock but an index of the special complexity in which free improvisation becomes compositional component.

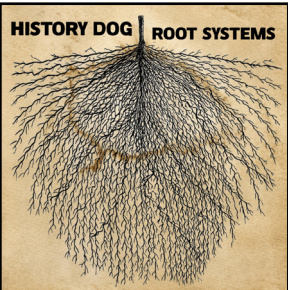
“Amager”, featuring rapper Billy Woods (also credited with A&R, suggesting the particular mix of rappers might have been his responsibility; the others are ELUCID and Cavalier), is a brilliant explosion of the band’s Hydra-headedness, an uncanny absorption of hot/cool, intense/abstracted, visceral/cerebral, from Woods’ own intensity to the myriad approaches that Rasmussen brings to individual moments: stratospheric bleeps to hard-edged melody, a free jazz saxophonist with a focused intensity, but with a certain distinguishing elegance. All the parts in an ØKSE track seem simultaneously independent and ideally connected, a music that matches spontaneity and design with dream-state precision.

“The Dive”, featuring singer Maassai, has extensive processed percussion as well as the multi-tracked voice, sometimes rapping, sometimes as singer, sometimes multiplied as vocal group, with an occasional male background voice. Rasmussen is again featured, but within collective music, the conclusion matching her with a wall of Jeanty’s chiming electronics, the cumulative effect a kind of pop radio from a distant planet. The concluding “Onward (keep going)” is tuneful pan-cultural hi-life, with Rasmussen and Harris simultaneously foregrounded, further animated by sampled chanting and tightly-locked bass and drum patterns, ultimately concluding in Jeanty’s sampled voices, flute and percussion—an

- RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES
- Peter Ehwald, Tom Rainey, Stefan Schultze — *Public Radio* (Jazzwerkstatt)
 - Nicole Glover — *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Savant)
 - Muriel Grossmann — *MGQ Live im King Georg, Köln* (Dreamland)
 - Joe Henderson and Woody Shaw — *Jazz Patterns* (Everest-Real Gone Music)
 - Fred Hersch, Drew Gress, Joey Baron — *The Surrounding Green* (ECM)
 - History Dog (Lesley Mok, Shara Lunon, Chris Williams, Luke Stewart) — *Root Systems* (Otherly Love)
 - Gwen Laster New Muse 4tet — *Keepers of the Flame* (Muffymarie)
 - Dave Liebman, Billy Hart, Adam Rudolph — *Beingness* (Meta/Defkaz)
 - Myra Melford — *Splash* (Intakt)
 - Johnny O’Neal — *Everybody Loves Johnny O’Neal* (Cellar Music)
 - ØKSE (Mette Rasmussen, Val Jeanty, Petter Eldh, Savannah Harris) — *ØKSE* (Backwoodz Studioz)
 - Michel Petrucciani Trio — *Jazz Club Montmartre - CPH 1988* (Storyville)
 - Alberto Popolla — *Really the Blues* (AUT)
 - Potsa Lotsa XL — *Amoeba’s Dance* (Trouble in the East)
 - Matthieu Saglio/Camille Saglio — *Al alba* (ACT Music)
 - Irène Schweizer, Rüdiger Carl, Johnny Dyani, Han Bennink — *Irène’s Hot Four* (Intakt)
 - Bill Stewart — *Live at the Village Vanguard* (Criss Cross Jazz)
 - Omar Thomas Large Ensemble — *Griot Songs* (s/r)
 - Dan Weiss Quartet — *Unclassified Affections* (Pi Recordings)
 - The Westerlies — *Paradise* (Westerlies)
 - Jacob Wick — *a veces me veo en el espejo y pienso en ti* (Ropeadope)

envoi suggesting everything is available, everything possible.

For more info visit okse.bandcamp.com. Val Jeanty is at Roulette Jun. 3 (with Nicole Mitchell) and Jun. 6 (with Shamanic Principle), both part of Vision Festival. See Calendar.



Root Systems
History Dog (Lesley Mok, Shara Lunon, Chris Williams, Luke Stewart) (Otherly Love)
by Ariella Stok

Although their name History Dog emphasizes an excavation of the past, the collective formed by four of today’s most exciting improvisers—Lesley Mok (drums), Chris Williams (trumpet), Luke Stewart (bass) and Shara Lunon (vocals)—is very much a response to the here and now, embodying the present moment in all its complexity.

Root Systems, the group’s first record, which they describe as a “family affair,” uses the tools of the studio to create a body of work deeply engaged with sociopolitical events, limning the space between resistance and radical existence. On Mother’s Day evening last month (May 11), their record release show filled Brooklyn’s Union Pool with a rapt crowd, open to the challenging performance the band was putting forth, combining free improv with noise and electroacoustic experimentation, which was abstracted and at times, abrasive.

