



Creation
Sabir Mateen (577 Records)
by Phil Freeman

Saxophonist Sabir Mateen, who turns 70 this month, is an old-school fire-breather. He started out as a member of Horace Tapscott's Pan-African Peoples Arkestra in the late '70s and early '80s, but came back to the East Coast (he's originally from Philadelphia) and made his name during the free jazz resurgence of the '90s, most notably as a member of TEST with fellow reed player Daniel Carter, bassist Matt Heyner and late drummer Tom Bruno. Their subterranean performances were notable for being audible over the crash and roar of subway trains and MTA announcements. Mateen performed and recorded in any number of other situations, of course, including brilliant duo recordings with drummers Hamid Drake and the late Sunny Murray. Of late, he lives in Europe, which is where this set was captured; it's a document of a 2012 show in Berlin, featuring three German musicians: vibraphonist Christopher Dell, bassist Christian Ramond and drummer Klaus Kugel.

The physical version of this release contains just over 45 minutes of music, divided into a 15-minute track and a 31-minute track, though they flow seamlessly into each other. The digital version adds a third piece, running about 24 minutes. The performance starts off relatively gently, with Dell setting a meditative mood even though Mateen is already off and running. The two men take turns in the spotlight and the vibraphonist's initial solo is quite beautiful, a fine counterpoint to Mateen's hoarse, harmonically fierce, almost Charles Gayle-ish eruptions. The long second piece begins with another lovely passage of vibraphone, accompanied by bass and very minimal drumming. About halfway through, after an initial salvo, Mateen puts the horn down and begins vocalizing—scatting isn't the right word, but what he's doing is fascinating.

On the digital-only third track, he duets with Ramond, bowed drones from the bass matched by soft squeals and murmurs from the saxophone. Eventually, though, Kugel rises up again like an undersea volcano and the quartet launches a final sprint. Though this is free jazz, there's plenty of bebop language in Mateen's playing and the sustained intensity never becomes mere scorched-earth abstract expressionism.

For more information, visit 577records.com



I pledge allegiance to the flag—the white flag
Stephanie Nilles (Sunnyside)
by George Kanzler

"I consider Charles Mingus a beacon in a world gone mad. His music celebrates the joy of living, mourns the pain of grief - and simultaneously harangues injustice. That it manages such a feat boggles my mind (and, I believe, transcends the construct of genres). I hope to

continue to live with this music as long as I'm privileged to do so," writes Stephanie Nilles in the notes to these solo piano (and occasional vocal) renditions of music by the legendary bassist/composer, who would have turned 99 this month.

Nilles doesn't employ a band here and the 30-something singer-songwriter confesses to a classical piano background. In fact, she doth protest too much, claiming she doesn't swing when she obviously does. Just listen to her "East Coasting" or "Remember Rockefeller at Attica". But Mingus' music has often been characterized by the often-headlong energy of ensembles, testifying horn soloists and rhythm sections accelerating and decelerating behind it all. Nilles jettisons all that, paring down Mingus' pieces to skeleton and scaffolding, showing us the bones that hold the tunes together. Nilles does employ one favorite Mingus strategy: varied dynamics. The contrasting melodies of "Pithecanthropus Erectus" rise up off her piano keys like the titular character rising from the primordial ooze into great clashing, banging chords. And "Peggy's Blue Skylight" contrasts soft tinkling intro with sprightly main melody.

The hypnotic, mesmeric quality of Mingus' best melodies comes out in a deeply meditative "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" while the longest track, "Fables of Faubus", reels off into an extended improvisation, which includes quotes from "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho", "Yankee Doodle", "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and some classical pieces, as well as including Mingus' lyrics. Nilles also sings and bluesily plays "Devil Woman" and "Oh Lord Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb On Me". This album pares away Mingus' music to its core, in revelatory fashion.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com



Rituals of Transition
Misha Mengelberg (I dischi di angelica)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Brimming though he was with ideas during his life, Dutch composer, bandleader and Instant Composers Pool co-founder Misha Mengelberg released only a handful of unaccompanied piano albums during his six decades of making records. He was committed to the band dynamic and, it often seemed, didn't quite feel the need to play all of the time anyway.

