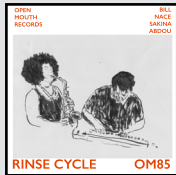


GLOBE UNITY



Overcoming
Zahili Zamora (s/r)
Rinse Cycle

Sakina Abdou/Bill Nace (Open Mouth)
A Mountain Sees a Mountain
Hamid Drake/Pat Thomas (Old Heaven Books)
by Daniel A. Brown

The principles of heritage, acknowledgment, activism, reverence and unity exist in a higher frequency than political trends and partisanship. This month we celebrate Black History Month, honoring the global history of Black culture and its crucial forging of the homegrown American art form of jazz. Black history is jazz history to a large degree, evident in three recent releases from international players, including Cuban, English, French and American musicians, who embody the ongoing diaspora and historical-spiritual network of great Black music that threads through the last century and the future evolution of jazz and the diverse experience of being human.

The debut from Cuba-born pianist-vocalist-composer Zahili Zamora, *Overcoming* is a five-song musical travelog chronicling her recent journey into deeper self-realization and the titular overcoming of hindrances. And Zamora doesn't take the trip alone, joined by featured

and able accompanists Yosvany Terry (soprano), Sean Jones (flugelhorn), Gerson Lazo (bass), Pedrito Martinez (percussion) and Julian Miltenberger, Yandy Garcia and Keisal Jimenez (drums, percussion). The undeniable Latin hue of opener "Rumination" is turned down to a low simmer, with Lazo, the drums and percussion creating a hushed, albeit-percolating groove below the frontline of keys and brass. "Despair", a piano/flugelhorn duet between Zamora and Jones, is an unpredictable ballad that harmonically shifts from jazz chord changes to dark chromaticism and the leader's somber melodic intervals. The odyssey ends with closer "Negra", a piece that sounds like the protagonist has found a kind of tentative joy through what has occurred in the preceding songs' moods.

As a transgressive counterpoint to the above title, French alto and tenor saxophonist Sakina Abdou and Philly-based multi-instrumentalist Bill Nace (electric guitar, two-string taishogoto, egg shaker, contact mic) genuflect before the animistic facet and hard-edged mysticism of unbridled improvisation over the course of *Rinse Cycle's* four tracks. Reducing music to its granular level, album opener "Vented" detonates out of the gate with unison moans of horn that then percolate into a swirl, Abdou emitting circular-breathing motifs in an alien call-and-response with Nace's grinding (yet weirdly soothing), distorted string crackle. "Mega Capacity" evokes old-school, unhinged FMP free jazz, with the saxophonist exploring Albert Ayler-like heraldic lines, while Nace alternates between plunging then retrieving into electric squawking chaos and simple motifs of overdriven guitar. On "Perfect Steam", the pair wind down the session with

Nace erasing much of the actual guitar altogether. Solitary amp buzz and trickling metal shimmers dance over his pickups as Abdou wades through the river of sound with rising and plummeting horn moans.

Another duet, *A Mountain Sees a Mountain* (recorded live last autumn at the OCT-LOFT Jazz Festival in Shenzhen, China) runs the gamut from placid to the torrential—at times in the same piece. Elder improvisers in UK pianist Pat Thomas and Chicagoan Hamid Drake (drums, percussion, frame drum, vocals) offer up eight songs that demand the listener's attention. "The Spiders Web" barges through the gates with Thomas' volley of low-register, tonal clusters, then dissipating into restless piano exploration; Drake responds in kind with a gurgling, pummeling flow of drum hits and metallic rattles. "Stay Safe" veers into a funk vamp transmitted from some parallel universe, with piano jabs containing elastic diminished and altered intervals that sound like they are fleeing the riff, Drake serving up a whip-crack commentary via a volley of beats. Like many sheer improvisational records, the remaining tracks of *A Mountain Sees a Mountain* play like edits of longer conversation; either an asset or impediment, depending on one's tastes, tolerance, even imagination.

For more info visit oldheavenbooks.bandcamp.com, openmouthrecords.bandcamp.com and zahilizamora.com. Zahili Zamora's album release concert is at Soapbox Gallery Feb. 13. Pat Thomas is at Shapeshifter Lab Feb. 19-21 and Solar Myth (Philadelphia, PA) Feb. 23, both with أحمد [Ahmed]. See *Calendar* and *100 Miles Out*.

Criss Cross Jazz latest releases

