

BALANCE POINT ACOUSTICS

BALANCED COMMITMENT

BY STUART BROOMER

Every independent record label devoted to marginal music represents a special commitment to an artistic vision. Few such projects, however, have the scale of Damon Smith's commitment: his embrace includes multiple forms of free jazz and improvised music along with a simultaneous allegiance to contemporary visual arts and poetry, as well as a certain added emphasis on his own instrument, the string bass. Smith founded Balance Point Acoustics (BPA) in 2001. In the years since, he has released 60+ recordings while moving from Oakland to Houston to Boston to St. Louis. The label's Bandcamp site is one in which an intrepid listener might wander for days.

Several elements distinguish the label. There's the focus on free jazz and improvised music, but there are also extended compositions. Almost any recording will have words and images affixed, but the emphasis at BPA is special. The recent *spi-raling horn* has Marilyn Crispell (piano) joining the working trio of Jason Stein

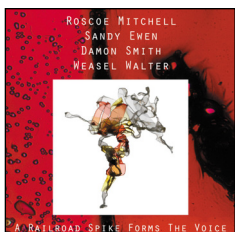
(bass clarinet), Adam Shead (drums) and Smith. It features cover art by the late, famed American painter-sculptor Cy Twombly, whose work helped inspire the collaboration, and a previously unpublished poem by Nathaniel Mackey. Smith's commitment to voice is further evident in *A Radio of the Body* with poet K. Curtis Lyle's reading accompanied by the vocal improvisations of Jaap Blonk and an instrumental trio.

There are few American labels with comparable ties to European free improvisation, noteworthy from BPA's inception. Smith himself is also a regular presence as a musician, but that, too, is a positive. He's an exceptional bassist with strong ties to the artists he records. His earliest recordings grew from the immediate impact of interacting with a series of senior bass greats: Peter Kowald, Bertram Turetzky and Joëlle Léandre. Whatever Smith's intentions, recording sessions turned into duets. The label's roots have been sustained to the present. Initially released as single CDs in the label's early years, they have since been reissued in 2021 as a three-CD set entitled *Bass Duos 2000-2007*. Another key BPA building block, already apparent in the presence of Kowald and Léandre, is a profound regard for the innovative work of European improvisers, including recordings that even predate the label. Smith's expansive vision, open to challenging art across a spectrum of music, visual arts and literature, is also aware of geography, early on forming a conduit to European improvising modes as well as American.

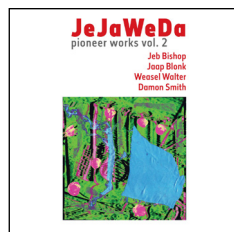
Before founding BPA, Smith had already begun to record sessions. One early example is *The Sale of Tickets for Money Was Abolished*. Recorded in 2000 and first issued a year later, it still sounds as fresh now as it did at the turn of the century, with Smith as part of a trio with English bass saxophonist Tony Bevan and Scott R. Looney playing prepared piano and electronics. The track titles such as "An Adverse Drawing Might Mean Mutilation" are taken from Jorge Luis Borges' fantasy short story, *The Lottery in Babylon*; the cover is a vibrant painting by California abstract expressionist Tom Schultze. Heard today, its interactivity remains state of the art, the gravity of Bevan's instrument still a revelation.

Other masterpieces further reveal the profound absorption and adaptation of European free improvisation. *Sextessence*, recorded in 1999 by guitarist Henry Kaiser's Sextet (including Smith) and subtitled *A Tribute to John Stevens and the Spontaneous Music Ensemble*, is particularly explicit, referencing SME's masterwork *Quintessence*. A 25th anniversary tribute to that SME title, Kaiser's sextet literally updates the homage, including in its personnel UK saxophonist John Butcher, who was a member of SME's later editions. Not untypical of BPA releases, the liner note is a poem, in this case an homage to Stevens by Kent Carter, the American émigré bassist who played on the

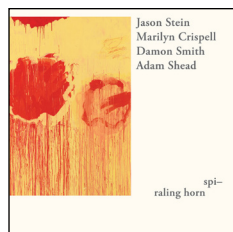
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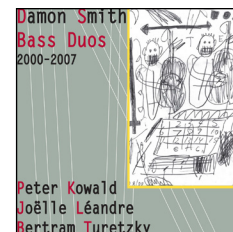
A Railroad Spike Forms The Voice
Roscoe Mitchell/Sandy Ewen/
Damon Smith/Weasel Walter



JeJaWeDa: Pioneer Works Vol. 2
Jeb Bishop/Jaap Blonk/Weasel
Walter/Damon Smith



spi-raling horn
Jason Stein/Marilyn Crispell/
Damon Smith/Adam Shead



Bass Duos (2000-2007)
Damon Smith



Wheat Fields of Kleylehof
Marco Eneidi Quintet

VOXNEWS

WHEN OCTOBER COMES

BY TESSA SOUTER

The month of October through time holds significant events in Black civil rights history, including the Supreme Court decision in 1883 striking down the Civil Rights Act of 1875 (thus re-legitimizing racial segregation); Nat King Cole becoming the first Black performer to host his own TV show (1956); Martin Luther King Jr. being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (1964) and the founding of the Black Panther Party (1966), among many other events. Two civil rights-related concerts at Dizzy's Club this month are right on track.

