

SUE SCHLOTTE/JOACHIM ZOEPF/MARTIN THEURER

Zwi + Zwi Sind Drei
Happy Few Records CD 1

JOACHIM ZOEPF
Kollateralschäden Solo Live
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The question of exactly how conventional orchestral instruments should sound seems to be endemic to Western music. And it's those sorts of sonic preconceptions that the improviser must constantly face.

European music is perceived to be played one conventionally correct way, so anyone who offers a deviant tonal landscape often faces questions of his sanity as well as his musical competence. Even after a century that saw experimenters as daring as Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, John Cage and Morton Feldman — to pick four at random — neo cons on both sides of the jazz-classical divide still insist that proper intonation and carefully shaped melodies are the essence of performance.

Don't look for any of the above on these discs.

Centre of ZWI + ZWI is keyboardist Martin Theurer from Witten/Ruhr, Germany, who is featured on all tracks. Someone who has evolved his own style out of Free Jazz and New Music, he has worked with many of the elders of Continental Improv, including bassist Peter Kowald and drummer Paul Lovens. The CD's first four tunes are duets between him and cellist Schlotte; the second four are Theurer/Zoepf duos; while the final four feature all three — thus the album title. An "outside the box" and inside-the-piano explorer, Theurer will rarely finger a note on the keyboard when he can use a mallet on the keys or on the side of the piano. Then again, he often decides to pluck the strings inside the instrument as if it actually was the horizontal harp it resembles. Preparing the piano he makes it percussion as well as a string repository. Then, during the course of a single tune, his touch can rage from the most minimalist key caress to one that forges massive, ascending thunderous tone clusters.

Cellist Schlotte follows gamely along, at certain times chopping great goutts of basso profundo out of her lower-pitched strings, or alternately responding to Theurer's single string shots by letting her bow unleash what sounds like a flock of migrating birds into the air. It must be said, however, that she sounds most comfortable when reinforcements arrive and Zoepf joins the fray.

A former member of the Cologne Saxophone Mafia, other European combos and video, theatre and sound installations, Zoepf's style is anything but conventionally "jazzy". Death defying leaps from the highest, dog-whistle-like overblowing to basement rattling bass tones are his stock in trade. He raises the temperature on several tunes to such heights that the façade of Theurer's New Music cool is momentarily cracked, prodding the pianist into some extended New Thing style pounding.

Having three voices on tap brings the final four tunes into broader relief. Tossing tones back and forth frees any of them from having to remain earthbound to advance the rhythm. Overall though, it still appears as if the individuals' conceptions could have cohered more closely together instead of offering up three interlocking solo lines. But that then is the pleasure or pain of instant composition.

Recorded at three concerts on three different years, Zoepf's SOLO disc gives him wider scope to show what he can do with his four horns — soprano, tenor and baritone saxophone, plus bass clarinet. Concentrating on extended silences, breath control, repeated reverberating

tones, stratospheric screeches, key manipulation and unexpected note clusters, he seems to want to impress with his dynamic range. And that he does.

But, since reedmen as varied as Anthony Braxton, Evan Parker, John Butcher and his countryman Frank Gratkowski have often gone the solo route, one is most interested in how the conception of a Zoepf saxophone narrative differs from those of others. The presentation may take your — and literally his — breath away, but the answer seems less than conclusive.

Right now the paramount *raison d'être* appears to be the sounds he can produce. Yet, as other solo recitalists have proven with their work, his conception won't be perfect until he can link each of those sounds as if it was one word in a longer musical story.

Singly and together, each of these discs and each of these musicians produces many moments of pleasure. But a need to bond the molecules into a fully satisfying whole, as others have done, is still needed. Let's applaud them for their efforts and keep an ear on their future projects.

— Ken Waxman