

Record Reviews



MUHAL RICHARD ABRAMS

THE COMPLETE REMASTERED BLACK SAINT & SOUL NOTE VOLUME 2

CD1: [Sightsong] (1) *W.W.; J.G.; Sightsong /Two Over One; Way Way Way Down Yonder;*

Panorama; Unity (Dedicated To The A.A.C.M.) (39.47)

CD2: [Shadowgraph, 5 (Sextet) – George Lewis] (2) *Monads; Triple Slow Mix; Cycle; Shadowgraph, 5 (Sextet)* (40.18)

CD3: [1-OQA+19] (3) *Charlie In The Parker; Ballad: Arhythm Songy; OQA; Ritob* (41.52)

CD4: [Lifelong Ambitions – Leroy Jenkins] (4) *Greetings And Salutations; Meditation;*

Happiness: The Blues; The Weird World; The Father, The Sun, The Holy Ghost (39.03)

CD5: [Duet] (5) *Transparency Of Lobo Lubu; Miss Amina; Swang Rag Swang; Down The Street From The Gene Ammons Public School; Journey Home As Seen Through The Fairness Of Life; Dance From The East; One For Peggy* (44.10)

CD6: [Colors In Thirty-Third] (6) *Drumman Cyrille; Miss Richards; Munkmunk; Soprano Song; Piano-Cello Song; Colors In Thirty-Third; Introspection* (46.01)

CD7: [Familytalk] (7) *Meditation 1; Drumbutu; DizBirdMonkBudMax (A Tribute); FamilyTalk; Illuso; Sound Image Of The Past, Present And Future* (72.05)

CD8: [Duets And Solos – Roscoe Mitchell & Muhal Richard Abrams] (8) *Scenes And Color (Piano Solo); Ode To The Imagination (Duet 1); Star Night (Saxophone Solo); Reunion (Duet 2)* (79.21)

CD9: [Song For All] (9) *Song For All; Dabadubada; Marching With Honor; GMBR; Over The Same Over; Linetime; Steamin' Up The River; Imagine* (77.20)

(1) Abrams (p); Malachi Favors (b, pc, v). New York, 13-14 October 1975.

(2) Anthony Davis (p); Douglas Ewart (various); Leroy Jenkins (vn, vla); George Lewis (atb, ttb, sous, Moog syn, Wagner tuba, sound tube); Roscoe Mitchell (various); Abdul Wadud (clo); Abrams (p). New York, 1977.

(3) Abrams (p, v, syn); Anthony Braxton (as, sps, f, cl, v); Leonard Jones (b, v); Steve McCall (d, pc, v); Henry Threadgill (as, ts, f, v). New York, Nov-Dec 1977.

(4) Abrams (p); Leroy Jenkins (vn). New York, 11 March 1977.

(5) Abrams (p); Amina Claudine Myers (p). Milan, 11 & 12 May 1981.

(6) Abrams (p); John Blake (vn); John Purcell (ss, ts, bcl); Dve Holland (clo, b); Fred Hopkins (b); Andrew Cyrille (d). New York, 19 December 1986.

(7) Abrams (p, syn, cond); Jack Walrath (t); Patience Higgins (ts,

bcl, engh); Warren Smith (vib, tim, mar, gongs); Brad Jones (b); Reggie Nicholson (d, mar, bells). New York, 26-27 February 1993.

(8) Roscoe Mitchell (ss, as, ts); Abrams (p). New York, 15 March 1990.

(9) Abrams (p, syn); Richard Abrams (v); Eddie Allen (t); Aaron Stewart (ss, ts); Craig Harris (tb); Bryan Carrott (vib, pc); Brad Jones (b); Reggie Nicholson (d). New York, 26, 27 & 29 April 1995.

Cam Jazz BXS 1041

★★★★

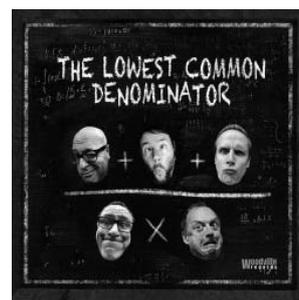
Back in 2012, the first volume of Abrams' Black Saint and Soul Note recordings was issued, clearly marking him as a wholly uncompromising individual, as befits one of the founding fathers of the AACM movement. This second volume (all of these nine discs were issued on Black Saint) finds him in similar mode with the odd nod towards the more conventional when the listener least expects it. But those who have followed the pianist and composer's career have never looked for compromise. Within the confines of what used to be designated as "the avant-garde", Abrams, who is 86 at the time of this review, has always associated with like-minded musicians and in this collection are plenty of examples of the outer reaches.