First, GRAMMY-winner Adonis Rose and the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, in collaboration with the renowned Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Company, present *Sacred Spaces*—a ballet blending music and dance that was inspired by the burning of three historic Black churches in Louisiana, featuring award-winning composer-vocalist **Andromeda Turre** (Oct. 16-19). Then, as part of the Ertegun Jazz Hall of Fame inductions at Dizzy's Club, pianist and composer Marc Cary unites with rising-star vocalist **Ekep Nkwelle** in what promises to be a stirring tribute (Oct. 21) to Cary's former boss, **Abbey Lincoln**, the significant voice of jazz and the Civil

Rights era, who used her music and songs to advocate for racial justice. Let's hope an album is in the works. It would certainly be timely. Over at Rose Theater, **Celia Cruz: A Centennial Celebration** (Oct. 17-18) honors the legendary Cuban "Queen of Salsa" with an all-star band led by Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra bassist Carlos Henríquez, who played with Cruz in his youth. Guest vocalists will include **Aymée Nuviola**, **Alain Pérez** and **Ariacne Trujillo Duran**.

ON THE RECORD...France-born, NYC-based jazz vocalist **Laura Anglade** celebrates the release of her fabulous new standards album *Get Out of Town* (Nettwerk Music Group/Justin Time), bringing her beautiful, clean sound to Zinc Bar (Oct. 21). The album features thrilling arrangements of standards including "April in Paris", "I Wanna Be Loved" and "This Can't Be Love". Winner of the 2023 Prix Opus for Concert of the Year, Anglade has opened for Melody Gardot and Gregory Porter and is definitely one to watch. **Stella Cole** presents her new release, *It's Magic* (Decca), over two nights at Sony Hall (Oct. 2-3). Expect vintage love songs backed by lush strings (arranged by GRAMMY-winning Alan Broadbent) and straight up standards. MacArthur Fellow and three-time GRAMMY-winning singer and composer, **Cécile McLorin Salvant's** new album *Oh Snap!* (Nonesuch) features 12 short, intimate songs, which she wrote as part of a creative quest: to place the same spontaneity and joy with which she draws and paints into her music. Initially never intending for them to be released, the songs experiment with digital tools and effects Salvant had never used before: GarageBand, Logic, AutoTune, Midi plugins, drum loops, vocal effects, reverb and filters—

reflecting her wide-ranging musical influences from her childhood in Miami: boy bands, grunge, classical, folk, etc. The result is everything you love about this daring, ambitious and riveting artist.

SEE YOU THERE...**Champion Fulton** will be all over the city, most notably with her co-led nonet with Klas Lindquist at Birdland weekly (Oct. 5, 12, 19, 26). The Gaia Wilmer Large Ensemble celebrates the iconic music of **Gilberto Gil** at Dizzy's Club with the profoundly moving, award-winning Brazilian vocalist **Mônica Salmaso** (Oct. 9-12). The emotionally resonant and always authentic **Vicki Burns** will celebrate Halloween Eve with her show *Haunted Heart* at The Green Room 42 (Oct. 30). **Andrea Wolper** and William Parker perform in duo at First Street Green (Oct. 5). **Curtis Stigers** is at City Winery (Oct. 12). **Gabrielle Stravelli** appears as featured guest of Michael Kanan's quartet at The Django (Oct. 12). The amazing **Carolyn Leonhart** sings as part of pianist Mike LeDonne's birthday celebration at Dizzy's Club (Oct. 26). **Jamie Leonhart** appears at Joe's Pub (Oct. 25). Ella Fitzgerald Jazz Vocal Competition winner, vocalist and songwriter **April Varner** appears at Zinc Bar (Oct. 13), celebrating her album *April by April Varner* (Cellar Music), a lovely collection of standards and originals around the theme of April. Also at Zinc Bar: **Sasha Dobson** (Oct. 29). At Pangea, check out **Alexis Cole** (Oct. 8), **Amy London** celebrating her birthday (Oct. 15), **Anne Phillips** (Oct. 22) and **Judy Niemack** (Oct. 27). **Sara Serpa** will be at Bar Bayeux (Oct. 17). **Alma Micic's** album release show (featuring saxophonist Eric Alexander) is at the Riverdale Jazz Series at An Beal Bocht Cafe (Oct. 29).