

SCATTERARCHIVE

IMPROVISING BEYOND ITS TRICENNIAL

BY STUART BROOMER

The Glasgow-based record label scatterArchive is a major dispenser of free improvisation that may pass under many listeners' radar. It's both a label with a long history and an immediately distinguishable contemporary identity, alive to current technology and rising mail rates, taking its presence to the internet and issuing downloads. Numerous labels, often artist-run, are doing the same thing, but scatterArchive has an astonishing catalog of around 250 recordings, dating back to the '80s. In 2024, the label's 30th anniversary, 60 recordings were released. And founder-label head Liam Stefani expects 2025 to be just as productive.

Stefani launched the enterprise as "scatter" in 1994, a physical label dedicated to musical improvisation in its many forms, with a particular focus on non-idiomatic free improv. Over the intervening three decades, this has continued to remain the primary focus. "scatter" produced six CDs: Derek Bailey, Dislocation (a Japanese noise band), Lol Coxhill and Pat Thomas, The XIII Ghosts (Alex Ward and Ben Hervey), Steve Beresford, and Tony Bevan/Alexander Frangenheim/Steve Noble. There were additionally

two cassettes by Inversion (Brian Lavelle and Caroline Mackenzie) and Dislocation. A curated series of live "scatter" events followed for a few years (late '90s to mid 2000s) including a festival of German music ("Baustelle" at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow), which included Paul Lytton/Paul Lovens, Olaf Rupp, Thomas Lehn and others. The majority of these live events were recorded (onto DAT and ADAT) and these became the source of several digital releases, as "scatter" then became scatterArchive, with an active Bandcamp page and presence for archival recordings and digital versions of the out-of-print "scatter" physical releases.

As the name changed, so did the business model. It was no longer reliant on each physical release selling enough copies to finance the next one, no longer having to wait for payments for orders to come through from distributors and shop/mail order outlets. It was now possible to remove the commercial aspect from the label, becoming a non-profit organization. Releases became "pay what you can afford" downloads with all the proceeds generated paid out directly to the artists on a regular basis. Without the physical object, it became possible to release high-quality digital work quickly, more like an online periodical publishing a new weekly issue. The direction of the label has shifted subtly over recent years to include more archival releases, such as Alan Tomlinson, Otomo Yoshihide

and others, with more to come from the Sue Ferrar and John Russell archives. According to Stefani, "We're also featuring lesser-known musicians, including the burgeoning São Paulo underground scene, improvisers collected around Eddie Prevost's (of AMM fame) regular meetings in London and venues like the Hundred Years Gallery in Hoxton, East London, run by Graham MacKeachan."

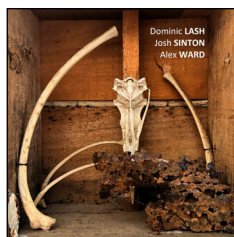
Part of the charm of scatterArchive is its advocacy of solo guitarists and other string players, among them Rex Casswell, Pierre Gerard, Brian Ruryk and several by N.O. Moore and the veteran Dave Tucker, as well as cellist Mark Wastell and harpist Rhodri Davies. With backgrounds ranging from folk, classical and minimalism to rock and noise, they represent both the quietest and loudest of the label's output. It's appropriate for a label that originally launched with Derek Bailey's *Drop Me Off at 96th*. A few years ago, Stefani launched one of Bailey's essential moments: *Domestic Jungle*. In the '90s, Bailey would sit at home and improvise along with the jungle and drum-and-bass music playing on underground radio stations. The DJs would repeat music, then suddenly drop off and talk aimlessly, all stimuli for Bailey's anarchic genius.

