

# Record Reviews

**JOHN ABERCROMBIE  
THE FIRST QUARTET  
RICHIE BEIRACH  
GEORGE MRAZ  
PETER DONALD**

ECM

## **JOHN ABERCROMBIE THE FIRST QUARTET**

CD1: [Arcade] *Arcade; Nightlake; Paramour; Neptune; Alchemy* (39.38)

CD2: [Abercrombie Quartet] *Blue Wolf; Dear Rain; Stray; Madagascar; Riddles; Foolish Dog* (45.43)

CD3: [M] *Boat Song; M; What Are the Rules; Flashback; To Be; Veils; Pebbles* (45.57)

John Abercrombie (g, md); Richie Beirach (p); George Mraz (b); Peter Donald (d). CD1: Oslo, December 1978. CD2: Oslo, November 1979. CD3: Ludwigsburg, November 1980.

**ECM 473 2437**

★★★★

Long out of print (with the excep-

### **JJ CONTENT**

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tion of Arcade, fleetingly released on CD in Japan) these albums form a welcome first-time CD reissue. The title of this box set derives from the fact that these recordings presented the first group that John Abercrombie led. His career began in a jazz-rock idiom, playing in Dreams and on Billy Cobham's early solo albums, Crosswinds, Total Eclipse and Shabazz. In common with fellow Berklee alumni Mike Stern, John Scofield and Bill Frisell, Abercrombie championed a recognisably new jazz-guitar style, less visceral and more cerebral.

Instruments attributed to Abercrombie on these recordings are guitar and "mandolin guitar". The latter instrument, a Fender Mando-Strat Solidbody Electric Mandolin, has the sound of a mandolin, albeit with some of the timbre of a solid-bodied guitar. On most of these recordings, the electric mandolin was Abercrombie's primary instrument. He described it as "really a soprano guitar...tuned an octave higher than a guitar" (and like a guitar rather than mandolin, since he couldn't face learning new fingerings).

Arcade (CD1) opens with the title track, where the electric mandolin first makes its presence felt. The high pitch might initially be disconcerting, but the lack of chordal elements, idiosyncratic jangly tone and higher pitch are identifiable characteristics of the hybrid instrument. George Mraz offers a resonant arco bass solo on *Neptune* and throughout the three albums his playing evokes the late Scott LaFaro. Richie Beirach is featured to great effect on his own composition *Alchemy*.

Abercrombie Quartet's (CD2) *Blue Wolf* again spotlights the electric mandolin and *Dear Rain* begins with a lithe bass solo from Mraz. On Richie Beirach's *Riddles* the guitar is Abercrombie's instrument of choice, distinguishable

by string-bent octaves and the occasional chord. On Abercrombie's composition *Foolish Dog*, Richie Beirach displays a keen Bill Evans influence.

Abercrombie's *Boat Song* evinces an *In A Silent Way* opening to the third album, M, with the addition of a repeated gong-like effect. The guitar's pellucid notes here contrast with the more brittle tone of the electric mandolin as heard on the final number, Beirach's *Pebbles*. On one level, determining which instrument Abercrombie deploys on which track is a minor irritation, but on another it impels the listener to pay close attention to his always compelling playing.

Roger Farbey

## **CANNONBALL ADDERLEY QUINTET**

### **COMPLETE RECORDINGS**

CD1: (1) *Spectacular; Miss Jackie's Delight; Tribute To Brownie; Cobbweb; 18th Century Ballroom; Lover Man; A Foggy Day; Hoppin' John; Jeannie; The Way You Look Tonight; Porky; Another Kind Of Soul; Spring Is Here; That Funky Train; Eddie McLinn; Our Delight; Jubilation; What's New* (78.48)

CD2: (2) *Straight, No Chaser; If I Love Again; I'll Remember April; Fuller Bop Man (long version); Fuller Bop Man (short version); Stay On It; Spectacular; Willow Weep For Me; Cobbweb; Wee Dot; A Foggy Day; Sermonette; Sam's Tune; Hurricane Connie* (79.14)

Julian Cannonball Adderley (as); Nat Adderley (c); Junior Mance (p); Sam Jones (b); Jimmy Cobb (d). CD1 and CD2 studio tracks: February 1957 and March 1958. CD2 live sessions: KNBC TV show Stars Of Jazz, Burbank, California, 17 December 1956 (tks 7-9) & Newport Jazz Festival, Newport Rhode Island, July 1957 (tks 10-14).

