Audiophile Audition

Wayne Horvitz – The Snowghost Sessions; Those Who Remain – Songlines/ National Sawdust Tracks

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Wayne Horvitz – The Snowghost Sessions; Those Who Remain – [TrackList follows] – Songlines NS-024, 47:29 [10/5/18]; National Sawdust Tracks SGL1627-2, 48:56 [10/12/18] ****:

Prolific pianist/composer Wayne Horvitz has done post-bop, electric funk, art-rock, avant-garde music, jazz, has teamed up with string quartets, created dance performance music, was part of the 1980s and '90s NYC downtown scene and has continued to stretch beyond genre definitions. In October 2018 Horvitz released two albums which showcase his wide-open creativity. The 47-minute and 14-track *The Snowghost Sessions* (on the Songlines label) focuses on trio improvisation. The 49-minute *Those Who Remain* (on the newly-formed National Sawdust Tracks imprint) includes two long-form works for sinfonia and string quartet.
The Snowghost Sessions has Horvitz on piano, amplified piano, live processing, Wurlitzer electric piano, Hammond B-3, and other electronics alongside Horvitz's long-time partners: bassist Geoff Harper (who has also recorded with Gary Bartz, Billy Hart, Woody Shaw and others) and drummer/percussionist Eric Eagle. While *The Snowghost Sessions* is not historically Horvitz's debut in a trio format, he explains, "This is actually really my first trio record with bass, drums and piano; my trio with Bobby Previte and Butch Morris wasn't like a traditional rhythm section." That first trio produced *Nine Below Zero* (Sound Aspects, 1987) and *Todos Santos* (Sound Aspects, 1988). Horvitz, Eagle and Harper spent one week in the spring of 2015 in residence at Snowghost Studios in Whitefish, Montana, which contains a high-end recording studio with impressive acoustic spaces, and a diligently maintained Steinway grand piano. Horvitz says, "I've never felt so free of expectations in the recording studio in my life. The sessions were relaxed, creative, and without a specific goal.

I brought in a pile of tunes and sketches and started making music. The only thing I knew was, I wanted to work with Eric and Geoff, and I wanted [to] find an organic marriage between the idea of a piano trio, and some ideas I'd been exploring with amplified and processed piano." In 2016 Eagle and Horvitz edited and mixed during a nine-month period at Seattle's Skoor Sound. Most tracks found on *The Snowghost Sessions* are live, including the processing, with minimal overdubs. A few cuts involve multiple keyboards. The compositions on *The Snowghost Sessions* combine quiet and earnest moments which balance acoustic and electronic elements, from unpredictable (the idiosyncratic "For James Tenney"—obviously inspired by the famed music theorist; and the strange and paradoxically shifting "The Trees") to groove-traced (the blues-tinted "Northampton" and "No Blood Relations #2"). One highlight is the strikingly melodic "Trish," where Horvitz interlaces exquisite piano lines while Eagle and Harper craft a nuanced rhythmic foundation. Another is "55 6 (21) Variations," (from Horvitz's live installation project, *55: Music and Dance in Concrete*) where Horvitz overdubs his piano with blues-shaded Hammond B-3 organ. Harper's warm bass solo supplies a muted feeling to this picturesque ballad. There is also a restrained vividness during "Yukio and Nao's Duet," a gentle ballad with a light electronic hue which glides beneath the sensitive bass, drums and piano. *The Snowghost Sessions* is available in CD and digital download versions. Digital download buyers get a bonus track, "American Bandstand." This review refers to the CD configuration.

Wayne Horvitz

Those Who Remain presents a different side to Horvitz: orchestral composer. The album comprises two neo-concertos. *Those Who Remain* can be purchased as digital download files or via CD. This review refers to the CD. The 17-minute opening title piece is split into two movements and was chiefly written during Horvitz's residency at Wyoming's celebrated Ucross Foundation in 2015. "Those Who Remain" uses the Northwest Sinfonia (conducted by Pablo Rus Broseta) with improvisations by electric guitarist Bill Frisell. *Those Who Remain* was kindled by Seattle-based poet Richard Hugo, who chronicled Pacific Northwest communities. The 10:28 "Movement I" (subtitled "Three Stops to Ten Sleep") is an interesting amalgam of classical and jazz, where the orchestra evolves from dissonant instances to scenically subtle flourishes, while Frisell provides inviting, graceful guitar lines. It's a fascinating comparison to hear Frisell's tactful notes poised against the symphonic and landscaped setting. There's a similar synthesis of guitar soloing and classical foreground on the seven-minute "Movement II (The Car that Brought You Here Still Runs)," although here Frisell utilizes guitar effects which add an eccentric quality. Dissonance turns into sheering noise at the conclusion when the brass and Frisell's loud guitar coalesce.

The four-movement "These Hills of Glory (for String Quartet and Improvising Soloist)" goes back to 2004 and has previously been performed with Frisell; violists Eyvind Kang and Carla Kihlstedt; and others. Although "These Hills of Glory" is basically classical in nature, this is differently organized than "Those Who Remain." Here, Seattle's forward-thinking Odeonquartet (two violins, viola and cello) improvise as well as follow musical text. And instead of a contrasting electric guitar, the quartet is augmented by clarinetist Beth Fleenor. The four sections run in length from just over ten minutes to under five minutes. "These Hills of Glory" is intense and edgy. The string section and clarinet reach high areas of discord and conflicted harmony (see the

first movement). There is a sense of rhythm, but it is tense and clashing (especially on the second movement). There are also segments which display consonance and moderation (the lingering notes which suffuse through the third movement). With *The Snowghost Sessions* and *Those Who Remain* Wayne Horvitz again proves his has no musical limitations or boundaries and can go from style to style with ease and intellectual curiosity.

Performing Artists:
The Snowghost Sessions
Wayne Horvitz – piano, amplified piano, live processing, Wurlitzer electric piano, Hammond B-3, Nord Lead, TX-7, Mellotron; Geoff Harper – contrabass; Eric Eagle – drums, percussion
Those Who Remain
Wayne Horvitz – piano; Bill Frisell – electric guitar; Northwest Sinfonia (conducted by Pablo Rus Broseta); Beth Fleenor – clarinet; Odeonquartet (Gennady Filimonov, Jennifer Caine – violin; Heather Bentley – viola; Page Smith – cello)

TrackList:
The Snowghost Sessions
The Pauls
No Blood Relations #1
Trish
IMB
Apart from You #1
Northampton
For James Tenney
No Blood Relations #2
Flies of Friday
The Trees
Yukio and Nao's Duet
55 6 (21) Variations
55 6 (7) Variations
Apart from You #2
American Bandstand (bonus track, not on CD)
Those Who Remain
Those Who Remain (Concerto for Orchestra and Improvising Soloist):
Movement I (Three Stops to Ten Sleep)
Movement II (The Car that Brought You Here Still Runs)
These Hills of Glory (for String Quartet and Improvising Soloist)
Movement I
Movement II
Movement III
Movement IV

—Doug Simpson