On the album’s opening track, “HE SHE WE”, Lunon launches into an extended inquiry into identity, erasure and questions of how power is conferred and taken away through the status of its visibility: “He, she, we, us, they, them...I didn’t even see you.” The ample use of electronics and extended techniques broadens and blurs the palette of sounds the musicians coax from their instruments, achieving that wonderful effect of not being able to easily tell from whom any particular sound is being generated at a given moment. Eschewing solos to instead focus on novel textures that contribute to a unified group sound, Mok propels across the drum kit with mallets, sticks and hands; Williams’ trumpet bleats and signals and Stewart scrapes and rubs his electric bass strings.

The motif of laughter is used to confront the absurdities of oppressive systems on twin tracks “HILARITY” and “HILARIOUS”, with Lunon incredulously demanding, “You’re so fucking funny... you’re just going to take that and say that’s yours?” In the live setting, the causticity of this query took on additional depth, its relevance made further pointed by sampling the recent statement by Columbia student and Palestinian activist Mohsen Madawi upon release from a two-week detention. Defiantly addressing his oppressors, he declared: “I am not afraid of you.” The track “HONEST” opens on Lunon’s susurrating breath joined by a pulsing bass throb, whirring oscillations, the sound of scraped cymbals, a tolling bell and Williams’ delay-soaked horn—a dark soundscape that calls to mind a hospital scene or a passage through the bardo—the sound of fighting for one’s life.

For more info visit otherlylove.net. Lesley Mok is at Asian Arts Initiative Jun. 7 (with Che Chen) and Roulette Jun. 25 (with Myra Melford’s Fire and Water). Luke Stewart is at Vision Festival at Roulette Jun. 3 (with gabby fluke-mogul and with Nicole Mitchell) and Jun. 6 (with David Murray),

and Ibeam Brooklyn Jun. 29 (with gabby fluke-mogul). See 100 Miles Out and Calendar.



Was It 1984-85?
Angling (Cuneiform)
Live 2019: A Map of Books
Collapsible Shoulder Big Band (Cuneiform)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Sometime in what might be called the second generation of Downtown, following the outsider spirit of Fluxus, but adding a DIY punk sensibility and a propensity for jazz and nonjazz improvisation, there came a band that was destined to be unheard but somehow has now beaten the odds. Few ever heard them. They played two gigs but had three names and it took years, 40 of them, maybe 41 depending on who’s counting, for a set of recordings to see the light of computer screens. But here they are in *Was It 1984-85?* and *Live 2019: A Map of Books*.

This brief-moment-in-time of a band was comprised of George Cartwright (soprano), Fred Chalenor (bass), Chris Cochrane (guitar) and Zeena Parkins (harp). The members would go on to play in various configurations of Curlw and No Safety, among other projects over the years. But those were different moments in time.

Angling was the one group that, at length, won out over CCCP and Her Hat, making their way into a studio with drummer-engineer Wharton Tiers (who also recorded Glenn Branca, Sonic Youth, Of Cabbages and Kings and Y Pants) at the board. The eight tracks laid down have since been mastered for release by Elliott Sharp (another Downtown mainstay with a finely-tuned ear) and released as *Was It 1984-85?*, proving the cloudy nature of their brief existence. It’s a fun listen, and fortunately this unit cared enough to preserve something. The audio quality is certainly more than acceptable, and as good as many Downtown records of the day. It also holds true to the eclecticism in that era: moments of bluster, occasional bits of Canterbury vibe, strong soloing and a Uruguayan folk song. It also comes off as a bit tenuous, like a set of demos. The pieces are those they would have worked on, developed, brought more life to, but that wasn’t to be. For scenesters, though, it’s well worth checking out.

Much water has passed under many bridges since then. In 2019, Cochrane introduced a new band at Roulette, which was no longer in a West Broadway loft but housed in a proper theater in Brooklyn. Collapsible Shoulder played two shows (the second in 2020, despite the title), from which the 11 tracks on *A Map of Books* were culled. It’s a big band—a total of 20 musicians appeared across the two sets, including older associates: Parkins, Eszter Balint (violin, vocals), Kato Hideki (bass), Jim Pugliese (drums) and Syd Straw (vocals)), and relatively newer names: Gordon Beeferman (keyboards), Gelsey Bell (vocals) and Brian Chase (drums). The songs they played explode off the disc, but what’s most notable is the strength of Cochrane’s writing. He’s long been an intriguing songwriter, but the cuts here—which also includes covers of songs by Fred Frith, Robert Pollard and This Heat—are sensitive, engaging, and, dare I say, refined? Cochrane’s not trying to prove anything, or at least it doesn’t seem so. He’s not trying to be anything with Collapsible Shoulder. The songs get a bit bluesy at times, a bit poppy, even slightly Beatles-esque, but Cochrane’s writing has never come off so heartfelt.

For more info cuneiformrecords.com

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