



The Signal Maker
Mark Helias Open Loose (Intakt)
 by David R. Adler

Over the course of six albums, bassist Mark Helias and Open Loose have evolved a chordless trio sound full of power, groove and abstract melodic contour. On the band's seventh effort, saxophonist Tony Malaby plays soprano on 5 of 13 tracks, bringing a freshness and increased timbral range to the set. On "Brothers", one of ten Helias originals, Malaby overdubs tenor and soprano in a two-saxophone setting quite different from his encounter with guest tenor Ellery Eskelin on *Atomic Clock* (2006). (Eskelin, the band's original tenor player, appeared on the 1998 debut *Come Ahead Back*.)

It doesn't require two saxophones, however, to get Open Loose thinking contrapuntally. Helias writes structured themes that often involve his bass and Malaby's horn in darting contrary motion or interlocking harmony—or, as the title of the band's 2008 album put it, *Strange Unison*. The soprano feature "Fast Feast", with its bright boppish feel and surprising switch to half-time at the end, is a prime example. Rainey, too, can play a contrapuntal role, doubling or answering themes and framing free sections as he locks in percussively.

"Ça Vous Gene", another soprano vehicle, begins with tightly executed counterpoint, prompting rubato improvisation and, finally, a striking, quasi-classical band unison with furious arco bass. Malaby is at his most sonically extreme on "Motoric", "End Point" and "Temoine", even if the last ends with a disarmingly lyrical melody line. He also sings through the horn with contemplative elegance on "Largesse", one of the band's most beautiful achievements.

The tone of the CD is woodier and perhaps more purely acoustic than in the past, as the unaccompanied bass solo on "Vocalise" captures. Rainey's ride cymbal beat on the opening title track provides a perfect sonic focus and seems right away to sum up the band's swinging but experimental intent.

For more information, visit intaktrec.ch. This project is at Cornelia Street Café Apr. 25th. See Calendar.



Conversations I
Roscoe Mitchell (Wide Hive)
Angel City
Roscoe Mitchell (Rogue Art)
 by Duck Baker

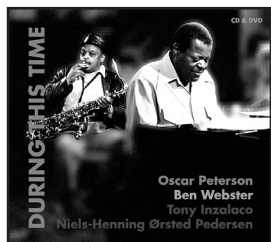
These excellent trio recordings provide proof that, 50 years into his recording career, multi-instrumentalist Roscoe Mitchell continues to find new worlds to explore in his musical universe. Though his compositional methods range from music notated along traditional lines to free improvisation, it seems safe to assume that most of what we hear on *Conversations I* and *Angel City* is improvised along pre-set guidelines. What these might be is, ultimately, irrelevant to the experience of hearing the music, but the fact that they guide the ways that the musicians

relate to one another is worth keeping in mind.

On *Conversations I*, Mitchell is joined by Craig Taborn (piano, keyboards and synthesizers) and Kikanju Baku (percussion). Taborn has worked with Mitchell frequently since the late '90s while Baku is newer to the scene and information gleaned online (there are no liners here) indicates that he is a Japanese musician based in London. Taborn never puts a foot wrong, whether he is working through the avant side of his widely varied piano style or showing how well a judiciously handled synthesizer can blend in on a group improvisation. Baku is extremely impressive as well, his concept of rhythm not unlike the constant fragmentation of either a Milford Graves or such Europeans as Tony Oxley, but his frame of reference is completely different from either of these masters. Baku's willingness either to lay out or simply lay low for prolonged periods helps the overall flow enormously and when things heat up, he is right there, dancing through the traffic with agility and poise. As for Mitchell, he spends more time giving subtle cues than pouring out a lot of flipped-out saxophone lines. It's a blast when he does get into some of this, as on "Outpost Nine Calling" for instance, but when this happens it feels like part of the whole play, not just one actor's monologue.

