

EXUBERANCE

The Other Shore
Boxholder BXH 040

QUATUOR

[KUJ:]

Nurnichtnur LC 5245

Analogous in instrumentation and players' experience, these quartet CDs couldn't be more dissimilar. Taken together as a matter of fact, they could serve as a textbook example of the differences between European and American free improvisation.

Consisting of well-traveled veterans of Continental music making, the three German and one British member of Quatuor draw from rock, New music and pure sound extensions as well as jazz when they play. Most of the band members have also been involved in interdisciplinary collaborations with artists, dancers and actors.

Except for drummer Michael Wimberly on the other hand, who has composed music for dance, Exuberance's members are out-and-out Free Jazzers, having worked with the genres heavyweights ranging from saxophonist Charles Gayle to bassist William Parker and drummer Rashied Ali. Also, as opposed to the rather formal, technical seriousness of the Europeans on their six instant compositions, the Yanks live up to their name here, adding a sense of free-flowing exhilaration to their nine pieces, notwithstanding that the CD is also a tribute to their close associate, the late bassist Wilber Morris.

This doesn't mean that either date is better or less satisfying than the other — just different. To get an idea of Exuberance's formula, listen initially to two tracks that progress largo, one dedicated to Morris, the other that by inference seems to refer to his transfiguration.

Unmistakably a threnody, "Elegy for Wilber Morris" initially features long time Ali-associate tenor saxophonist Louie Belogenis advancing a sorrowful legato line partnered by the faintly bowed bass color of Hill Greene, who has played with Gayle and Cecil Taylor. After a while, Belogenis is spelled by trumpeter Roy Campbell, a longstanding Parker collaborator, whose open-horn, but low key, contributions appear even more melancholy. After quietly double-tonguing a few notes, he falls silent, only returning to meld with the saxman and Wimberly's expressive sizzle cymbal and snare-side knocks for the coda to this understated ballad of remembrance.

Nearly 16¾ minutes long, the serpentine title tune can be interpreted as a celebration of Morris' life and a send off for his journey across the river Styx. Belogenis' leisurely, but slinky saxophone line shares space with Wimberly's djembe-style, behind-the-beat hand drumming and Campbell's emphatic muted trumpet. As the piece evolves, the reedist flutter-tongues and side slips to make his sound more emotional, Greene's bass strings buzz sympathetically like a berimbau and the drum beats bring a sense of finality to the proceedings. Ultimately the trumpeter's understated grace notes and the saxophonist's smooth lines meld, suggesting that the journey has been completed.

Exuberance also has its playful side however, as it demonstrates on "Walking in Loisaída", a loping, polyrhythmic portrait of a Manhattan neighborhood. Campbell works out of a freebop Kenny Dorham bag, while Wimberly comes up with enough press rolls and dropped bombs to qualify the tune as freebop if not hard bop. As the trumpeter slides out some bubbling growls, the saxman's output turns from legato to multiphonic, including off-kilter slurs and the odd honk. Expanding his sound, Greene does so by hitting all his strings at

once, torquing the tempo faster and faster. Horn parts meld, then break apart to slacken and end the piece.

Similarly, “Afro Eurasion Sketches” features a rhythmic current that sounds as if bata drums have been added to the proceedings. Belogenis’ blurred tone turns grittier and as he progresses chromatically up the scale, the trumpeter parries with a characteristic Afro-Cuban lip vibrato. Simultaneously pulsating and dissonant, the saxophonist tries variations on many tones in Trane-like fashion, while Campbell tongues triplets in counterpoint. With cymbals suddenly exercised, the piece is taunt, but lacks release.

Elsewhere, one or another of the four bend brass notes for effect, try overblown, screaming freak effects, enlarge the string palate or crash and bang with abandon. Going every which way, the tempo changes and glides from fortissimo to pianissimo don’t seem to effect their commitment to a beat, even if it’s usually more implied than emphasized. One tune is even titled “Terpsichore”.

Meanwhile, over in Germany, the only dance you could imagine Quatuor doing would be robotically led by Mike Meyer’s Teutonic character from his “Sprockets” routine on Saturday Night Live. Not that the band members’ playing is mechanical in any way, it’s just that the mental picture you have of the Exuberance four wondering through New York’s Lower East Side neighborhood is replaced by imagining the Quatuor in white smocks calibrating sound impulses under laboratory conditions. Again though, the timbres produced by these tone scientists are as stimulating in their own way as Exuberance’s exuberance.

