

IN PRINT



***On the Way to the Sky:
Remembering Bob Brookmeyer*
Michael Stephens
(University of North Texas Press)
by Ken Dryden**

The late Bob Brookmeyer (1929-2011), whose birthday and death anniversary are this month, is widely recognized for his immense contributions as a valuable sideman on valve trombone, although his vast discography showcases him also as an innovative composer, orchestrator and arranger with a distinctive style, gifted improviser, bandleader and occasional pianist—strengths which are often overlooked. Author (and drummer-percussionist) Michael Stephens knew Brookmeyer for over three decades as a mentor and sideman. His introspective look at the genius of the 2006 NEA Jazz Master is not a typical biography or exploration of a musician's music: it isn't strictly chronological, but it is compiled in a way that flows perfectly.

A native of Kansas City, MO, Brookmeyer initially studied clarinet, then switched to trombone after his embouchure changed. His new teacher was also a composer, and his hand-written march scores drew the teenager's interest. Diving head-first into writing arrangements, Brookmeyer became a professional arranger at age 14, due to the demand for new charts by the many big bands then in existence. Studying piano helped him understand how to layer different instruments in his charts. But the jazz master's preference for valve trombone over slide trombone was influenced by the sound and voicings that he produced, which often simulated the human voice, though he later abandoned that technique for a more complex harmonic approach. Brookmeyer eventually became an important part of groups led by Stan Getz, Gerry Mulligan and Jimmy Giuffrè, along with Thad Jones and Mel Lewis.

The author shares his memories of Brookmeyer as a mentor, bandleader and friend, even dealing with the trombonist's battle with alcoholism during his decade of studio work on the West Coast, finally achieving sobriety with the help of many friends. Stephens gives credit to Brookmeyer for recognizing this threat to his health and dealing with it. The observations of musicians who worked with and/or were mentored by Brookmeyer are illuminating: to-the-point remarks by guitarist Jim Hall from the master's memorial service, as well as numerous others who reveal much about Brookmeyer as a composer, orchestrator, conductor and leader, including Jim McNeely, John Hollenbeck, John Mosca, Dave Rivello and Maria Schneider, whose studies with Brookmeyer reveal how influential he was to her.

Readers will inevitably find themselves stopping to pull out Brookmeyer albums to play or search for his music and videos online while reading. Another plus is the discussion of unissued music which hopefully will eventually be released.

For more info visit untpress.unt.edu

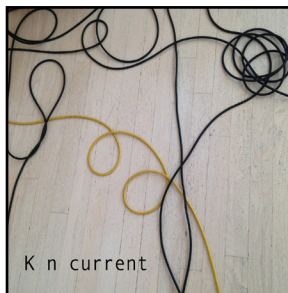


***Live at Birdland*
High Society New Orleans Jazz Band (Turtle Bay)
by Scott Yanow**

The High Society New Orleans Jazz Band (HSNOJB) appears at Birdland each and every Thursday night, a residency that began last year. Co-leaders Conal Fowkes (piano) and Simon Wettenhall (trumpet) were members of Woody Allen's New Orleans Jazz Band for almost 30 years. Their septet includes Harvey Tibbs (trombone), Tom Abbott (clarinet), Josh Dunn (guitar, banjo), Brian Nalepka (bass) and Kevin Dorn (drums). The group plays creatively within the style of 1920s jazz, sounding like New Orleans players from that time period who had found work in Chicago clubs. The ensemble playing is rousing, the soloists fit well into the era in their concise statements and the results are joyful. While there are many vocals by the co-leaders, they are generally fairly brief and, in Eddie Condon's words, "don't hurt anyone."

The set begins with a medley of two pieces often played at New Orleans funerals: a brief "Flee as a Bird" symbolizes the burial while the upbeat jam on "Oh Didn't He Ramble" celebrates the deceased's life and adventures. "Here Comes the Hot Tamale Man" is a worthy obscurity (recorded by cornetist Freddie Keppard in 1926). "Dallas Blues" and "Ace in the Hole" have Wettenhall vocals, with the latter being a song that Clancy Hayes used to sing in the '50s. The high point of the set is the group's rendition of Jelly Roll Morton's "Shreveport Stomp", which is often played as a clarinet feature (Omer Simeon recorded the definitive version with Morton in 1928). Here HSNOJB transforms the piece into a full-band romp. "Say 'Si Si'", a Swing era hit for The Andrews Sisters and a song adopted by some New Orleans veterans in the '40s, works well as a Dixieland stomp; its closing choruses are full of infectious abandon. The group's version of "High Society" is fine, except that they should probably not have left out the famous and integral clarinet solo (originally played by Alphonse Picou). However, they make up for that omission by concluding the program with a particularly stirring version of Irving Berlin's "When I Leave the World Behind". Fans of hot traditional jazz will find much to enjoy in this spirited album.

