

Phone Book
Laura Toxvaerd/Jacob Anderskov (ILK Music)
Light
The Universal Quartet (ILK Music)
Eponymous
Klökkeblömst (ILK Music)
[Part I - SloeBlack]
On Dog (ILK Music)
 by Donald Elfman

The Danish label ILK continues a long-standing Scandinavian tradition of seeking original new music. Exactly 10 years ago 20 musicians from that country formed a company to release “original quality music”; its label statement notes that it reflects “the incomparable and vibrant scene in Copenhagen” and that its concerns are “musical necessity, collective responsibility and inspiration from all past and present genres.”

Alto saxophonist Laura Toxvaerd has written something of a suite of four compositions united by the name *Phone Book*. (The CD actually includes graphic scores.) Digging into the gritty and raspy sounds of her horn - it sometimes sounds as if she’s playing tenor - Toxvaerd presents a variety of colors and textures in a 30-minute journey. The opening section “Androidangle” is perhaps the most conventional, a melancholy and dark yet hopeful poem. It opens with what seems a familiar set of chords on Jacob Anderskov’s piano and then moves to a theme stated by the composer. The two musicians move in and out of that theme and concentrate on sonorities and atmosphere. It’s bittersweet and beautiful.

Yusef Lateef continues to find the universal in jazz. We find him, at age 93, still supremely intrigued by color, sound, diversity and telling stories. On *Light*, he is joined by his longtime partner, multi-instrumentalist Adam Rudolph, and Danes Kasper Tranberg (trumpet, pocket trumpet, cornet and flugelhorn) and Kresten Osgood (drums, percussion and keyboard). Sounds from around the world are suggested - we hear cries of Africa, European classical tradition and a tribute to Randy Weston, whose music reflects all that and more. Rudolph plays insistent piano figures on “Antenna” and is complemented increasingly by percussion and then the horns of Tranberg and Lateef, the composers. Ever-present is the human pulse supplied by Osgood. This album is about the universal ethos of a group in its best and most ego-less form but also the wise meditations of an artist who has been around a long time and seen a lot but still has questions.

The overall theme of *Klökkeblömst* is, according to the band, “Songs That Could Have Been Danish”. All the tunes are written by bassist Peter Danstrup and are a melodic questioning of the notion of Nordic and Scandinavian and even music itself. The melodies sometimes feel folk-like and they all provide excellent foundation for the improvisational excursions of Anders Banke (tenor saxophone), Danstrup and Anders Provis (drums). The opener, “Campanula”, has an Ornette-like shape to its jauntiness. The soloists each have a warm sound that somehow takes an edge off while always allowing it somewhere at the center. With quiet plinking and plonking from Provis, this group demonstrates just how solid a unit it is and how flexible each of its players can be. This group takes into

consideration how to transcend labels. None of the tunes is extended and thus the statements are concise and beautifully pointed.

On *Dog* describes their project as trans-European, with their musicians hailing from Italy, Denmark and Luxembourg. The music is through-composed but allows for sections of improvisation and goes from dense and busy to open and almost chamber-like. When the five are playing together, the sound can be ferocious and powerful, but quickly the mood will change and there’s the transparency that allows us to note the sonic skills of the players more easily. The opener, “Lortehund”, composed by saxophonist Francesco Bigoni, emerges out of some primal chaos. But what happens is that, suddenly, as the drums enter, courtesy of Marc Lohr, the horns (Piero Bittolo Bon, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, flute; Bigoni: tenor saxophone, clarinet; Beppe Scardino: baritone saxophone, bass clarinet) seem to center around a pulse and the group boldly comes together to create a kind of order that never completely leaves the chaos. Mark Solborg on guitars and Moog creates a simple base from which the reeds do their own individual searching. If all of this sounds ponderous or academic, be assured there is an organic and thoughtful sense of urgency that makes this trek feel like one we’d like to take. Or maybe have already taken. Or both.