On “Mediolobivia”, for instance, bass guitarist Hans Schneider, whose experience includes membership in the understated King Übü Orchester, exposes both parts of his instrument when he plays. Not limited to the beat-shackled vamps and thumb pops of players like Stanley Clarke, his expanded string flavors include flat-picking color from the “guitar” and rhythmic plinks and plucks that showcase his “bass”. There’s also plenty of movement here courtesy of the drums and percussion of Wolfgang Schliemann, but certainly no swing in a Marsalis-sense. His rhythm includes a clock-ticking metronome beat and the whistles and scrapes that can be produced from implements moving along the tops of a ride cymbal and a hi-hat. Schliemann, who usually works as a freelance percussionist in improvised and notated situations, is most concerned with the extension of techniques and instrumentation.

Mini-chirps, sibilant mewls and elongated slurs are the order of the day from reedist Joachim Zoepf, whose multi-disciplinary activities include long time collaborations with fellow sound explorers like pianist Martin Theurer and guitar torturer Hans Tammen. Trumpeter Marc Charig seems to limit himself to expelling pure air or squeezing anemic Bill Dixon-like tones from his cornet. It’s a strategy that pays off here, but may surprise those who know the British brassman from his membership in the Soft Machine, the London Jazz Composers Orchestra and various Keith Tippett projects.

Or take “Hylocereus undatus”: Here offside, reverberating guitar picking seemingly taking place near the tuning pegs meet tongue slaps from the baritone saxophone. Showing that an old improviser can still do new tricks, Charig then produces the kind of abstract, protracted trumpet breath that most would associate with younger brass improvisers like Greg Kelly and Axel Dörner.

Schneider too is most impressive. Sometimes his flailing makes his strings ring like a vibraharp’s bars; other time he’ll use the heel of his hand as a capo, stopping all the strings for a muted sound then flatpick up the neck; still other places he’ll merely strum away. While all this is going on Zoepf key pops and forces shrills from his horns. The entire piece ends with a squeezed cornet tone melding with the reverberations from a whacked crash cymbal.

Polyrhythmically, “Juttadinteria longipetania” finds mouthpiece vibrations and muted wah-wahs meeting slurs, honks, whines and growls from the woodwinds. A choked-valve purr

from Charig is answered by reed chirps and tongue slaps from Zoepf, while Schliemann appears to be producing irregular woodblock and drumhead rhythms. Among the bass drones it sounds as if there's the impossible proposition that Schneider is somehow playing arco, as the tune resolves itself in a welter of squeaks, whistles, slurs and glottal growls.

Other extended techniques appear to leech even more oxygen for the oral instruments from this scientific workshop cum studio. At one point, for instance, Craig creates mountain top ululations from his alp horn; then his cornet skips from mouthpiece French kisses to air siren drones. Meantime Zoepf wheezes out a buzzing tone that then reconstitutes itself in a high false register; Schliemann appears to be worrying the sides of his drums with metal stick while hitting the heads at same time, then testing various unselected cymbals for different timbres. Then for a split-second Schneider appears to revert to his rock music background, shooting out electrified distortions from his bass. Other times he flat picks it like a banjo, and still others manipulates it to produce kora-like tones;

Take your choice of the Old World or the New with these fully improvised sessions. Depending on your tastes, you'll probably find much to admire in either or both.

— Ken Waxman

Track Listing: Shore: 1. Offering 2. Afro Eurasion Sketches 3. Fulcrum 4. Walking in Loisaída 5. Terpsichore 6. The Other Shore 7. Exuberance 8. Elegy for Wilber Morris

Personnel: Shore: Roy Campbell (trumpet); Louie Belogenis (tenor saxophone); Hill Greene (bass); Michael Wimberly (drums, percussion, bells)

Track Listing: KUJ: 1. Mediolobivia 2. Stenocereus 3. Juttadinteria longipetania 4. Lobivia jajoiana 5. Encephalocarpus 6. Hylocereus undatus

Personnel: KUJ: Mark Charig (cornet, alto horn); Joachim Zoepf (bass clarinet, soprano and baritone saxophones); Hans Schneider (guitarbass); Wolfgang Schliemann (drums, percussion)