Four of the albums find him in a duet situation, the more challenging meetings coming from his encounters with violinist Jenkins and reedman Mitchell; the former tends to dominate proceedings, leaving Abrams to punctuate the violin's soaring flights in a percussive manner much of the time, although the fractured concoction entitled *The Blues* is an inspired take on an enduring genre. The *Sightsong* and *Duet* discs were intriguing conceptions; the interplay between piano and bass is continually listenable on the former, while the duelling keyboards of the latter mix it up nicely, throwing in some swing on *Swang Rag*

Swang and presenting an early 80s take on the boogie-woogie masters Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis, as they negotiate the beautifully titled *Down The Street From The Gene Ammons Public School*. The larger ensembles are pretty much what we came to expect from the more adventurous groups of the time, not offering too much in the way of theme statements to hang your hat on and always making demands on concentration. The solos constantly take the unwary out of their comfort zone, the core of the music rarely relating to conventional melody, harmony or rhythmic patterns.

Abrams has never been regarded as a virtuoso pianist but we should not lose sight of the importance of his decidedly quirky keyboard excursions and off-centre compositions and associations in an area which for many will always remain out of bounds.

Peter Gamble



GILAD ATZMON/ALAN BARNES

THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

Fat Cat; The Lowest Common Denominator; Blip Blop; Sweet Pea; Phonus Bolunus; Pro-State Solution; Giladiator; Sun, Moon, Stars, Rain (45.05)

Barnes (cl, as, bar); Atzmon (bcl, ss, as); Frank Harrison (p); Yaron Stavi (b); Chris Higginbottom (d). London, 2-3 May 2016.

JJ CONTENT

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Woodville 148
★★★★

As boss of the Woodville label, some may think Alan Barnes took a risk here, not only by sharing the limelight with Gilad Atzmon but letting him organise the show and bring in musicians from his Orient House Ensemble.

Actually, it's not quite so drastic, since Barnes wrote five of the eight originals and effortlessly enters into the spirit. The two horns blend pretty well. Atzmon's sometimes controversial image does not make his actual music that far-out; he and Barnes have similar roots on alto saxophone, kicking off with Charlie Parker and moving back and forth from there. You don't have to worry over who plays when because the systematic use of different instruments simplifies identification while adding interest and colour.

Tunes are mostly good ones, two attractive ballads in *Sweet Pea* (Barnes) and *Pro-State Solution* (Atzmon) standing out from the more swinging surrounds. Fine backing all round, with Frank Harrison getting several solo spots, should make the album appealing to fans of the leaders and beyond.

Ronald Atkins



DON BAGLEY
FOUR CLASSIC ALBUMS

CD1: (1) *23 N 82 W; Portrait Of A Count; Inventions For Guitar And Trumpet; My Lady; Young Blood; Frank Speaking; Prologue (This Is An Orchestra); Improvisation;* (2) *Basically Bagley; Meet Me In St Louis; Beady-eyed Clyde; Robins And Roses; 'Round Midnight; Double Stop; Maids Of Cadiz; The Bachelor; They Can't Take That Away From Me; Shell's Half Acre; All I Need Is You (72.06)*
CD2: (3) *Batter Up; Come Out Swingin'; Odd Man Out; Bull Pen; Hold In There; Miss De Minor;* (4) *The Soft Sell; Manitou; Doi-Cats;*

CRITICS' CHOICE

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

Muhal Richard Abrams	Complete Black Saint/Soul Note, Volume 2	Cam Jazz BXS 1041
Gilad Atzmon/Alan Barnes	The Lowest Common Denominator	Woodville 148
Jim Black	Malamute	Intakt 283
Charlie Christian	First Star Of The Electric Guitar	Mr. Music 7040
Al Cohn & Zoot Sims	In London	Harkit 8567
Carlo Actis Dato/Enzo Rocco	Noise From The Neighbours	Setola di Miaile 3160
David Murray	Complete Black Saint/Soul Note, Volume 3	Cam Jazz BXS 1042
Bobby Previte	Mass	RareNoise 072
Stan Sulzmann & John Taylor	Double Exposure	Inversion 002
Clarence Williams	Baby, Won't You Please Come Home?	Retrospective 4303