**Phoenix 131614**

★★★★★

The opening track, *Spectacular*,

appropriately named, provides a forceful and sparkling reminder of exactly how good this combo could be. Driven along con spirito by Jimmy Cobb and Sam Jones, the style is set for the many treats that follow. Throughout, Cannonball is at the top of his form, while brother Nat demonstrates his regard for Clifford Brown. In the process the cornetist demonstrates that he was not to be underestimated in the matter of secure high-note playing. Pianist Junior Mance is a revelation; his nifty manner of inventing compelling patterns to create an organised infrastructure behind the soloists is a device that could be adopted by others.

The pacer of the quintet was Cannonball Adderley himself. On the Newport tracks he is heard making the announcements. Smooth, articulate and grammatically correct they had to be. His father, a university English teacher, was in the audience! These live tracks also provide an opportunity to compare those performances with some of the well-known studio tracks. In *A Foggy Day*, for instance, Cannonball takes a looser, more adventurous, approach.

An important part of the appeal of these performances is the superior repertoire, well arranged. One can easily imagine the tuneful *18th Century Ballroom*, or perhaps *Porky*, being chosen as the theme music for a BBC Radio 4 panel game, or a current affairs TV programme, even today. A most welcome reissue.

John Robert Brown

## **JACOB ANDERSKOV**

### **HABITABLE EXOMUSICS TRILOGY**

CD1: [Kinetics (The Path)] *Pull Up; Stop Pats; Tat Star; Sleeveless; Wolf Flow; Tattarrattat; March Charm; Diamonds Are For Unreal People IV* (36.00)

CD3: [Statics (The Map)] Statics Part I-XII (46.00)

CD2: [Dynamics (The Terrain)] The Terrain, Part I-IV (48.00)

Collectively: (1) Jacob Anderskov (p); Adam Pultz Melbye, Nils Davidsen (b); Anders Vestergaard, Gerald Cleaver (d). Oslo 2014 and Copenhagen 2015.

ILK 244, 245 & 246

★★★★★

Anderskov's Habitable Exomusics is an ambitious project. In his own words, it's "a radicalized summary of my musical language so far". "Exo-" implies an outside origin and certainly Anderskov's approach tends to be fragmentary, angular, unexpected and yet capable of instant absorption with cliché-free channelling of jazz, classical and folk traditions. The "habitable" element apparently refers to how the musicians can improvise and co-create within each piece, i.e. "inhabit" it and, in turn, open it up and make it "habitable" for the listener.

The title Kinetics implies energy and movement, both physical and otherwise and the first disc is an adventurous piano trio set, with Anderskov and the up-and-coming Melbye and Vestergaard in a display of perfect give and take. Interestingly, the titles are mostly palindromic (or nearly so) which represents well the push-pull, inside-out approach to the various themes. The exception is *Diamonds Are For Unreal People IV* which first appeared on the 2010 Agnostic Revelations album and sits nicely here with its freeform dynamics.

For the second disc, Statics, Anderskov provides a solo set and enters territory which is much more free improv, sculptural and, at times, practically anti-tune. It's much more inward-looking than Kinetics and is a more intimate experience for that. Some tracks (*Part III*, for instance) are practically synaesthetic in that the music conjures up swirling colours and visual images behind closed eyes. However, the division into parts is slightly artificial: the whole thing is really a single solo meditation.

As a conclusion, Dynamics is back in piano-bass-drums trio mode, but with a more abstract and experimental quality than the first disc. The opening *Part I* is a three-way delicate conjunction, pointillistic, subtle, and hinting at extended technique. The dynamics ebb and flow –

CRITICS' CHOICE

The 10 CDs JJ critics most wanted to hear from this month's review pile

Cannonball Adderley Quintet	Complete Recordings	Phoenix 131614
Art Blakey	Complete Columbia And RCA Albums	Columbia Legacy LC 00162
Dollar Brand	Plays Sphere Jazz	Phono 870235
Tadd Dameron	Four Classic Albums	Avid Jazz 1175
Benny Goodman & Orchestra	Complete Benny In Brussels	Solar 4569965
Scott Hamilton/Jeff Hamilton Trio	Live In Bern	Capri 74139
Coleman Hawkins/Ray Bryant	Complete Recordings	Solar 4569966
Jackie Paris	Sings Gershwin/Paris	Fresh Sound FSR-CD 878
John Stevens' Away	Away/Somewhere In Between/Mazin Ennit	Beat Goes On 1198
Weather Report	The Legendary Live Tapes: 1978-1981	Columbia Legacy 88875141272

*Part II* becomes increasingly imposing before a minute-long implosion, *Part III* is sparse and introspective, and *Part IV* is initially bass-led before the piano swells and, aided by frenetic percussion, overturns everything before settling on a calmer but enigmatic close.

