

GLOBE UNITY: CHINA



No. 9 Yang Jing/Christy Doran (Leo)
Unknown Journey (Jazz Music in China)
Luo Ning (RuiMingYinYue)
China Live: In Beijing 2011
Peter Brötzmann & Improvising Ensemble of Qianxingzhe (Jazzhus Disk)
 by Tom Greenland

Jazz and traditional Chinese music might seem, at first surmise, to make for odd bedfellows, yet they share a common ethos of spontaneity and tone poetry, allowing for rich and varied collaborations.

No. 9 is a duet album by Yang Jing and Christy Doran, the former a traditionally trained pipa (Chinese upright lute) virtuosa with experience in contemporary classical and jazz music, the latter a Dublin-born, Lucerne-based guitarist who melds elements of rock and free improv. On "Moving East", Yang's florid thumb-picked melodies over four-finger tremolos recall flamenco guitar while on "Salü Abend" her sweeping string-bends into deep scalloped frets evoke Mississippi Delta slide blues and her scooping ornaments on "Birnenblüten" echo an Indian sitar. Doran's electric canvas displays diverse sonic colors that shadow, heighten or contrast with the pipa's acoustic palette. On "Shadow of Roses" both players seem to be singing the blues, each in his or her distinct musical accent.

Beijing-based pianist Luo Ning is a formidable technician with a delicate touch. On *Unknown Journey (Jazz Music in China)*, he combines straightahead and Latin jazz with traditional Chinese music. "Distant Kashgar" opens with a zither, then goes into a funky nouveau flamenco section; "Mudanhuan" is a folksong from Luo's northwestern homeland, enlivened by distinctive ornaments, and "Farewell My Concubine", Mei Lanfang's title aria from his opera, is bookended by sections featuring the jinghu and erhu (bowed lutes), lu (pitched gong), hardwood clapper and falsetto singing typical of traditional Xipi opera. Elsewhere, Chucho Valdés is fêted with Latin rhythms and caliente solos, notably on "Caridad Amaro", two versions of "Elena" and "Danzon in the Rain".

Peter Brötzmann's sax sound lies heavily to the yang side of the Chinese philosophical duality, but that doesn't hamper a successful collaboration with the Improvising Ensemble of Qianxingzhe - Li Tieqiao on sax and flute; Xu Fengxia on guzheng (zither), vocals and sanxian (lute) and Kristian Mondrup Nielsen, a Beijing-based drummer - in a one-off concert held in 2011 in Beijing, available as a CD/DVD set. While Nielsen's playing is avant but yin and Li's guzheng is buried by the frontline fusillade, her gutsy singing trumps the saxes' excesses. Brötzmann defers to his colleagues, toning down his tempestuousness to mingle with the locals, though on "Walking in Wu Men" he delivers a masterful solo oratorio. The DVD augments the CD with longer takes and vivid visuals: dry-ice clouds, roving spots and flashing strobes.

For more information, visit leorecords.com, luoningmusic.com and downtownmusicgallery.com



Birthmark
Lotte Anker/Rodrigo Pinheiro/Hernani Faustino
 (Clean Feed)
 by John Sharpe

Danish saxophonist Lotte Anker revels in the slow burn. For confirmation, just lend an ear to records like *Live At The Loft* or *Floating Islands* (both on ILK Music) by her trio with Craig Taborn and Gerald Cleaver to hear how she builds a soaring edifice from humble foundations. It's a trait she shares with Portugal's RED Trio who, in two acclaimed outings with saxophonist John Butcher and trumpeter Nate Wooley, demonstrate how they can absorb a radical stylist into their idiosyncratic group conception. *Birthmark* should appeal to fans of both outfits and make new converts besides, combining as it does Anker's fluent husky musings with the spare but astute sound placement of pianist Rodrigo Pinheiro and bassist Hernani Faustino.

In instrumentation, the threesome echoes Jimmy Giuffrè's pioneering ensemble of the seminal *Free Fall* (Columbia, 1964). And though she doesn't play clarinet, Anker makes virtuoso use of some of the same split tone effects on her array of saxophones while maintaining a biting abstract lyricism. In that, she sets up a tension with the extended techniques of Pinheiro and Faustino. Subtle piano preparations accentuate the percussive nature of the keyboard while the bassist mines a wide range of timbres through insistent scrapes and scrabbling fingerwork, emphasizing the thwack of string against wood. Conversing through terse diction in a language of their own creation, they explore the expressive potential of line against tone.

All seven cuts are collaborative constructs, characterized by a high level of sensitive interaction. "Golden Spiral" provides a case in point in the way ghostly soprano overtones merge with bowed harmonics and rubbed piano wires. After a tiptoeing sax/piano dance, the piece opens up for a wonderfully dark rippling interlude from Pinheiro, which shows that his armory comprises more than just novel textures. But that's only one example among many on a set of chamber jazz that smolders throughout with dazzling intensity.

For more information, visit cleanfeed-records.com. Anker is at *Barbès Jun. 5th* and *The Stone Jun. 9th*. See Calendar.



Arson!
Denman Maroney/Hans Tammen (OutNow)
 by Kurt Gottschalk

Denman Maroney and Hans Tammen are a wonderfully well-suited pair of soundmakers. At their core they comprise a piano/guitar duo, but both of them stretch their instruments far beyond the natural voices. Perhaps more significantly, they each occasionally employ those natural voices for strikingly dramatic effect. Their shared commitment to such 'extended techniques' is made evident by the fact that

Maroney calls his piano preparations and inside-case playing "hyper-piano" and Tammen refers to his approach as "endangered guitar". *Arson!* is their second release as a duo (following *Billabong*, released way back in 1999 on Potlatch), although the two have worked together in larger settings as well. The album is a great mix of melody and density, with bowls and slides on piano and guitar strings (and other such things) creating an ever-shifting bed over which fragmented phrases and further mutations appear.

The album opens with the excitingly pounding "Dynamo Meat" but explores many more ethereal arenas over its 11 tracks. Tammen fills the field with so many sounds of indeterminate origin that the music rarely feels like a duet - or if it is, maybe a duet in a windstorm where the two can't quite hear one another. By the eighth track, "Ornamenta", the music almost sounds residual, as if the players were gone but had left some directionless noises behind them. The penultimate title track comes off as a solo piano piece, only with shards of sound breaking off and bouncing around the room. "Mad Rhyme", the closer, sounds more like an arson attack, at least in a building filled with elastic bands and bubble packaging. Such impressions don't take away from the duo's purposeful approach to their work, but rather underscore it. The vessel is, of course, their creation and the music it carries very evocative.

At the Rhythm in the Kitchen Festival this month, they'll be presenting another layer of discovery, with Tammen leaving his guitar behind and processing just the sounds of Maroney's hyperpiano, for what promises to be another exciting exploration of texture.

For more information, visit outnowrecordings.com. This duo is at *Rhythm in the Kitchen Festival Jun. 5th*. See Calendar.

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