Notable among them is the FMP release *Impromptus*, a set of improvised miniatures recorded in a Berlin studio in 1988. *Rituals of Transition* is a considerably different collection than that earlier gem, but sits comfortably alongside it as a fine example of Mengelberg's quizzical mind at work. Where *Impromptus* was 13 pieces of a whole, the six tracks on *Rituals of Transition* are culled from appearances over a span of eight years, from 2002-10 in Bologna, Italy; Kiev, Ukraine; Pantin, France; and Amsterdam, Holland. (He retired from public performance in 2014 and died three years later.)

Mengelberg was the rare example of a performer with deep knowledge and nothing to prove. There were plenty of quotes and phrases up his sleeve, but he was as committed to absurdism as he was jazzology. He could work in prolonged ideas, but was nevertheless happy to have plans interrupted or subverted. That playfulness, the willingness to accept the accidental as intentional, is on display within the first 60 seconds of *Rituals of Transition*, when a baby in the audience

erupts in what sounds like amused delight and Mengelberg accepts it as an invitation to a duet.

It was easy during Mengelberg's concerts to be distracted by waiting for the humor, rather like the anticipation that arises while anticipating Inspector Clouseau's return to the screen during a *Pink Panther* movie. *Rituals of Transition* rewards the wait in the final 14-minute track. In between times, there's plenty of the rest of what made Mengelberg great: a wonderful ear for melody, an odd predilection for broken syncopation and an ever-endearing playfulness in the playing.

For more information, visit idischiangelica.bandcamp.com

DROP THE NEEDLE



Talking Gong
Susie Ibarra (New Focus)
by Franz Matzner

The centrality of percussion on Susie Ibarra's *Talking Gong* is nothing shocking, considering her prolific awards as a percussionist, composer, sound-stylist and researcher. It is the nature of the percussion that both surprises and mesmerizes. The album has Alex Peh on piano and Claire Chase on woodwinds, offering an amalgam of the novel sounds each has developed on their respective instrument. Utilized in ways that merge traditional Western-European, jazz, folk styles and pure innovation, the overall effect is like nothing else.

Drawn from Ibarra's Filipina-American heritage and the Philippines' environment, *Talking Gong* reflects the traditional Philippine use of gongs to communicate. Ibarra also folds in other percussive tools, including a standard drumkit. Chase presents her own diversity of wind instruments, including piccolo, flute and bass flute. Peh's notes and plucked strings dance and dart with unexpected techniques. Expanding overtones spread through gaps of silence. The piano rumbles in its lowest register. A piccolo breaks forth, simulacrum for more ancient instruments. Melodic shapes flicker. A plucked piano string here, a jaunty rhythm there. Drums and piano chase and tumble in a playful duet.

"Kolubri (hummingbird)" and "Sunbird" underscore Ibarra's environmental engagement. Dedicated to a tiny Philippine hummingbird, the former solo drum piece is astonishing in its sheer technical achievement. The triumph, however, is Ibarra's ability to evoke the bird's singular beauty and strength in exquisite detail. Extraordinarily fast brush-snare rolls flutter like wings, complex tom patterns dart and dive. Similarly, "Sunbird", a songbird known for its gorgeous music, gives Chase a platform to develop her own crystalline evocations. Trills, whistles, scattered melodies, tremulous bass, all unfold into a detailed sonic rendition of the attributes of the unique winged species.

An album of joy and insight, sophisticated technique and improvisational delight, *Talking Gong* is a nuanced universe of sound grounded in traditional musical roots and natural splendor.

For more information, visit newfocusrecordings.com. This project live-streams Apr. 19th at twitch.tv/bennington_college_music.