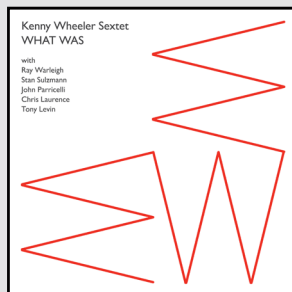


UNEARTHED GEM



What Was
Kenny Wheeler Sextet (False Walls)
by Fred Bouchard

Limpid lines of exquisite purity and gentle sadness, bristling with passionate melodicism, are suddenly punctuated with squibs and squeals, then balanced with broad, calming subtones—few trumpeters and flugelhorn players are as instantly recognizable as Kenny Wheeler, who passed away a dozen years ago this month at age 84. The shy Torontonian made his early (but permanent) jump to London’s cautiously exploratory mainstream, where he deftly carved welcome niches in the bands of John Dankworth, Tubby Hayes and Ronnie Scott. Wheeler collaborated equably with rockers (The Animals’ Eric Burdon) and avant-gardists Anthony Braxton, Globe Unity Orchestra and Evan Parker, who is the producer here for False Walls, a Chicago-UK boutique label. Wheeler often ran his own ensembles, large and

small, playing his iconic melodies, with resonant favorites (check ECM and CAM Jazz) including *Gnu High* (1975), *Kayak* (1992), *Angel Song* (1996) and *What Now?* (2004).

On *What Was*, a 1995 archival studio session released here in full for the first time, the ostensible leader readily shares the limelight with long-standing bandmates Ray Warleigh (alto, flute), Stan Sulzmann (tenor), John Parricelli (guitar), Chris Laurence (bass) and Tony Levin (drums). “Blue Nile” takes Wayne Shorter’s exotic “Footprints” bassline at a camel walk, its motilic, ever-alert, bass and drum backfield muscling support. “You’ve Read the Book”, a ballad led by cocky flute, lets Wheeler tell his own sad-but-true tale. Oddly structured, “Masbro” features a tenor saxophone/drum duo and the leader’s energized but wistful solo. The gently lilting flugelhorn leads on “Footloose” lets Wheeler air his lofty views with typical modesty. On the title track, heraldic in intent as a Booker Little-type flagwaver, Wheeler and Levin duel over 8-4-2s, leading—surprise—to a variant on “Sub-Conscious Lee”, likely a transcribed Lee Konitz chorus. Clever by half! “Kind Folk”, a eulogistic ode, well-suited to the phlegmatic Wheeler temperament, opens with watery guitar and mild flute, as horns sit *shiva*.

What Was offers a fine late chapter of Wheeler memorabilia in a starkly elegant package.

For more info visit falsewalls.co.uk/release/what-was



Tramonto (ECM)
The Bauer Session (CAM Jazz)
John Taylor
by Ken Dryden

The English pianist John Taylor (1942-2015), who would have turned 84 this month, was widely known in his homeland and in Europe as a bandleader and collaborator with his former wife, Norma Winstone, as well as John Surman, Mike Westbrook and Kenny Wheeler. His distinctive sound, brilliant improvising and creative compositions make it worth exploring his extensive discography.

Tramonto is the first-time release of Taylor’s 2002 trio concert in Birmingham, UK, with two veteran Americans—Marc Johnson (bass) and Joey Baron (drums). Given the greats that both have played with in trios, here they once again prove themselves to be interactive musicians, rather than serving as simple accompanists. The pianist’s “Pure and Simple” is anything but, at times it’s a whirlwind of jagged lines, dazzling runs and intricate interplay, which is a specialty of the leader’s rhythm section partners. Taylor’s humorous touch is central to the trio’s rendition of Steve Swallow’s “Up Too Late”, which is marked by frenetic runs and a bit of dissonance. Johnson is prominent on a reading of Ralph Towner’s title track (“Tramonto” is Italian for sunset), as the

pianist gives the bassist much of the spotlight in this low-key ballad.

The Bauer Session, Taylor’s solo piano studio date from 2014, is also previously unreleased. While he’s recorded a few solo albums, they were only a small part of his discography, and this session makes his skills in this setting clear. Kenny Wheeler’s “Sophie” reveals the pianist’s immense lyricism as he explores this ballad, expanding upon it with rich chords and constant shifts in direction. “Impro” is a masterful improvisation, combining an aggressive tempo with endless ideas as Taylor creates an on-the-spot masterpiece. His original ballad “Three” has an impressionistic air, as if he is ruminating at the keys, lost in thought. “Fifteen” is a bit more dramatic, as it finds him in a mood for reflection, the music unfolding like a series of reminiscences. No explanation is offered for the intriguing title of “Deer on the Moon” (co-composed with his son, singer-songwriter Alex Taylor), but it is pensive and tentative, with a meandering theme that gives the air of lurking danger. The album wraps with “Intro Sophie”, an original miniature evidently intended as an introduction to Wheeler’s “Sophie” composition, though it stands on its own, even with its unresolved ending.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com and camjazz.com



Love Is the Whole Thing, We Are Only Pieces
Matt Wilson's Good Trouble (Palmetto)
by Fred Watts

Matt Wilson’s Good Trouble is set to release its sophomore album this month, presenting a new set of music that furthers the group’s social mission. In response to the divided state we now find ourselves in as a country, *Love Is the Whole Thing, We Are Only Pieces* seeks to foster togetherness through a joy present throughout the album. Those familiar with the drummer-bandleader’s oeuvre will know the positivity that emanates from his recordings and his presence.