Angel City was recorded in concert at Mills College in Oakland, California and the trio this time includes James Fei on reeds and electronics and William Winant on a wide array of percussion instruments. Winant should be the familiar name here; his career in modern classical, avant-rock, contemporary jazz and improvised music stretches back for several decades and includes associations with the likes of John Cage, John Zorn, George Lewis, Cecil Taylor and Fred Frith. But Fei, who has worked mostly in the classical world, is an equal member of the trio. The music on *Angel City* tends to move at an even more measured pace than that on *Conversations I* and some of this has to do with the differing roles that Baku and Winant are asked to fulfill, the former conforming to some abstracted version of what jazz drummers do and the latter providing more atmosphere and color than rhythmic propulsion. Though *Angel City* is one long piece, the development is very episodic. A lot of the focus is on slowly shifting landscapes illustrated by means of held tones that sometimes combine and sometimes slowly fade into silence. Several passages seem to be largely notated, for example the very attractive section that occurs around the 29-minute mark, but again, the impressive thing is how well it all holds together.

For more information, visit widehiverecords.com and roguart.com. Mitchell is at Bohemian National Hall Apr. 29th. See Calendar.



During This Time
Oscar Peterson/Ben Webster/Tony Inzalaco/
Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen (MIG)
Bouncing With Bud
Bud Powell (Storyville)
 by Brian Charette

Virtuoso bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen (NHØP), affectionately called "The Great Dane with the Never-Ending Name" and who died 10 years ago this month, is the focus of two releases with pianists, one with Oscar Peterson, the other Bud Powell. NHØP, son of a church organist, studied piano as a child but switched to bass at 14. In his early years, he played regularly at Copenhagen's Jazzhus Montmartre, a

regular stop for touring Americans, performing with a slew of greats like Sonny Rollins, Dexter Gordon and Bill Evans.

During This Time, a previously unreleased concert from 1972 pairs Oscar Peterson with tenor saxophonist Ben Webster. The latter was in poor health and died within a year so this is one of his last recordings. Webster owns the medium blues stomp opener "Poutin'" with short swinging phrases and his trademark raspy sound. Peterson puts nice tinkly blues fills in the cracks until he takes his own killing choruses. NHØP's pulsating line provides interesting pedal points and inversions as it travels. A gorgeous Peterson intro ushers in Webster's soulful sigh on "I Got it Bad and That Ain't Good". The group actually plays five tunes from the Duke Ellington songbook, a nod to Webster's most famous boss. The ailing Webster sounds deeply soulful; his lines are perfect in their economy and swing and let you really hear the sound of a man who has lived. On the piano solo, NHØP and drummer Tony Inzalaco's unobtrusive swing provide the perfect canvas for Peterson's double-time bebop lines and lush block chords. "Cottontail" has the best bass solo, crystal-clear bebop interspersed with humorous big band clichés in the first few choruses before very modern quartal harmony in the last few.

Bouncing With Bud features NHØP with another giant near the end of his career. After years of mental institutions, electroshock treatments and drug problems, Powell relocated to Europe for an easier life, where he met NHØP and the swinging drummer on this date, William Schioppffe. Powell sounds very fresh at a time when his playing was generally considered to be in decline. The title track swings very hard, Powell grunting rhythmically in the background as his brilliantly conceived bop solo unfolds, the rhythm section swinging buoyantly behind him. NHØP's solo comes next and his lines are on the same level as Powell's; a great moment comes when Schioppffe cleverly answers one of NHØP's riffs on the snare drum. Irving Berlin's "The Best Thing for You" has a very interesting whole tone harmony intro before the melody is stated by Powell in greasy block chords. His solo has all the melody of his mentor Charlie Parker and also his own twisty style of resolving long bebop phrases. NHØP takes a long solo on Monk's "Straight, No Chaser" with pluggy riffs that sound great against Schioppffe's pingy ride cymbal but are slightly covered up by Powell's bombastic comping. The disc ends with a wild version of the bebop anthem "52nd St. Theme", which starts out a little wobbly but has an amazing frenetic delivery of the melody—one can really feel the wildness of the famous street.

For more information, visit mig-music-shop.com and storyvillerecords.com



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