For more info visit turtlebayrecords.com. HSNOJB is at Birdland Theater Thursdays. See Calendar.



***KnCurrent*
KnCurrent (patrick brennan, Cooper-Moore,
On Ka'a Davis, Jason Kao Hwang) (Deep Dish)
by Pierre Crépon**

The four members of KnCurrent all have extensive roots in the New York jazz avant garde. Longtime composer, bandleader and saxophonist Patrick

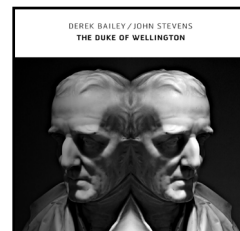
Brennan moved to the city during the Loft era of the '70s. Multi-instrumentalist Cooper-Moore made his first mark playing high-energy free jazz piano with saxophonist David S. Ware that same decade. Guitarist On Ka'a Davis' discography opened with Donald Ayler's enigmatic *In Florence* 1981 recordings. Back then, violinist Jason Kao Hwang was playing with his first band, Commitment, which included bassist William Parker. But besides established credentials, those résumés do not say a lot about KnCurrent's very new music.

The album's sequencing offers better pointers regarding what matters. A strong, whirling opening collective piece quickly gives way to a solo feature for Cooper-Moore's diddley-bo, the only instrument he plays here. This homemade monochord is essentially a long piece of wood with two bridges supporting an upright bass string. It can be played with sticks or hands, is electrified, and its bending notes remind of its blues roots. This short solo provides an opportunity to familiarize oneself with the low, pulsating sound that is central to the group's highly original sonic balance. In higher registers, Davis' pedal-equipped guitar and Hwang's "electronically enhanced violin" deploy controlled bursts of notes that can be crumpled, twisted or elongated at will. The precision with which Davis and Hwang work is in clear evidence on the album's next, saxophone-less track: they are not playing instruments plus additional gadgetry, but integrated wholes.

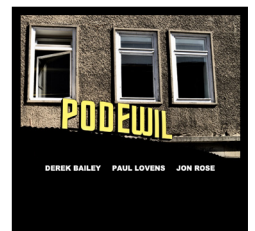
When the full group reassembles, the music takes flight, notably on "sumūd/دومص" (Palestinian steadfastness). Although the tune emanates from the only purely acoustic instrument, Brennan's precise tone seems plugged directly into his colleague's setups, reminding listeners that the dichotomy between acoustic and electric signals is an artificial one. The saxophonist skillfully identifies the points of departure needed to lift the music up another notch. "tewatatewenní:io" confirms that the group has found a unique palette, conducive to breaking new sonic grounds of the best kind.

This is powerful music for electrified strings and an alto saxophone, music that can make even jaded listeners pause and backtrack. Let's, by the way, pause and backtrack: great *new* music featuring the diddley-bo, really? Absolutely.

For more info visit patrickbrennansound.com. Brennan is at Downtown Music Gallery Dec. 9 and Soup & Sound Dec. 13. See Calendar.



***The Duke of Wellington*
Derek Bailey/John Stevens (Confront Recordings)
Podewil
Derek Bailey, Paul Lovens, Jon Rose
(Jon Rose Archive)
by Kurt Gottschalk**



Guitarist Derek Bailey thrived on spontaneity and new encounters. But even for someone so fully committed to the art of improvisation, familiarity sometimes bred contentment. Drummer John Stevens, who ran London's Little Theatre Club and founded the Spontaneous Music Ensemble in the second half of the '60s, was one of Bailey's earliest musical associates. Through Stevens, the guitarist also met and worked with Evan Parker, Kenny Wheeler and other key figures of the British free improv movement. Bailey passed away 20 years ago come Christmas Day and Stevens in September 1994.