Major figures in improvised music and free jazz continue to release material on the label, including Pat

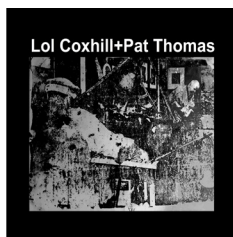
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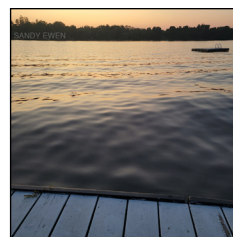
Drop Me Off at 96th
Derek Bailey



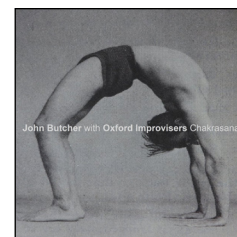
Lash/Sinton/Ward
Dominic Lash, Josh Sinton, Alex Ward



Duo (And Solos)
Lol Coxhill+Pat Thomas



20 July 2023
Sandy Ewen



With Oxford Improvisers
John Butcher

VOXNEWS

EXPRESSED LIVE

BY TESSA SOUTER

Perhaps more than any other genre of music, jazz has broadened into an extraordinary range of styles since its beginnings—absorbing influences from blues, classical, rock, funk, hip-hop, Latin, Indian, African and electronic music, while retaining its core identity: improvisation, swing, intelligence and emotional expression. Being a living, breathing, of-and-in-the-moment art form, jazz is probably best appreciated live—not least because the vibe of a great audience contributes to what is happening on the bandstand. And witnessing the communication between bandmembers and creative improvisations happening right in front of you is hard to beat. But, if you can't be there in person, live albums are a close second. Singer-pianist **Johnny O'Neal**'s swinging *Everybody Loves Johnny O'Neal* (Cellar Music) is a lesson in how to do it, making you wish you were there. His version of Betty Carter's "Tight"—so different from any other version—is like hearing the song for the first time. The whole album is exhilaratingly fresh, at the same time as clearly borne of his nearly 50 years as a performer.

Continuing the live recording theme, guitarist-vocalist **Allan Harris** has released his imaginative 17th album, *The Poetry of Jazz: Live at Blue Llama* (Blue Llama)—a beautiful blend of poetry (by Shakespeare, Dylan Thomas, Langston Hughes, among others), spoken word and jazz (both standards and several arresting originals). Combining Shakespeare's sonnet "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day" with

"Midnight Sun" is particularly inspired. His delivery of the poems is vaguely reminiscent of Arthur Prysock's spectacular 1969 album of poetry (spoken over music) *This Is My Beloved* (Verve). More from the Blue Llama is trumpeter-vocalist **Benny Benack III**'s *This is the Life* (Bandstand Presents)—a fun romp through mostly standards, recorded there live.

A beautiful new modern jazz album, the aptly-named *Searching for Beauty* (Rogue Tone) by German-Argentinian vocalist, arranger and composer **Sabeth Perez**, features mostly her own gorgeous compositions delivered with bell-like clarity in a beautiful crystalline voice and is one for the audiophiles. Already popular with the audiophile crowd, wunderkind **Stella Cole** has a new album of standards, *It's Magic* (Decca), featuring truly stunning string arrangements by Alan Broadbent. Watch out for the new album from the always exciting Christian McBride, *Without Further Ado, Vol. 1* (Mack Avenue), featuring his arrangements of classic songs with special guests: Sting, Andy Summers (together for the first time since The Police's 2007/2008 reunion tour), Jeffrey Osborne, **Samara Joy**, **José James**, **Cécile McLorin Salvant**, **Dianne Reeves** and **Antoinette Henry**. Vocalist, multi-instrumentalist **Amanda Ekery**'s soothingly beautiful album (with accompanying book) *Arabe*, is inspired by the marriage of her Syrian great grandfather to her Mexican great grandmother; it focuses on the shared Syrian and Mexican history and culture along the El Paso, TX border. 2023 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Competition-winner, Haitian-American **Tyreek McDole**'s highly-anticipated debut album, *Open Up Your Senses* (Artwork), features some great songs by spiritual icons Leon Thomas and Pharoah Sanders, among others, with a singular voice that somehow manages to be simultaneously soft (as in

caressing) and strong. The album release concert is at Joe's Pub (Aug. 6) and the quaint Close Up (Aug. 16). Singer-pianist **Kandace Springs** has a huge hit on her hands with a remake of Billie Holiday's *Lady in Satin* (SRP). The 12-song collection is a very personal reimagining of Holiday's classic 1958 album of the same name, backed by the 60-piece Portuguese ensemble Orquestra Clássica de Espinho. Plus, the arrangements are to die for.

