



Allison Miller's Boom Tic Boom (Royal Potato Family)
by Robert Bush

Allison Miller's sextet doesn't feel like a drummer's group—she is actually placed very modestly in the mix and there aren't a ton of drum solos on *Glitter Wolf*—but she's definitely in charge and her compositions reflect a wise and egalitarian sense of democracy that sounds both beautiful and adventurous. Boom Tic Boom is comprised of Myra Melford (piano), Ben Goldberg (clarinet, contra-alto clarinet), Kirk Knuffke (cornet), Jenny Scheinman (violin) and Todd Sickafoose (bass), all players representing a kind of alternative mainstream where creative expression trumps any slavish devotion to a preconceived definition of 'swing' or service to 'the tradition'. Yet *Glitter Wolf* is undeniably accessible, gloriously melodic and funky as hell.

Goldberg is a monster clarinet player and on opener "Congratulations and Condolences", he sets a standard for golden tone while Sickafoose holds down the bottom with weighty heft and Knuffke reaches for the heavens, all supported by the leader, who sounds light and airy while still packing a considerable punch.

The band entertains a moody shift between a New Orleans-style gutbucket and an austere chamber feel on "The Ride", anchored by trenchant contra-alto clarinet and boasting superb solos from Knuffke and especially Scheinman, whose country-tinged filigree is a constant source of joy. Wicked ride cymbal punctuates and uplifts the enchanting "Daughter And Sun" and the rich combination of clarinet, cornet and violin proves to be quite irresistible. The drum solo kind of sneaks up on the listener, architecturally brilliant and seamlessly executed.

There are a wide variety of moods and grooves throughout the disc, from the celebratory, almost Carnival nature of "Welcome Hotel" to dark orchestral textures of "Vine And Vein". The closing "Valley Of The Giants" offers up a hypnotic, trance-like structure of layered melodic repetition reminiscent of Balinese Gamelan music.

For more information, visit royalpotatofamily.com. This project is at Dizzy's Club Feb. 26th. See Calendar.



Noise of Our Time
Ken Vandermark/Nate Wooley/
Sylvie Courvoisier/Tom Rainey (Intakt)
by Steven Loewy

The relatively short pieces on this studio recording are filled with surprising shifts, focused passion and outstanding technique. The players mesh together in a thoroughly delightful and often thrilling collaborative effort, for which reed player Ken Vandermark, trumpeter Nate Wooley and pianist Sylvie Courvoisier each contribute three compositions. It works well due to the thoughtful arrangements and diversity of the pieces. While the members of this quartet, completed

by drummer Tom Rainey, have crossed paths often and worked together in various combinations, this is the first time they have recorded as a group. The sound reveals the subtle influences of early Ornette Coleman and Anthony Braxton but marked by the individuality of the players.

Highlights abound, with hidden facets in each track, most of which sport melodic lines, quick changes and exhilarating contributions from each player. Wooley and Vandermark are perfect foils and the latter's eclectic clarinet soars with abandon on the former's "Songs of Innocence", as piano and drums form a perfect backdrop. Intense, revelatory piano juts forth ferociously on Courvoisier's forward-thrusting "Checkpoint" while her "VWCR" lays a seamless takeoff for swishing trumpet. Wooley's loosely structured "Truth Through Mass Individuation" features an impressive Rainey solo; throughout the drummer eschews simple time-keeping for a fascinating participatory approach that pushes the others or, as on Vandermark's rolling and leisurely "Simple Cut", provides a stimulating backdrop that almost substitutes for bass behind Wooley's fanciful flights.

Vandermark is off to the races on "Checkpoint", spurred by Rainey, while Wooley offers a master class in avant garde trumpet that is jagged yet surprisingly focused and intense, followed by Courvoisier's angular and progressively mesmerizing technique. This is immediately contrasted with Vandermark's extraordinary "Track and Field", opening slowly and softly, followed by droning saxophone, bass drum and eventually muted trumpet, with the horns ping-ponging, gradually building toward a majestic, riveting piano improvisation with punctuating drum thrusts, after which clarinet forcefully mines the upper registers. Courvoisier's "Sparks" shows off her postbop roots, with a clever opening and dynamic performance, after which Vandermark and Wooley interlock horns followed by the sensuously ragged melody.

For more information, visit intaktreco.ch. Wooley is at Pioneer Works Feb. 25th. Rainey is at The Jazz Gallery Feb. 22nd. See Calendar.



Icarus
Joris Roelofs/Han Bennink (ICP)
by Mark Keresman

Important locales in the timeline of jazz: Kansas City in the '30s; NYC in the '50s; and Amsterdam in the '60s. Of the latter scene is legendary drummer Han Bennink, who worked with Eric Dolphy, Wes Montgomery and Dexter Gordon before going on to become a central figure in Euro-free circles. At 76, Bennink is still going strong and *Icarus* is his latest project, a duet with a countryman clarinetist who could be his son: Joris Roelofs, born 35 years ago this month.

Bennink and Roelofs share a playful, joyful approach to free improvisation, the former especially possessed of an impish, absurdist streak. The album opens with the ominously dramatic "Carmen", clarinet wailing like a wounded beast while Bennink has at the drums and a piano simultaneously; the pair then stalk one another through darkened Hitchcock-ian hallways.

Most of the music herein is improvised but there are a few interpretations: Kurt Weill's "This is New", played with a definite lilt and carefree swing; Dolphy's "Something Sweet, Something Tender" essayed as a pensive, somewhat restless ballad with drums

providing stormy counterpoint to soulful bass clarinet; Charlie Haden's "Song for Che" as classically elegiac. Bennink makes the drums crackle on "Broad Stripes and Bright Stars" while Roelofs offers mournful, high lonesome clarion calls, then lithe, gently swirling, bop-flavored lines. These performances, while free-ranging, are concise and punchy, most tracks hovering at the three-minute mark.

Icarus is a set of stimulating, fascinating duets where questing freedom and merry tunefulness, serious musicianship and goofy, burlesque-ish moods overlap and intertwine.

For more information, visit icporchestra.com

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