For Heaven's Sake; It's Cooler Inside; (5) *Paul's Blues; The Boy Next Door; Never Let Me Go; Pitchin' Easy; Say Si Si (73.35)*

Bagley (b) with: (1) Stan Kenton Orchestra. Chicago, 8-16 September 1952. (2) Jimmy Rowles (p); Shelly Manne (d). Los Angeles, 27 June & 23 July 1957. (3) Phil Woods (as); Eddie Costa (p, vib); Sal Salvador (g); Charlie Persip (d). New York, 19 September 1957. (4) Paul Horn (cl, f); Tommy Loy (frh); Jimmy Rowles (p); Shelly Manne (d). Los Angeles, 26 February 1958. (5) Jimmy Rowles (p); Shelly Manne (d). Los Angeles, 26 March 1958.

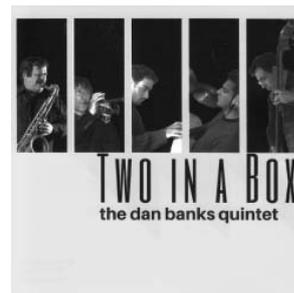
Avid Jazz 1231
★★★★

On the back of a seven-year (1950-57) association with Stan Kenton, bassist Don Bagley, who had replaced the ebullient Eddie Safranski with Stan, made three albums under his own name in the late 1950s. To fill out CD1 Avid selected the Kenton set *New Concepts Of Artistry In Rhythm*, said to be "featuring Don Bagley". While the bassist's presence is felt his only fleeting feature is a few bars on *Prologue*. Kenton was jazz Marmite, but few of his detractors could write off his dynamic early 1950s ensemble, populated by the likes of Candoli, Ferguson, Rosolino and new recruits Lee Konitz and Richie Kamuca. Bill Russo wrote and arranged most of this music with added contributions by Gerry Mulligan, Bill Holman and Johnny Richards. There are some splendid tracks here, not least *Young Blood* and *Frank Speaking*. The lengthy *Prologue* has its moments, but Stan's narration and the overall concept teeters on the brink of pretentiousness.

Bagley's own dates, with unprepossessing titles like *Jazz On The Rocks* and *The Soft Sell*, were not bad, although he allotted himself rather too many solos. The trio with Rowles and Manne (2 & 5) was a working unit with a good

rapport. Rowles's spare style remains an object lesson to over-busy pianists, while Manne was the epitome of good taste. On (4) French hornist Tommy Loy and reedman Paul Horn were added to little effect. However, when Bagley made a trip to New York, he recruited a useful pick-up group featuring fellow Kentonite Sal Salvador and East Coasters Phil Woods, Eddie Costa and Charlie Persip, all of whom enjoyed a tasty blowing session for Regent, sister label of Savoy. Woods and Costa are the stars of this show on a bunch of Bagley originals which are workmanlike, but scarcely arresting. Bagley was a reliable, steady bassist, but there is no sense of strong or unusual leadership by him on any of these half-forgotten dates.

Mark Gardner



DAN BANKS
TWO IN A BOX

Duntitled; The Strut; Wheeler's Wise; Helm Of The Fallen Hero; City Screen; Gettin' Past It; Two In A Box (43.50)

Banks (p); Roberto Manzin (s); Paul Higgs (t); José Canha (b); Joshua Law (d). UK, 2017.

danbanks.co.uk
★★★★

Based in Gillingham, Kent, Dan Banks was classically trained and still plays Bach, Bartok and Debussy on an almost daily

basis. However, he discovered jazz and learned with the best, including Eddie Harvey, Barry Green, Simon Purcell and Steve Melling. You may not have heard of him yet, but on this set of originals, his debut as leader, he shows a mastery of the hard-bop idiom as composer, soloist and bandleader.

Dan didn't set out to imitate Blue Note, rather writing and then finding that the music fit the classic hard-bop quintet format. He found a solid set of individuals to fill the bandstand, including the well-known Paul Higgs. The other names are less familiar but step up to the mark with flawless aplomb. The band includes the Roman Roberto Manzin (b. 1966) who was a member of Tony Scott's 1990s Italian quintet before moving to London later in that decade. He brings a gritty energy to this material.