SEE YOU THERE... **Allan Harris** celebrates his new release at The Django (Aug. 2). **Nancy Kelly** presents her latest, *Be Cool* (Origin), at Birdland (Aug. 3). **Lizzie Thomas**' album release is at Drom (Aug. 8). **Tierney Sutton** will be at Smoke with Houston Person (Aug. 20-24). **Samara Joy** at Close Up (Aug. 31) will be a rare opportunity to catch her in a truly intimate space: arrive early and grab it while you can! The Charlie Parker Jazz Festival in Marcus Garvey Park presents **April May Webb** (Aug. 22) and **Georgia Heers** (Aug. 23). Don't miss the amazing **Dee Dee Bridgewater** *Elemental* (DDB/Mack Avenue) album release duo with Bill Charlap at the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival in Tompkins Square Park (Aug. 24). Pianist-vocalist **Champion Fulton**'s 19th release is *At Home* (Turtle Bay), a duo with her partner, Swedish clarinetist and saxophonist Klas Lindquist. She is at Mezzrow (Aug. 8-9). **Ekep Nkwelle** is at Dizzy's Club (Aug. 16-17). NoMad Jazz Festival (Aug. 9-10) in Madison Square Park presents **Lizz Wright** and **Michael Mayo**. The Jazzmobile Summerfest in Marcus Garvey Park presents Terri Lyne Carrington with **Christie Dashiell** (Aug. 15) in the *We Insist!* 2025 (Candid) album release concert tribute to Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach. Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church presents **Milton Suggs** (Aug. 15) and **Carla Cook** (Aug. 22).

(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30)

that space of no chordal instrument. I just leaned into that a lot more and allowed the music to unfold.

TNYCJR: Well you're a lyrical player, so it works quite well. You don't need the harmonic underpinning because there's a lyricism to your improvisations that helps make it work.

BLAKE: I think that the cool thing for me was that I got hip to that early on with drummer Gregory Hutchinson, who I worked with in the Roy Hargrove Quintet, playing in ways that gave me a lot more space. And also, playing alongside Art Farmer was a lesson in playing with space and lyricism. There can be a lot of great interaction with a rhythm section but it's not always needed. I leaned into incorporating more space and including the rhythm section in the conversation of my improvisations. That has always drawn me to the music, such as the eclecticism and the lyricism of how Wayne Shorter or Von Freeman played. There's a lot of stuff going on around them musically, which you could hear them listening to and interacting with, but they seem to sing on top of all that.

For more info visit ronblakemusic.com. Blake's *SCRATCH Band* album release concert is at Dizzy's Club Aug. 13. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Roy Hargrove Quintet—*Of Kindred Souls (Live)* (RCA Novus, 1993)
- Ron Blake, Gregory Hutchinson, Peter Martin, Rodney Whitaker—*4-Sight* (N2K Encoded Music, 1998)
- Christian McBride—*Live at Tonic* (Ropeadope, 2005)
- Ron Blake—*Shayari* (Mack Avenue, 2006-7)
- Ron Blake—*Mistaken Identity* (7tēn33 Productions, 2018/2021)
- Ron Blake—*SCRATCH Band* (7tēn33 Productions, 2021)

(LEST WE FORGET CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

had to cancel the gigs."

Still, Grossman produced some of the more intriguing fusion-era music, including his debut *Some Shapes to Come* (PM, 1973) and *Terra Firma* (PM, 1977) with Hammer, Perla and Alias, as well as *Perspective* (Atlantic, 1979): an ensemble featuring bassists Marcus Miller and Mark Egan; drummers Steve Jordan, Victor Lewis or Lenny White; pianist-keyboardists Onaje Allan Gumbs or Masabumi Kikuchi, and others. As Stryker states, "[Grossman] was going for *something*, even if it wasn't always clear what exactly it was." Then Grossman pulled a disappearing act, moving to Europe (landing in Italy) and remaining relatively quiet until he reemerged in 1984, having embraced a Sonny Rollins straight-up style that dominated his comeback albums, starting with *Way Out East Vol. 1 & 2* (Red). His fourth record for the Italian Red label, *Love Is the Thing* (1986), which includes Cedar Walton (piano), David Williams (bass) and Billy Higgins (drums), does have some Coltrane-ish moments and is as solid an artistic statement as the saxophonist could muster, although his collaborations for Dreyfus Jazz in the late '90s to early 2000s with pianist Michel Petrucciani and fellow emigrant saxophonist Johnny Griffin—come close.

