

Uwe Oberg & Evan Parker

Full Bloom
Jazzwerkstatt JW 092

Michel Doneda/Taavi Kerikmäe

Kirme

Improtest Records IMPRTCD 03

Stretching free improvisations for the piano and saxophone to their limits are these CDs, which, audaciously enough are not only complexly spontaneously created but feature intergenerational and multi-national duos. Full Bloom is a first-time meeting between Wiesbaden, Germany-based pianist Uwe Oberg, 48, and British tenor saxophonist Evan Parker, 66; while Kirme matches French soprano saxophonist Michel Doneda, 56, and Estonian pianist Taavi Kerikmäe, 34. Needless to say, age and nationality fall away when the duos become fully engrossed in improvising.

Both reed players are experienced hands at this sort of try-anything interaction. Unprepossessing Parker seems to have worked in ad hoc situations with a multitude of improvisers, as well as having long-time relationships with pianists such as Alexander von Schlippenbach, Marilyn Crispell and Steve Beresford. Doneda is similarly catholic having worked with Beresford and Fred Van Hove earlier in his career. Oberg usually travels in more structured circles with his own trio or in the Lacy Pool band with trombonist Christof Thewes and drummer Michael Griener. Kerikmäe, who teaches experimental music and improvisation at the Estonian Academy of Music, moves among notated, electronic and improvised music and in the past has played with trombonist Vinko Globokar and clarinetist Xavier Charles.

Perhaps suggesting that this first-time meeting is an alternate method of approaching improvisation for the pianist, "Alternate" is one of the most characteristic tracks on Full Bloom. As the saxophonist develops the theme with distinguishing slurred timbres and rough reed bites, Oberg's tones resonate against the piano's soundboard, exposing guitar-like strums and rubber-band-styled cracks. Dynamic key clusters separate in such a way that the pianist appears to be both advancing his part on the higher-pitched keys and slapping supplemental coloration from the lower-pitched ones. Parker's focused and curved circular breathing eventually gives way to harsh tongue slaps, further decorated with buoyant plinks and key pushes from the piano. Oberg's kinetic fantasia, which at points almost slips into stomping Ragtime territory, further frames the saxophone line which remains taut and staccato.

This rapprochement is intensified as the session develops, despite the initial contact where Oberg's colorful note-spinning appears to be a bit florid for Parker's adroit trilling. By the time "Lightly Odorous" – a floral reference one hopes, related to Parker's early botany studies and Oberg's gardening background – arrives, the sonic partnership has been further strengthened. More substantial, as arpeggiated internal-string plucks meet pressurized reed trills, the pianist eventually exposes impressionistic timbres that accelerate as the saxophonist splutters a guttural line that parallels but doesn't intersect the other's cadences, finally sweeping aside piano cadences for a tongue-ululating finale.

Even putting aside the emphasis that results from Parker's occasional stop-time flattening and Oberg's kinetic plucks, together the two often create grace-note codas that vibrate in the air after each track is completed.

There's similar sound-melding on Kirme, although in track titles and presentation the outcomes are more abstract. While Parker is still fundamentally a saxophone player, Doneda has become a sound producer who just happens to play a single-reed instrument. Thus his contributions aren't thematic as much as sonic. From the first improvisation with Kerikmäe, the saxophonist's contributions centre around barely-there aviary slurps, lip-spittle shrills, air forced through the horn's body tube without touching the keys, and inhuman cries. Unfazed, the pianist, who in other contexts has experimented with live electronics and custom-made electronic instruments, transfers these impulses to the acoustic piano. In response to Doneda's quivering nodes and peeps for instance, Kerikmäe strums the piano's internal strings as if playing a mandolin; stops the external keys with rough implements; rushes over the keyboard with slurred fingering; and produces onomatopoeic overtones to match Doneda's reed extensions.

These timbral encounters, which involving balancing knife-edge improvisations from each player without cutting either, reach a climax on the almost 25-minute live concert track recorded a year later. Emboldened, it appears, by the passing of time, Kerikmäe's piano work now encompasses polyrhythmic and pitch-sliding reverberations that stretch and scuff patterns until a distinctive key cluster brings forth bleating split tones from Doneda that soon turns to abrasive growls and caws. Before a reflective silence divides this exposition from the next variant, super-fast fingering and plinking strings create a contrapuntal backing upon which the reedist unleashes a series of dynamic reed bites and tongue squeals. That interlude ends as well when key slides and strokes create a comping strategy that reduces the saxophone output to air expelling. Emphasizing the horn's metallic qualities, this air joins in double counterpoint with muted key percussion and top-of-key wipes. Finally, the last variant narrows the dual output to an intermittent, polyphonic diminuendo.

Putting aside standard expectations for conventional piano and saxophone duets, these discs express imaginative conceptions in this configuration.

Full Bloom Waxman Jan. 2011.txt

-- Ken Waxman

Track Listing: Full: 1. Red, The Dark Violet 2. Amply Spiny 3. Alternate 4. Lightly Odorous 5. Multiple, At Last Black 6. Very Short, Seldom Extended

Personnel: Full: Evan Parker (tenor saxophone) and Uwe Oberg (piano)

Track Listing: Kirme: 1. Studios 04048/1 2. Studios 04048/2 3. Studios 04048/3 4. Kontsert Kanutis 161209

Personnel: Kirme: Michel Doneda (soprano saxophone) and Taavi Kerikmäe (piano)

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