The opening track, “Wind Spirit”, is a familiar and appealing type of Wilson composition. This anthemic melody, initially stated by vocalist-pianist Dawn Clement, is underpinned by a loose and undulating accompaniment from the rest of the band. It’s reminiscent of “Flowers for Felicia”, a striking ballad from Wilson’s 2016 release *Beginning of a Memory*. “Joonam” shares this chant-like quality, stating and restating its thematic material through an ever-evolving texture. Alto saxophonist Bobby Watson’s “Fuller Love” serves as a stylistic foil, with its driving tempo and high energy. Originally composed as a tribute to trombonist Curtis Fuller, the inclusion here tips the hat to alto saxophonist Tia Fuller (no relation), who makes this piece her own with a striking solo that weaves ideas through a form reminiscent of early ‘60s Jazz Messengers recordings. The late Jack DeJohnette’s “Festival” serves as another energetic high point of the album. Wilson pays homage to this titan of the jazz world with a beautiful interplay between his own drum solos and masterful ensemble playing. The collective improvisations by saxophonists Anisha Rush and longtime collaborator Jeff Lederer build a captivating bridge between stretches of composed material.

With *Love Is the Whole Thing, We Are Only Pieces*, Matt Wilson’s Good Trouble shows a clear mutual

bond and sense of development. Especially where the compositions give the band a sense of freedom, they possess what is needed to build something meaningful together. Here’s hoping there’s more on the way from this group, and that its positivity rubs off on every listener.

For more info visit mattwilsonjazz.com. The album release concert is at Birdland Sep. 25 + Sep. 27. See Calendar.



A Silence Opens
Columbia Icefield (Out Of Your Head)
by Stuart Broomer

In its brief history, trumpeter Nate Wooley’s quartet Columbia Icefield produced lyrical, powerfully elegiac music. For its first release in 2019, Wooley was the nominal artist, *Columbia Icefield* its title and inspiration. The group included Mary Halvorson (guitar), Susan Alcorn (pedal steel guitar) and Ryan Sawyer (drums). The personnel remained the same when the group name took over for 2022’s *Ancient Songs of Burlap Heroes*. By May 2024, when the group appeared at Quebec’s FIMAV (Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville), Ava Mendoza was the guitarist in a powerfully elegiac concert that opened with Wooley’s homage to his late friend and mentor Ron Miles, “We Say Goodbye Twice”, and ended with Wooley’s unaccompanied and impassioned performance of Albert Ayler’s “Ghosts”.

A Silence Opens was initially intended as a tribute to Ron Miles; “We Say Goodbye Twice” (here conjoined with the Carter Family’s “Wildwood Flower”) is Wooley’s only composition credit here. The quartet’s other three tracks are beautifully wrought Ron Miles compositions. “Howard Beach” is an orchestrally-rich performance emphasizing both the quartet’s range and creativity, from an energized Wooley solo with some stratospheric high notes to the shifting sound palettes of Alcorn, Mendoza and Sawyer. “Darken My Door” moves episodically, propelled by Sawyer’s percolating shakers; Mendoza’s edgy, acidic highs; Alcorn’s subtle timbral shifts; then Wooley’s formal clarity. “You Taste” also benefits from Mendoza’s rock-edged punch, Alcorn’s pitch slides and Wooley’s movement from august clarity to electronic distortion. The final trumpet soliloquy presents a series of brief and shifting sonic gestures.

Alcorn’s subsequent passing led Wooley to create a double memorial. The homage assumes more radical form, with him finding “one of her favorite pieces of protest music,” recording different versions and alternating them with the quartet pieces. The song is “El Derecho (The Right to Live in Peace)”, composed by Chilean songwriter Victor Jara. The album is bracketed with Wooley whistling the song and shuffling his feet. Mendoza sings a brief, moving version; Wooley overdubs a multiple trumpet arrangement. One ambitious take has the quartet members joined in a solemn choir with other friends of Alcorn: Ingrid Laubrock, Wendy Eisenberg, gabby fluke-mogul, Laura Ortman and Patrick Holmes.

A Silence Opens includes some of the saddest music to be released in 2026. It also possesses both beauty and emotional urgency.

For more info visit outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com. Wooley is at Roulette Sep. 14 and 30. See Calendar.

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