By 2005, Grossman was clearly in failing health and was even fired by Perla for poor performance while in Italy, which may have been the reason Grossman finally turned himself in for treatment. But by 2015, when he had returned to the US, the troubled saxophone genius was finished as a player and five years later he died at age 69 in Glen Cove, NY. His

tenor saxophone, though, remains in the hands of Perla, and saxophonist/Grossman loyalist Ryan Devlin will be playing it during a tribute concert with Perla at Zinc Bar in commemoration of Grossman's five-year deathaversary this month. Devlin, who, like the late Michael Brecker, was taken by Grossman's debut album, originally offered to restore the relic, "just in honor of Steve." After Perla restored the saxophone, he loaned it to Devlin, who recorded two albums with it. Three years later, the memorializing of the influential and tragic Steve Grossman continues, via Devlin, Perla, and what is fortunately archived.

For more info visit pmrecords.com. A Grossman tribute is at Zinc Bar Aug. 26-27 (with Ryan Devlin, Gene Perla, Billy Hart, et al.). See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Miles Davis—*At The Fillmore (Miles Davis 1970: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 3)* (Columbia-Legacy, 1970)
- Elvin Jones—*Live at the Lighthouse, Vol. 1 & 2* (Blue Note, 1972)
- Steve Grossman—*Some Shapes to Come* (PM, 1973)
- Stone Alliance—*Stone Alliance* (PM, 1975-76)
- Steve Grossman—*Bouncing with Mr. A.T.* (Dreyfus, 1989)
- Steve Grossman Quartet—*With Michel Petrucciani* (Dreyfus, 1998)

(LABEL SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

Thomas, who first appeared on "scatter" thirty years ago on one of the label's original six CDs. There are numerous recent releases of Thomas' electronic music on scatterArchive as well as a recent duo, *Elements and Properties*, where his interior/exterior piano playing meshes perfectly with Dominic Lash's electric guitar. Saxophonist John Butcher and ten members of the Oxford Improvisers appear on *Chakrasana*, recorded in 2022 and released in 2024. Two tracks have Butcher playing solo, and two others with the ensemble, fine examples of inspired listening and interaction. There is also a wind trio recording drawn from the larger ensemble.

Another major figure, pianist Veryan Weston, presents *Water*, a 2023 release of a 1988 cassette that documents his energized, creative virtuosity as he prepared for an upcoming solo performance. A recent album of note is *Scratched Earth*, an eerie recording by N.O. Moore and veteran percussionist Prévost, that might suggest a haunted factory. Moore's guitar can sound like a didgeridoo, electric saw and car engine, while Prévost's kit seems to include clattering pottery. Moore's online note concludes with the observation, "Scratch a line in the earth; the sacred is always on the other side of that line." Just 24 minutes long, the track might be too short for CD release on Prévost's Matchless label, but it's significant work.

In recent years, scatterArchive's appeal has reached artists around the globe, including North America. The distinguished Canadian trio of Arthur Bull (guitar), John Oswald (saxophone) and Scott Thomson (trombone), members who inhabit three different provinces and rarely assemble, recently released *Prophet Marginals*, a stellar example of collective invention. An homage to an early "scatter" masterpiece, was released by San Francisco guitarist Ernesto Díaz-Infante, who recorded *Pocket Strings*, named for a practice tool that "nevertheless is made of real strings, real frets and a strum-pad for rhythm." He improvised on it while "listening to Derek Bailey's *Drop Me Off at 96th* on one earbud," a remarkable act of homage that sounds something like a pipa, the Chinese lute.

For more info visit scatterarchive.bandcamp.com. scatterArchive artists performing this month include Sandy Ewen at Nublu Aug. 5. See Calendar.



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