

GLOBE UNITY: JAPAN



Nobusiko
Benjamin Duboc/Itaru Oki (Improvising Beings)
and that's the story of jazz...
Akira Sakata & Jim O'Rourke with Chikamorachi
(Family Vineyard)
Eponymous
KuRuWaSan (Quintoquarto)
by Ken Waxman

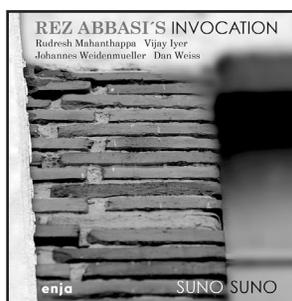
With Japan's year filled with disasters both geographical - an earthquake and a tsunami - and societal - political instability and falling interest rates - it's heartening to hear CDs proving that musicians' improvisational skills are still intact. The sessions are also noteworthy, because like relief efforts, their success is due to collaborations with foreigners.

Trumpeter Itaru Oki moved to France in 1974 and he and bassist Benjamin Duboc work together frequently. On *Nobusiko* Duboc uses the bass' percussive qualities to maintain a chromatic bottom as Oki splutters split tones. Pointed bass plucks match rubato brass squeaks while steady walking accompanies tongue flutters. Oki thickens brass shrieks with multi-flute resonations as Duboc thumps his instrument's wood on "Ihoujin". Plus Duboc's stops not only mute Oki's note squalling at the end, but also move the duet towards melody.

Akira Sakata, who has released 35 discs since 1969, dedicated *...and that's the story of jazz* to a friend missing since the tsunami. The alto saxist has worked with noise experts like bassist Bill Laswell and he extends that concept with drummer Chris Corsano, bassist Darin Gray (Chikamorachi) and guest Jim O'Rourke on guitar, harmonica and electronics. No conventional melodies appear, rather tension without release. "Kyoto" finds O'Rourke's choked guitar strings spurring the reedist to staccato screams as Gray hammers his four strings over Corsano smacks. Sakata's nephritic growls also create a menacing interface when paired with the guitarist's slurred fingering. If Sakata introduces "Nagoya 3" with unforced clarinet trills, paramount stimulation is soon attained. Luckily the result is more exhilarating than exaggerated.

KuRuWaSan's memorable CD pairs tuba gusts from Osaka's Daysuke Takaoka with Brussels-based reedist Grégoire Tirtiaux, keyboardist Pak Yan Lau and drummer João Lobo. The eponymous album references parade rhythms, microtonalism and electronica. On "Baking", Lau's kinetic piano patterns brush up against tuba bellows as drum beats bounce. "Traffic Jam" finds Lau pulsating electric piano plinks plus resonating organ washes as Tirtiaux' breathy flute lines challenge Lobo's slide-whistle squeals. The disc climaxes with "Trilogy". Surrounding a protracted pause are variants that include piano soundboard scrapes plus ascending drums rolls pushed aside by pedal-point tuba and saxophone tongue slaps. The result is restrained and exhibitionist in equal measure.

For more information visit improvising-beings.com, family-vineyard.com and quintoquarto.net



Suno Suno
Rez Abbasi's Invocation (Enja)
by Elliott Simon

Suno Suno (Listen Listen) is the second offering from guitarist Rez Abbasi's Invocation, a band with altoist Rudresh Mahanthappa, pianist Vijay Iyer, bassist Johannes Weidenmueller and drummer Dan Weiss. Individually and collectively the members of this quintet have been at the forefront of charting a new course for Indo-Pakistani jazz. But *Suno Suno* is an exploration of ethos as opposed to a modern co-opting of folkloric and ancestral forms. Qawwali, a musical structure that originated on the Indian subcontinent as a part of Sufism, motivates this session. Its defining characteristics are the vocal fleetness of its central singer and a hypnotic beat often presented via a wonderfully textural dholak/tabla percussion section combined with handclaps. Invocation, especially Mahanthappa's speedy alto, beautifully reflects this spirituality. They cleverly do so while paying as much homage to a jazz-inspired transcendence as to specific culturally inspired sacred dynamic.

Spirituality aside, what immediately impresses is the quality of musical interplay; Abbasi and Mahanthappa electrify with fluid joint phrasing on quickly moving passages while Iyer, whether buttressing the rhythm section or firing off his own swift phrases, is an integral part of the overall sound. Weidenmueller and Weiss combine to create rhythmical patterns that are both hypnotic and fertile ground for improvisation. Expansive compositions with meaty soundscapes and intricate rhythms stretch time as well as geographical and musical borders on *Suno Suno*.