For more information, visit ilkmusic.com



Ghosts of the Holy Ghost Spermic Brotherhood
Michael Evans/David Grollman/Andy Haas
(Resonant Music)
 by Ken Waxman

Furrowing the rarely upturned soil where industrial sounds meet *Musique Concrète*, Orientalized court music meets rural field hollers and free jazz brushes up against electronic impulses is this trio of sound explorers. With the loam sometimes unyielding, *Ghosts of the Holy Ghost Spermic Brotherhood* uses a collection of excavating tools that include familiar and Korean-sourced reed instruments, percussion, balloons, processing plug-ins and so-called objects. The resulting dozen tracks sometimes infuriate as much as they intrigue, since the band goes out of its way to scramble its influences and identity. Titling each track with an individual typographical sign is another way to sow confusion, but adventurous listeners who persevere will be rewarded.

No tyro noise-makers, saxophonist Andy Haas plus snare drummers Michael Evans and David Grollman have been involved in creating unusual sounds for almost three decades, alongside players ranging from Fred Frith and Martha & the Muffins to William Parker and LaDonna Smith. For jazz purpose probably the most representative track is “;”, an almost straightahead line where Haas’ vibrating alto saxophone is backed by drum-top scratches as Grollman’s stroked rubber-latex echoes like organ or guitar chords. Other pieces such as “/”, which match ring-modulator clangs, bell tree shakes and irregular reed bites, suggest what could happen if roots jazzers like Milford Graves and Yusef Lateef had access to the equipment in a futuristic computer lab. Still other narratives meander through curlicue themes without ever needing a full-fledged percussive backbeat.

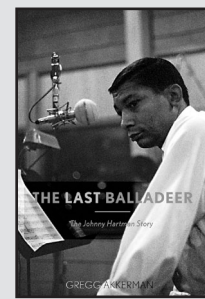
But the pinnacles of the trio’s creativity are tracks that mulch so many textures together that patterns can

barely be isolated. For example, “X” matches ululating timbres from the piri (Korean double reed) with wild-animal-like digging sounds, washboard-like scrapes, what could be cash register ringing and processed oscillating tones. Simultaneously referencing past and future, the result is both ineffable and uplifting.

Not the easiest listen, *Ghosts of the Holy Ghost Spermic Brotherhood* is fascinating in its audacity and ultimately illustrative of one somewhat muddy path committed improvisers are following to sonic fruition.

For more information, visit soundcloud.com/bspermic. This project is at Downtown Music Gallery Sep. 29th. See *Calendar*.

IN PRINT



The Last Balladeer: The Johnny Hartman Story
Gregg Akkerman (Scarecrow Press)
 by Marcia Hillman

Known as a “singer’s singer”, Johnny Hartman (who died 30 years ago this month) flew under the radar for most of his career so it is no wonder it has taken so long for a solid biography. Gregg Akkerman (Director of Jazz Studies at the University of South Carolina Upstate) has produced a definitive work, not only about Hartman but about the music business and world that existed during Hartman’s career. Akkerman has researched well, reaching out to Hartman’s immediate family as well as musical colleagues such as the late Dr. Billy Taylor, Jon Hendricks, Tony Bennett, Ralph Sharon and Tony Monte, among others.

The story begins in Louisiana, where Hartman was born in 1923. The family then migrated to Chicago and he grew up in the music-filled South Side. His singing career began during his service in the Army, where Hartman was able to exchange the normal drudgery for performing with the all-black big band at Camp Lee in Virginia. At this time, the Army was highly segregated and full of bigotry, but Hartman persevered and honed his craft. After the war years came his singing with the big bands of Earl Hines and Dizzy Gillespie before going solo in ‘50s. His long catalogue of classic recordings with Bethlehem Records followed.

The story follows his years of ups and downs, leading to the legendary 1963 collaboration with John Coltrane. Although Hartman never considered himself a ‘jazz’ singer, this pairing brought him to the attention of many jazz lovers and widened his audience, the book discussing his popularity in Europe and in Japan. Akkerman also tells the story of when a larger part of the world ‘discovered’ him 12 years after his death as a result of his recordings used in the soundtrack of Clint Eastwood’s movie *The Bridges of Madison County*. Aptly, Hartman is quoted in the book as saying “I have a feeling my work won’t be appreciated until after I’m gone.”

This biography contains a session-based discography, list of songs that Hartman recorded, timeline of his life and bibliography. It is a smooth read and a well-done portrait of a gifted singer and a warm and caring human being.

For more information, visit rowman.com/Scarecrow