This style of music has been around long enough to draw a pension but it still sounds timelessly modern, helped by Dan's later influences including Kyle Eastwood, Christian McBride and Kenny Wheeler. It's propelled by rhythms that are cleanly swinging (e.g. in *Duntitled, Gettin' Past It*), funky (*The Strut*) or Latin-based (*Wheeler's Wise, Two In A Box*) and variously features functional and modal harmonies, with *Helm Of The Fallen Hero* a splashy modal piece redolent of Coltrane's *Spiritual* period. *City Screen*, in its harmony and trumpet phrasing reminiscent of something Randy Brecker might have written, exemplifies the more contemporary touches in the writing.

Dan Banks has wide experience in leading UK jazz venues and if this particular band plays near you you should try to catch it; fans of the idiom won't be disappointed.

Mark Gilbert



BURAK BEDIKYAN
AWAKENING

Idée Fixe; Mother Earth; All Alone; Unfair Blues; Awakening; Memory Of A Fading Dream; Ad Infinitum; Do Not Fear; The All Seeing Eye (69.27)

Burak Bedikyan (p); Loren Stillman (as); Ugonna Okegwo (b); Donald Edwards (d). Denmark, December 2015.

SteepleChase 33129
★★★★

Accomplished as it was, the Turkish Bedikyan's previous SteepleChase release Circle Of Life promised a touch more more than it delivered, even with such an estimable saxophonist as Chris Potter on board. A much stronger release, Awakening drops the idea of a Beatles cover found on Circle to feature a programme of originals from the leader. An impressive, intelligently two-handed player with a crisp touch and a finely judged capacity to blend the poetics of East and West, Bedikyan has assembled here some of the strongest players on the contemporary New York scene to help deliver a really cracking album.

The music holds one's attention from first note to last. Its sharply swinging, often urgently pitched yet elegantly turned post-Tyner modes and moods stimulate some terrific work from all participants, exemplified by the burning *Idée Fixe*, *Blues* and *Eye*. There is also a pleasing, leavening measure of mellow reflection, as in the precisely floated lines and richly rounded time of *Awakening*, *Memory* and *Do Not Fear*, all of which elicit tautly cast reflections from the excellent Stillman. Throughout, the vastly experienced Okegwo and Edwards compel attention, offering a wide range of both root support and practically painterly context for Bedikyan's astutely voiced figures and, at times, intriguingly shifting meters (hear *Ad Infinitum*, especially). Questing, consistently excellent music, rounded out by a typically

appreciative, informative and insightful sleevenote from Neil Tesser.

Michael Tucker

TERRY BOZZIO

COMPOSER SERIES

CD1: North 101; Joe; Existential; Psychic Energy; Arabia; Cityscape; Offering; What Is A Memory?; Watched (Under Surveillance); Me, Jeff & Tony (48.10)

CD2: Marked Man; Al & Doug; Blues For?; Miles; Fascist; Heavy Metal; Beast; Psychopath; Db Modal; OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder); Three Friends; ADD; Rondo For Woodwinds (50.56)

CD3: Six Miniatures For Guitar & Piano; Far East; Music For Idiots; Three Postcards From Japan; Ukiyoe (Full Version); Matsuri (Festival); Haiku (Go-Shichi-Go, 5-7-5); The Courier; Sunday Morning; Wisteria; Mayumi; Afro-Industrial Fugue; Orchid; An Adventure In Modern Spain; Elegy; Drama; Herr Nordegg; What She Never Heard; Ukiyoe (String Quartet Version) (69.04)

CD4: Silenced; Self Deceived; Anime; Liquid; Displaced; Conversion Process; Perception Of Honesty; Trees In Winter; Dream; Document 2.5; Siren; Dark Energy; Yon Wa No Karasu (4 Crows); Fractalization; Shrine; Cloud Chamber; In Memoriam 9-11; Alone (63.54)

Blu-ray DVD: Terry Bozzio Drum Solo at Landmark Studio; Introducing Terry Bozzio's drum set; Terry Bozzio's drum set – set up and break down time-lapse video (46.35)

Bozzio (d, pc, p, f, x, bcl, kyb, syn). CD1-4: no details given. DVD: Yokohama, Japan, 17 February 2015.

