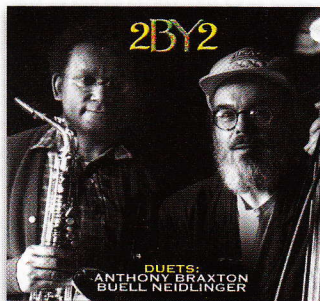


JAZZ



**ANTHONY BRAXTON &
BUELL NEIDLINGER**
2 By 2

Anthony Braxton, soprano, soprano, alto, C-melody saxophones; Buell Neidlinger, bass K2B2 Records 4169 (2 CDs). 1989/2011. Buell Neidlinger, Marty Krystall, prods.; Ethan Chase, eng. DDD? TT: 102:04

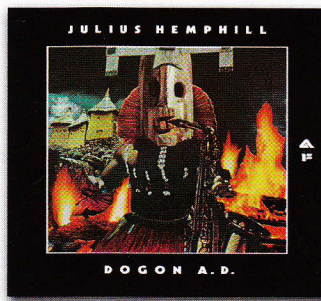
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

Fresh from their quartet collaboration (with Mal Waldron and Billy Osborne) on *Six Monk's Compositions* (1987), in 1989 Anthony Braxton and Buell Neidlinger performed as a duo at McCabe's Guitar Shop, in Santa Monica, California. That intimate environment made for absorbing, deeply connected performances, and finally these master musicians have released a strong two-disc document of them. There are ample opportunities for Braxton's volcanic solos to overload the signal, but that doesn't happen. In fact, we hear a range of timbral subtleties from his four saxophones, and a clear, woody tone from Neidlinger's full-bodied bass. Musically and sonically, the duo is consistently in balance.

Braxton and Neidlinger devote almost half the program to Thelonious Monk's music, including two takes of "Off Minor." Braxton plays with restraint on the melodies of "Criss-Cross" and "Well, You Needn't," then stretches furiously. Neidlinger, unfazed, lays down mid-tempo walking grooves, but also allows Braxton to lure him outside.

The non-Monk pieces are improvisations that Neidlinger titled long after the fact. "Tonight the Night," dedicated to the late Greek composer Iannis Xenakis, appears on both discs (the second version segues into "Off Minor" long before the track listing indicates). "Ballade in F" begins with tense melodic musings on C-melody sax, while "High Flight" ends disc 1 with a full-tilt freak-out on unaccompanied soprano. "Exodust," a three-minute sketch in poignant *rubato*, ends the encounter in surprisingly tonal fashion. —David R. Adler



JULIUS HEMPHILL
Dogon A.D.

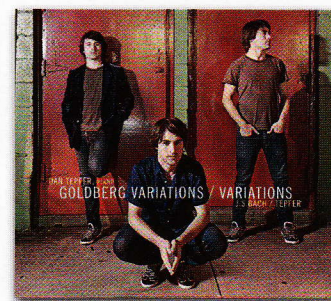
Julius Hemphill, alto saxophone, flute; Baikida Carroll, trumpet; Abdul Wadud, cello; Phillip Wilson, drums; Hamiet Bluiett, baritone saxophone (track 4). International Phonograph (CD, no catalog no.). 1972/2011. Julius Hemphill, orig. prod.; Oliver Sain, orig. eng.; Jonathan Horwich, reissue prod.; Steve Marlow, remastering. AAD. TT: 58:11

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

This first album by the late avant-garde saxophonist (1938–1995) was recorded in his adopted hometown of St. Louis for his own Mbari label in 1972, and reissued on Arista/Freedom in 1977. Now the fledgling International Phonograph label has finally released the album on CD, adding a track recorded at the original session but first released on Hemphill's 1975 Freedom album, 'Cooon Bid'ness. The sound quality, while much clearer than on the LPs, is similarly faithful, reproducing such glitches as the strange dropouts in the final track, and the inadvertent echo of Baikida Carroll's trumpet line at the beginning of the title track.

"Dogon A.D." is a masterpiece, and the main reason for the album's legendary status. Over an insistent cello vamp and an off-kilter drumbeat, alto sax and trumpet intone the intriguing melody, then improvise tartly yelping abstractions. The drum and cello provide an astringently catchy rhythmic and harmonic framework for the squalling horns, making free jazz not just palatable but practically irresistible. "Rites" is the most abstruse track, with saxophone, trumpet, and cello all jamming together over high-energy drumming. The album as a whole proved to be years ahead of its time—most jazz musicians still haven't caught up to it. Its appeal lies not only in its structural concept, but in the extent to which the players truly listen to one another. —Larry Birnbaum



DAN TEPFER
Goldberg Variations/Variations

Sunnyside SSC 1284 (CD). 2011. Dan Tepfer, prod., eng.; Ben Wendel, prod.; Nate Wood, mastering. DDD. TT: 77:51

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* have been transcribed for various instruments over the years, and redesigned for any number of players. The contemporary standard was set by pianist Glenn Gould, whose two recordings of the work, in 1955 and 1981, plumbed the soul of Bach's intricate musical puzzle. Pianist Dan Tepfer has taken Gould's concept into another dimension, adding an improvisation of his own to each of Bach's 30 variations. The permanence of a recording makes the task of improvising on a timeless piece of music even more difficult. This challenge somehow illuminated Gould's work, but Tepfer's *Goldbergs* work on their own terms; in retrospect, his beautiful 2010 trio album, *Five Pedals Deep*, with its connecting musical themes, now seems a prelude to this exercise.

Tepfer's background as a classical pianist in Paris gave him the discipline to approach Bach from the inside; his subsequent immersion in the New York jazz world afforded him the rhythmic nuance and thirst for deconstructing melody required to alter Bach's pieces without disrespecting them. After all, Bach was himself exploring the ways a piece of music can be taken apart and reassembled. Tepfer doesn't use Bach as a pretext for imposing his own form on the music, whether it be a boppish "swinging the classics," or the pomposity of Virgil Fox and his "heavy organ." Tepfer's reimaginings, which use each variation as a jumping-off point for an improvisation of roughly equal length, provide a foil for Bach's substitutions and ruminations, and create the magical effect of letting the listener hear them anew. —John Swenson