

UNEARTHED GEM



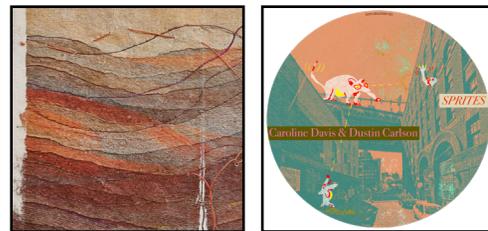
Fragments: The Complete 1969 Salle Pleyel Concerts
Cecil Taylor Unit (Elemental Music)
by Duck Baker

When multi-instrumentalist Sam Rivers joined pianist-composer Cecil Taylor's Unit in early 1969, the trio of Taylor (who passed away eight years ago this month), Jimmy Lyons (alto) and Andrew Cyrille (drums) had been working together for five years, sometimes adding a bassist to the group. With Rivers playing tenor and soprano as well as flute, this quartet was one of the most intense of all Cecil Taylor Units. Fortunately, this lineup was recorded live several times, mostly during a November tour that year of Europe, but the first recordings to be released were taped in southern France months earlier during the summer, and issued on the Shandar label in 1971. Not only was the music (later released as *The Great Concert of Cecil Taylor*) incredible, but it showed for the first time on record what a monster free-jazz improviser Sam Rivers really was. With the

fully unleashed Rivers on board, the Unit's group improvisations were often downright volcanic for extended periods. And while this had been a common practice in free jazz for a while, it was never common to hear such brilliant musicians playing this freely with the kind of cohesion we witness here. It does require total concentration to follow the music, as is always the case with Taylor, but the rewards are enormous.

Like all Zev Feldman productions, *Fragments* (available as a gatefold, triple-LP, 180gr edition or deluxe two-CD set) is packaged beautifully, with excellent liners, terrific photos and exemplary mixing and mastering. The one drawback is that the balance is less than ideal towards the beginning of the long afternoon concert, with Rivers too high in the mix. This is a problem in some of the ensemble improvs because the way this band most always worked was for Lyons to root the music from the top down. His bluesy, somewhat boppish lines (he cited alto saxophonist Ernie Henry as a primary influence) often spell out the musical directions Taylor is implying with his furious fragmentations. All four players here are in spectacular form, and as usual it is the leader who is the most mind-blowing. The balance does improve as that concert proceeds, and is fine for the phenomenal evening performance.

For more info visit elemental-music.com. Andrew Cyrille is at Village Vanguard Apr. 28-May 3 (with Joe Lovano Quartet). See Calendar.



Fallows
Caroline Davis (Ropeadope)
Sprites
Caroline Davis & Dustin Carlson
(Out Of Your Head)
by Jim Motavalli

Not strictly a solo album per se, *Fallows* has alto saxophonist Caroline Davis interacting with her own electronics (courtesy of a Boss RC-505 loop station and the Critter and Guitari beat-making Organelle), as well as the recorded sounds of nature encountered in the wild. David Rothenberg and Paul Winter excel in albums like this, though they seem to prefer interacting with living creatures, such as birds, wolves and even whales. Recorded last year in Ucross, WY, this recording is all-in on the birds but is more about water flowing through the mostly short, spontaneous, original compositions (except for the traditional "Barbara Allen"). Listen closely and you might be able to pick out a curlew or a western meadowlark.

Davis might overlap her horn in conversation with itself, as well as with walls of static. Opener "Springtails" is a futuristic dance for an optimistic science-fiction film, while "Flower Sway" is Weather Report-like through a distorting mirror. The haunting alto performance on "Mars" floats over an evolving drone, in vivid contrast to the relentless percussive pound of "Holocene Rhythms". The fully-acoustic "Underground" proves to be among the more "out" tracks, as Davis creates an otherworldly scraping sound by dragging an aluminum can filled with water across the bell of her horn. The voices of the late jazz pianist-educator Connie Crothers and Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk, are also heard. Davis also made field recordings (birds, water) on a Zoom H4, as heard on "Yellow Phlox" (which uses repetition à la Terry Riley), "Bongos" and "Knahk". And, yes, that's real rain on "Cloudburst". Don't think of *Fallows* as a New Age bliss-out—far from it, as parts can prove confrontational. Overall, it's a consistently challenging, quite engaging listen.

Davis adds another element, her sparingly used voice, to *Sprites*, an album of duets she recorded with guitarist (and a deep student of flamenco) Dustin Carlson. Both musicians add electronic touches to this on-the-spot music, which was recorded live in Brooklyn. Guitar and saxophone improv suggests a chilly ECM session put down at a studio in Norway in February, but this music is warmer than that and, like the above *Fallows*, can be unsettling. The playing is intense, but very in-sync. "It Feels Human", in fact, does. The skittering, echoey title track is only slightly over a minute long, and you beckon it to be longer. The likewise short "A Bushel" is theme music for a therapy session in which dark secrets are revealed. "Nude" is a tolling cathedral bell, and "C.A.D.", like "Flower Sway", is reminiscent of one of Joe Zawinul's more programmatic compositions.

As a saxophonist, Davis would seem to line up with players such as Britain's Alabaster DePlume striving for something new via her instrument. Of the two, though, Davis is more grounded in the jazz tradition. While *Fallows* might be her more personal statement, *Sprites* reveals an empathic collaboration. Both are well worth your time.

For more info visit ropeadope.com and outofyourheadrecords.com. Davis plays solo at Roulette Apr. 7 and Firehouse 12 (New Haven, CT) Apr. 17. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.

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