Despite the changing states and players, Habitable Exomusics is a highly cohesive statement, looking back over Anderskov's 15 years of recording, collaborating and experimenting, and – one hopes – pointing forward to future that is at least equivalent.

Dave Foxall



ALAN BARNES/DAVE O'HIGGINS

OH GEE!

*Doozy; The End Of A Love Affair; Just A Mood; The Chase; Orejas De Cerdos; Topsy; Chelsea Bridge; Our Delight; Koko; Oh Gee!* (60.03)

Alan Barnes (ss, as, cl); Dave O'Higgins (ts); Sam Mayne (as); Judith O'Higgins (ts); Karen Sharp (bar); Robin Aspland (p); Adam King (b); Sebastian de Krom (d). London, January 2015.

Woodville 146

★★★★★

Barnes and O'Higgins here lead a band of five saxophones and rhythm, the front line scored in parallel block voicing after the manner of Jimmy Giuffrè's *Four*

*Brothers* of 1947 or, from around 1972, Med Flory's Supersax. The CD proffers exemplary playing of strong arrangements by a first-rate band, one that should earn festival bookings and an appreciative reception. Most of the material will be familiar to jazz aficionados. The one Barnes original, *Orejas De Cerdos*, translates as pigs' ears. Make of that what you will. Is this a culinary delicacy, or an insult? Who knows?

Solo duties fall mainly on the stimulating saxophones of Barnes and O'Higgins, with a robust contribution from the excellent Karen Sharp on baritone. The rhythm section is, in the words of Alan Barnes, one that is guaranteed to swing. The recording was engineered, mixed and mastered by Dave O'Higgins, who thus demonstrates an impressive ability to concentrate on two things simultaneously, and to do both well. *Oh Gee!* is a convincing testimony to the health of the current British mainstream.

John Robert Brown

LORI BELL

BROOKLYN DREAMING

*Nostalgia In Times Square; Times Squared; 52nd Street Theme; Streets Of New York; Brooklyn Dreaming; A Dog On Coney; Lower Manhattan; 3 Deuce Blues; Harlem Nocturne* (48.06)

Lori Bell (f); Tamir Hendelman (p); Katie Thiroux (b); Matt Witek (d). Los Angeles. 2015.

loribellflute.com

★★★★★

Lori Bell is an exceptionally skilled instrumentalist, playing both C flute and alto flute. She has brought her skills to a wide audience through live performances and also with several own-name albums, the first of

which was in 1983. On this album, her ninth, she has wholly admirable accompaniment from a first-rate trio. Hendelman is perhaps the better known (through his big band and small group work with Jeff Hamilton) but Thiroux and Witek are similarly adept both as accompanists and soloists. This said, the spotlight is of course on Bell who brings inventive depth and subtle swing to the repertoire presented here.

Six of the tracks are her own compositions and are strong and always interesting in structure and provide a solid base upon which the soloists, especially Bell and Hendelman, can build. There is also one piece each from Charles Mingus and Thelonious Monk while, melodically speaking, Earle Hagen's vintage *Harlem Nocturne* is particularly suitable for the gentle sound of the flute.

Although there were some fine players of the flute in jazz in earlier years (Wayman Carver and Frank Foster come readily to mind), the instrument has not always been unreservedly accepted. It remains a relatively rare instrument in jazz but in recent years a few players, like Lori Bell and Holly Hofman, have done much to change opinions. If you happen to be among those who are still unsure, this very good album should settle your doubts.

Bruce Crowther

ART BLAKEY

COMPLETE COLUMBIA AND RCA ALBUMS COLLECTION

CD1: [The Jazz Messengers] (1) *Infra-Rae; Nica's Dream; It's You Or No One; Ecaroh; Carol's Interlude; The End Of A Love Affair; Hank's Symphony; Weird-O; Ill Wind; Late Show; Deciphering The*