For more information, visit enjarecords.com. This group is at *Jazz Standard* Dec. 6th-7th. See Calendar.



Ghibli
Giovanni DiDomenico/Alexandra Grimal (Sans Bruit)
by Donald Elfman

Soprano saxophonist Alexandra Grimal and pianist Giovanni DiDomenico have come together to discover paths of expression that, like the koans which give titles to five of the nine numbers in this suite, make their meaning available through intuition or some kind of non-rational thinking. Grimal has traversed the areas of jazz and new music, always with an ear towards improvisation while DiDomenico has proven himself as a composer of meaningful scope.

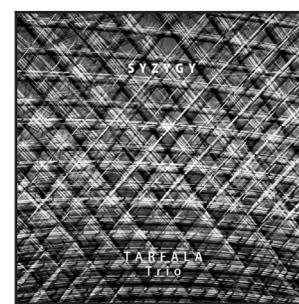
For *Ghibli*, the Arabic name for the Mediterranean wind often called the sirocco, DiDomenico has composed an eight-part suite whose openness and sense of space allow both musicians to create music that often feels very free.

Even the tunes that seem to have a more pulsing rhythm are, somehow, quietly insistent. "Earworm", for example, opens with a dense theme with many notes but still feels as if it's quietly developing.

DiDomenico takes the open solo and uses the lower part of the keyboard to provide a dark underpinning even as the music seems to be constantly opening out. Grimal's entrance is subtle and goes almost unnoticed but it immediately complements the darkness of the piano and takes it to a number of places, some almost sprightly and bright, as it throbs to its opening theme. "Coldfinger" has a melody that suggests the impressionism of Debussy or Ravel but is also the most defined 'jazz' composition of anything in the set. The series of five koans make us forget that this music is composed, so seamless are the improvisations and written notes. Even when at high volume the musicians' delicacy of tone and approach make them feel like whispers.

The final piece, "Svanevejens Rundkorsel", is written by Danish bassist Claus Kaarsgaard, a brief excursion well-suited to the capabilities of the two players. It's a moody, beautiful ballad and it puts a quiet period at the close of the remarkable story that DiDomenico and Grimal have told.

For more information, visit sansbruit.fr. Grimal is at *Alliance Francaise* Dec. 3rd and 5th, *I-Beam* Dec. 17th and *Douglass Street Music Collective* Dec. 18th. See Calendar.



Syzygy
Tarfala Trio (NoBusiness)
by Stuart Broomer

Saxophonist Mats Gustafsson and bassist Barry Guy are each celebrated for their membership in great trios tracing their inspiration to Albert Ayler's 1964 band: Gustafsson for The Thing, Guy for his 30-year tenure in the Parker-Guy-Lytton Trio. They share membership in another trio: Tarfala with Swedish drummer Raymond Strid. The group first performed together in 1992 and since then have gathered sporadically, releasing two CDs on Guy's Maya label - *You Forgot to Answer*, recorded in 1994-95 and *Tarfala*, 2006. *Syzygy* presents a 2009 concert from Belgium, released as a vinyl-only, limited-edition two-LP set with an additional EP.

Named for Sweden's Tarfala Glacier, the group might immediately suggest the sheer auditory power for which Gustafsson is known, almost a force of nature himself. But other natural analogies will suggest themselves for the trio's music: it can be as delicately variegated as the leaves of a forest or light on water. Strid moves from dense rhythmic overlays to feather-light cymbal shadings and almost alarm-clock rolls; Guy, the fleetest of bassists, finds ways to combine lightning-fast runs with shifting timbres and a host of extended techniques that include 'prepared' bass, with multiple shifting bridges. The three can create the quietest atmospheric layerings, as in the introduction to "Cool in Flight" with Gustafsson creating key-pad rhythms, but the dialogue can also launch Gustafsson on heroic expressionist episodes, from roiling high-speed runs and skittering flights into the upper register to some glacially slow, wailing passages: at one point in "Tephra", he vocalizes through his horn with sufficient passion to suggest a man playing Picasso's "Guernica" on a tenor saxophone. Tarfala Trio may not be a well-known configuration, but when it gets together, it's one of the great bands in free jazz.

For more information, visit nobusinessrecords.com. Gustafsson is at *Issue Project Room* Dec. 3rd. See Calendar.