Ear Music 0211707
★★★★

Terry Bozzio was ranked 17th in Rolling Stone magazine's 2016 list of the 100 greatest drummers of all time. However, given that Art Blakey didn't even figure in this list, a fair degree of sodium chloride should be taken with these results. But despite all that pop-centric hyperbole, Bozzio is a genuinely prodigiously talented drummer having notably cut his teeth with Frank Zappa, recording numerous albums with the maestro including *Bongo Fury*, *Zoot Allures*, *Zappa In New York* and *Sheik Yerbouti*, to name just four. But Bozzio is no

mere rock star drummer. He recorded with the Brecker Brothers on their Heavy Metal Be-Bop album. He's also worked with Herbie Hancock, Allan Holdsworth, Jeff Beck, Mark Isham and Tony Coe to name but a few.

In the early 1970s Bozzio played in Azteca, a Latin/jazz/fusion band where he met and played with Eddie Henderson, Woody Shaw, Julian Priester and Joe Henderson and others around the San Francisco area. Eddie Henderson was employing George Duke at the time, who mentioned to Bozzio that Zappa was looking for a drummer. Bozzio got the gig, but to play on well over 20 Zappa albums surely attests to Bozzio's outstanding technical abilities. Zappa did not suffer fools or incompetents gladly and had put Bozzio through his paces early on in their partnership. Zappa In New York features a drum solo *The Black Page*, a piece noted for its immense difficulty and as Geoff Wills puts it in his excellent book *Zappa And Jazz: Did It Really Smell Funny, Frank?* (2015), it's "a composition that has become a rite of passage for any jazz fusion drummer worth his or her salt". Zappa's influence on Bozzio is apparent in this Composer Series set, specifically Zappa's *Jazz From Hell*, recorded in 1986, on which he employed the Synclavier Digital Music System on all but one track. It was essentially highly sophisticated synthesizer music, arguably the next paradigm shift on from Zappa's masterwork *Hot Rats*.

This box set comprises four CDs and one Blu-ray DVD. The first two CDs are thematically entitled *Fusion*, the third *Classic* and the fourth *Ambient*. Bozzio helpfully provides individual notes to each of the tracks accompanied by his own miniature artwork for each composition. The notes are useful because they assist in unpacking the complex nature of each piece, such as which instruments are utilised, time signatures, devices such as ostinato vamps and chief influences for specific compositions. The 59 tracks were composed by Bozzio using a variety of software packages such as Sibelius, ProTools and Reason with the instruments usually, but not always, gleaned from field samples. Even the drum parts are programmed so there are actually no live drums on any of the numbers.

The Blu-ray DVD contains three



programmes, all fascinating. Bozzio's kit, on which he gives a highly impressive solo, is staggeringly large with well over 100 pieces; it makes Ginger Baker's double set-up look like a practice pad. The time-lapse kit setup and breakdown video is jaw dropping as a virtual 360-degree ring of percussion gradually evolves. It includes multiple-tuned tom toms (tuned diatonically and chromatically) and bass drums, a vast array of cymbals of all types and sizes, exotic percussion and MIDI interface. Bozzio's kit may well be the biggest in the world. When viewing Bozzio's performance it becomes apparent that he approaches his kit as though it were an enormous polyphonic instrument capable of playing actual melodies in a similar fashion to steel drums but on a very different scale (in both senses of the word). There's also a short video of him talking about his kit and influences, the most significant of whom are Joe Zawinul and Miles Davis, and who both have tracks dedicated to them on the *Fusion* CDs (*Joe* and *Miles* respectively).

Inevitably there is a degree of mechanical sterility attached to the pieces. Whilst the compositions on the two *Fusion* sets frequently contain dramatic vamps, *Fascist* or *Psychopath* for example, in the same mould as Stewart Copeland's memorable *The Equalizer* television theme, they don't quite satisfy as much as a live Bozzio drum solo would. The *Classic* CD contains a more interesting selection, *Music For Idiots*, with sampled strings and piano, might have been influenced to some extent by Zappa's *Lumpy Gravy* orchestral work. The final disc, *Ambient*, is not always ambient as such, occasionally containing some quite strident passages. Taken as a whole, the project is an ambitious one, exuding energy and imagination throughout.

Roger Farbey