

Michel Doneda

Solo Les Planques

Sillón 1

Joachim Zoepf

Production: Berserker

Nurnichtnur LC 05245

Alessandro Bosetti/Michel Doneda

Breath On The Floor

absinthRecords 007

**S**olo – sort of – saxophones – in different configurations are the focus of these three memorable CDs. Highlighting improvisers from France, Germany and Italy, a multiplicity of approaches and results, the discs confirm once again that in the free improv context, its not the reed as much as the reedist – plus his intellectual conception –which determines the shape of the program.

Consider Paris-based Michel Doneda. His Solo Les Planques and Breath on the floor, his duo disc with Berlin-based Italian saxophonist Alessandro Bosetti, are closely allied. Doneda has such command of his reed that on his solo session it often seems as if two improvisers are playing at the same time. Meanwhile Bosetti, who now mostly concentrates on electronics, and Doneda, both playing soprano saxophones, together function like the left and right sections of a single improviser's brain, anticipating, accompanying and complementing one another's breathes.

Cologne's Joachim Zoepf's approach seems to melds the two others' ideas. Aided by the electronic wizardry of Berserker's production – both pre-and-post – and using delays, distortion, double tracking and feedback, his bass clarinet and soprano saxophone textures combine, divide and contort throughout. The overall effect is as if the members of a woodwind or saxophone combo were recorded as they receive electro convulsive therapy.

To get particular, Planques is more-or-less a recital, with its seven linked tracks evolving from staccato air expelled through the saxophone's body tube to showcasing expansive undulating note formations, lip squeaks and overblowing. Here wave forms sequentially dissolve and solidify, making the vibrating tinctures of color audible as well as the initially tongued note, and often exposing two distinct tones – as Bosetti and Doneda do jointly on their duo CD.

Doneda, who has been in the forefront of reed experimentation for years, often in the company of baritone saxophonist Daunik Lazro and percussionist Lê Quan Ninh, continues his research on this disc. Unafraid of coarseness, some of his timbres revel in the texture of the abrasive metal with which he's working. At points one tone merely adumbrates another, or – as on the final track where he holds an almost motionless single tone for nearly two minutes – he wallows in the mono-sound.

Protracted modulations can suggest the gathering of aviary creatures at feeding time; elsewhere hissing fluctuations give way to regularized peeps; or a solo can alternately reference stolid spetrofluctuation or an earth-drilling didjeridoo-like sonic.

More than a tandem exercise, Breath on the floor expresses many of the French reedist's advances in multiple rather than dual tones. Overblowing is the order of the day. Yet harmony and blends aren't part of this game plan – double counterpart is. Contrapuntal, one player often sets up lip-burbling shrills, while the other counters with basso lines redolent of stomach rumbles.

Vibrations are advanced as narrow and condensed, or in contrast, wide, loud and outsized forms are expelled with shaking ferocity. Underscoring pedal point is the specialty of one saxman, while the other layers the line by progressively humming tones through his mouthpiece and body tube.

Not only is the rasping hardness of the soprano saxophone reed acknowledged, but when rubato textures resonate, the extension isn't to extended saxophone techniques, but to percussive snorts and squeaks and internal mouth sounds that seem to clear the lungs and nasal passages. Rhythmic key percussion provides what sounds like accelerating passenger train movement on some tracks. On others, piping whines reference a rubber band being stretched to its limits or sul ponticello fiddle lines.

Regularly multi-tracked and distorted, Zoepf's two horns on Production: Berserker utilize more of these aural comparisons – often reaching the status of non-reed instruments. Along with the saxophonist's triple-tongued flutters and swarming buzzing trills is processing that causes chords to resonate wind-tunnel-like as if they come from a church organ. Bass clarinet played without a mouthpiece can sound like col legno string techniques, while flanged, tremolo soprano saxophone distortions take on jew's harp-like twanging. Elsewhere overblown feedback pulled from a brace of bass clarinets is altered and converted into psychedelic-era electric guitar riffs.

Indefinite sustain that could result from using an e-bow on guitar strings also makes an appearance as well. But perhaps that shouldn't be a surprise, since in the past the saxophonist, has collaborated with players like Hans Tammen, who specialize in similar guitar experimentation. Zoepf is evidentially interested in exposing exceptional or universal properties, not ones directly related to metal, reeds, ligature or keys.

Tracks are sometimes pointillist, assembled in dribs and dabs from understated intermezzo expansions, or more spectacularly stitched together from glottal stopping, hocketing, subdivided chirping or the use of several mics to amplify fingernail scratches to percussion. Delay and modulation allow reed tones – computer generated or not – to reflect back onto themselves, while the nearly 20-minute final “hidden” track is constructed from strident wave-form distortions, a centerpiece of pure silence – at least to the human ear – and a cumulative postlude that shrills ever noisier reed tones.

With such bravura performances, each CD suggests that its proper appreciation of comes from listening to individual tracks, rather than trying an entire CD at one sitting.

— Ken Waxman

Track Listing: Planques: 1. DZ 2. DZ-DZZ 3. Endemique #1 4. Endemique #2 5. Vrilles 6. La Planche 7.DND

Personnel: Planques: Michel Doneda (soprano saxophone)

Track Listing: Production: 1. You can get the trouble you want by chance 2. Darwin on demand won't help falling in love with your next door's neighbour 3. Surrounded by some chinamen the president will call the dogs 4. Old hippies don't die in time if they are asked for 5. Hopper in the next step of the final

Personnel: Production: Joachim Zoepf (soprano saxophone and bass clarinet)

Track Listing: Breath: 1. La partie en cours 2. Verbs rather than Nouns 3. Lord Boomerang 4. Deux Encoche 5. Not only Cigarettes but Cheese 6. Migrations 7. Giuseppe Ielasi

Personnel: Breath: Michel Doneda and Alessandro Bosetti (soprano saxophones)