



Kind Folk, a quartet named after Kenny Wheeler's piece from the classic 1977 ECM release *Angel Song*, has come to represent something very special for the players involved. The group debuted with *Why Not*, a program of original pieces, improvised duets and interpretations of Wheeler and Charlie Haden, released in 2018. Then came big changes, including the departure of saxophonist and composer Wheeler, who had been living in the Netherlands, and the arrival at Indiana University drummer Colin Starks (released [album] temporarily) in his hometown of Denver during the pandemic. No one could perform live in any case. But together with alto saxophonist Alex Loke and bassist Nuno Wisenberg, Kind Folk was dedicated to finding a way forward. Head thoughts: the Center, the quartet's sponsonome, with its free improvising, and a small but beautiful repertoire of Wheeler's Bragg brothers' music, by a studio session, with five new pieces, two free improvisations, and arrangements of "Mr. Heartbeats" by Kurt Rosenfield and "Between the Bars" by the late Elliott Smith. It was hard work but felt like a long-awaited victory.

It's a table that every member of Kind Folk is a capable and forward-thinking leader in his own right, able to group how a group like this can pool all their wide-ranging experience to make a unified statement. That's not to say that the music happened by itself: It took concentrated effort to learn and rehearse all new material in two days, so the two fully improvised pieces, "Where Am I" and "Distant Signal," made at the end of the recording session, felt distinctly like a release. On the former, Raymond (an flugelhorn) plays a bowing Wiesenberg in the construction of floating, ethereal textures, while the other two players, including the two women, play a more traditional, rhythmic role, sketching a sensitive butro with bright, light white. On the latter, Wiesenberg plays a strummy, thumping pedal pulse as the horns respond in exploratory fashion, culminating in a calm, matter-of-fact tone. Stronach creates textural counterpoint, staying active without losing an obvious tempo.

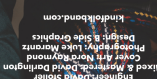
Raymond plays fiddlegait on all "Between the Bars" from Elliott Smith's 1997 release *Either/Or*. It's his own idea: it's a solo acoustic number with an intimate double-tracked vocal ["Drink up baby, look at the stars / I'll kiss you again, between the bars / where I'm seeing you there with your hands in the air / waiting to finally be caught"]. Wiesenberg's solo intro, with thick double-tracks spelling out the harmony, sets the stage for Raymond's entrance on the melancholy melody in three. The folklush quality, appropriately enough for a band of this name, is enhanced by Raymond's brusque, almost off-kilter vocal delivery. The lyrics and the melody's dissonances and displacements in the octave of the vocal unions converge on the chorus, it feels like an arrival. "I had always wanted to arrange this song for a small group," says Strawn. "It calls for sensitivity as the melody dances around the beautiful chords, and it seemed fitting to have the improvisation be a collective effort."



WHERE AM I?	1:51
POWER FALL	6:48
MANTROIS	3:25
AROUND, FOREVER	7:39
MR. HOPE	5:40
BETWEEN THE BARS	5:18
DISTANT SIGNAL	2:04
SWEET SPOT	6:02
HEAD TOWARDS THE CENTER	5:36



KIND FOLK HEAD TOWARDS THE CENTER



Raymond's "Power Fall" came about through an effort to create "density or the feeling of power and strength" in an ensemble without a choral instrument, says the trumpeter: "I had the horns harmonize in various ways [unison, fourths, seconds, fifths], and had the bass playing a strong root motion, sometimes with double-stops. All of this combined with the rock groove throughout helps achieve the density I was looking for. Those two words, 'power' and 'fall,' came to symbolize for me the chaos and angst that often comes with a person's or government's power crumbling."

Wiesenberg and Lokke each offer tribute a piece as well. "Around, forever" grew out of the altoist's deep study of Bach's Goldberg Variations (check out his hard copy and digital book of transcriptions, the Goldberg Variations for Solo Saxophone Duets, Trios and Quartets). It took inspiration from the general harmonic movement, Lokke explains, especially early on. The duo's first recording was a duet of the two pieces, which they performed at their own saxophone therapy clinic. Opening with an overtone of sorts reminiscent of Variation 16, it then chose to segue into what brass kimp and use elements of fugue writing to weave the trumpet and saxophone melodies together. The playing on this track is gripping. It should also be said – a tour de force rooted in a legacy spanning Ornstein to Konitz.

Wiesenberg's "Mantrois" is a compositional study of another kind, a short mood piece with a heartbeat of pulsating strings, shuffling piano and saxophone. "It really isn't all that simple," he says. "I tried to make it more complex than the thing I'm addressing." The bridge is a beautiful example of how he can take a simple idea and make it

The band name *Kind Folk* "could be taken literally," Raymond muses, and it certainly seems that being kind to themselves and each other would be a prerequisite for pulling off a project such as *Head Towards the Center*. "But I imagine it more abstractly for us," Raymond concludes. "Maybe it's the connotations of each of those words. They have a sort of folkloric feeling for me, almost an ethos of lyricism and sincerity." LoR concurs: "The name does capture a vibe, ultimately boiling down to the spirit of our band in whatever music we play."

David R. Adler