Absurd in the Anthropocene
Dan Rosenboom (Gearbox)
by Tom Greenland

Some geologists use the term Anthropocene for our current epoch, a time when technological capabilities have begun to tip the balance in that ancient conflict between man and Mother Nature; when we, not she, become the climate changers. L.A. based trumpeter Dan Rosenboom's new release is a response to these changes, climatic and otherwise. His music crosses genre boundaries, an auditory metaphor, perhaps, for his desire to challenge current socio-political trends that seem to neglect our environmental responsibilities.

Heavily layered, the music is especially dense in the lower frequencies, an effect created by the electric bassists' use of octave-dividers and other signal processors and addition of synthesized keyboard bass parts. Although the core quintet is Rosenboom, alto saxophonist Gavin Templeton, keyboard player Jeff Babko and either Jerry Watts, Jr. or Tim Lefebvre (bass), Zach Danziger or Gary Novak (drums), many tracks have guests, including guitarists Tim Conley, Alexander Noice and Jake Vossler; alto saxophonist David Binney; and drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, who brings palpable vitality to "Apes in Rapture" and "Obsidian Butterfly". The former features a seven-horn dectet blowing punchy big band tutti in 6/8 and a wistfully intelligent solo by Binney. A big part of the album's impact is attributable to Babko's production, a cinematic scope, a vivid electro-industrial tableau, epic in proportion, apocalyptic in inference. There's a certain distancing that occurs for the listener despite the acoustic warmth of the horns and drums, due to the liberal application of this musical machinery. It's a scary vision of our planet's future.

Leavening this grim prophecy are two factors. First is Rosenboom's inventive writing. His syncopated, often through-composed melodies have a sense of impatience and inevitability, employing unusual accent patterns, warped phrases, even a canon texture ("Green Moon"). Second is his fine trumpet/cornet playing, with a robust tone up through the higher ranges, strong chops, often expressed in long legato lines with occasional pinched or flutter-tongued attacks, and pervasive ingenuity. He is best heard on "Mr. Lizard Said", "Still", "Heliopteryx" and "Forget What You Know", the last a mash-up of techno and bebop.

As part of his album tour, Rosenboom brought Templeton, Binney, Noice, Vossler, Watts and Novak to Alphabet City's Nublu 151 last month. The absence of Babko was a noticeable change, as was the constant presence of two guitarists. Unfortunately, the thick low frequencies that work so well on the album did not translate to the live environment. Watts' tone was loud and indistinct, often sounding like wind across a microphone, overpowering many of the horn and guitar solos and Novak's extremely active drumming, even in the midst of these solos, didn't help.

The set followed the album cuts in order, excising three tracks from the middle. "Mr. Lizard" and "Pushed to the Edge of Ideas by Dispassionate Bias-algorithm Bots" both displayed fast, fat legato cornet, with a cool, moody solo by Binney on the former. "Still" opened with a cappella cornet, leading to another impressive turn by Binney. Vossler's vigorous Eddie van Halen-meets-George Benson guitar solo on "Green Moon" was intriguing and Templeton was finally allowed to shine on "Obsidian Butterfly", demonstrating an unusual and evocative style alternating delicate passages and gruff comical shrieks. The set ended with "Drowning on the High Ground", Rosenboom more subdued yet still fiery.

For more information, visit gearboxrecords.com

The Golden Rule: for Sonny
Eric Wyatt (Whaling City Sound)
by Phil Freeman

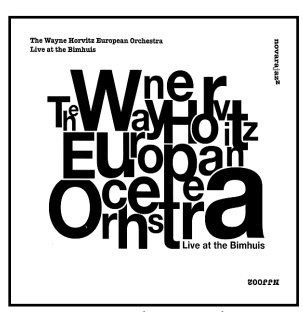
Saxophonist Eric Wyatt's third album as a leader and his second for Whaling City Sound after a debut on Posi-Tone, is dedicated to his godfather Sonny Rollins and often has the feel of one of the older man's mid '70s recordings for the Milestone label. Wyatt's tone is big and warm and he's got a sure-footed rhythmic sense, which allows him to work as confidently over a blues as over samba or calypso rhythms.

This album, which includes 12 tracks and runs 79 minutes, was recorded in a single 10-hour session, but features a variety of rhythm sections, including pianists Sullivan Fortner, Benito Gonzalez and Anthony Wonsey, bassists Tyler Mitchell and Eric Wheeler and drummers Chris Beck, Charles Goold and Willie Jones III in various combinations. A few additional guests pop up here and there: trombonist Clifton Anderson on three tracks, trumpeter Giveton Gelin on four, guitarist Russell Malone on two and on the final track, fellow tenor saxophonist JD Allen.

The title track is a tribute to Rollins and two other pieces carry explicit dedications. "After The Morning", a gentle ballad that is Fortner's sole appearance, is for trumpeter Roy Hargrove and the battering "In The Spirit Of Arthur", more surprisingly, is for Arthur Rhames, the saxophonist/guitarist who was a New York cult sensation in the late '70s-80s. There's also a version of one of Rollins' signature tunes, "Don't Stop The Carnival", which features a shimmering Malone and forceful Anderson.

The album concludes with one more Rollins nod: a take on "The Bridge", from his 1962 album of the same name, on which Wyatt and Allen, friends of long standing, chew the tune up at a racetrack tempo set by Gonzalez, Wheeler and Goold, turning it into something reminiscent of the Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis/Johnny Griffin Quintet. Allen often comes across as a very introspective musician on his own albums, so hearing him tear it up and riff along with Wyatt, clearly having a blast, will put a grin on any listener's face.

For more information, visit whalingcitysound.com. Wyatt is at Smalls Mar. 27th. See Calendar.



Live at the Bimhuis
Wayne Horvitz European Orchestra (Novarajazz)
by Mark Keresman

Player of assorted keyboards, composer and bandleader Wayne Horvitz has been active in the creative music scene(s) in NYC, Pacific Northwest and parts of Europe since the '80s as a leader, collaborator and bandmember. Horvitz has led Pigpen, The President and Zony Mash and played with John Zorn, Butch Morris and Bobby Previte, among many others. Along with his American groups (and collaborations) he has a European Orchestra and this is a document of an Amsterdam concert by same. Horvitz does not play; his role is that of composer and conductor. The band is a fascinating cross-section of Europe's avant garde firmament: saxophonists Silke Eberhard, John Dikeman, Massimiliano Milesi and Edoardo Marraffa; trombonists Gerhard Gschlössl and Wolter Wierbos; trumpeters Eric Boeren and Luca Calabrese; guitarist/clarinetist Alex Ward; pianist Alexander Hawkins; bassist Danilo Gallo and drummer Zeno de Rossi.

The kickoff, "Prepaid Funeral", begins briskly, like a Thad Jones/Mel Lewis swinger, before gently segueing into near-free saxophone solos amid pointed ensemble work, gradually building in intensity until the ensemble starts to swing in earnest à la late-period Duke Ellington—quirky refrains, a bank of horns wailing in a tight, slightly twisty fashion. Solos dart in and out of the mass/morass, the orchestra bouncing dark motifs conveyed in a light-hearted way, while the rhythm section carries proceedings forward in an ever-so-slightly ominous manner. It concludes in what could be a parody of a march tempo (perhaps a nod to old-school New Orleans funeral marches), growing into a cyclic pattern. "Trish" is full of restrained, sentimental swing and nostalgic fragments of melody, the reeds and brass gradually swelling and engaging one other as if it were a classical dance. "Disingenuous Firefight" has a wistful intro, which grows more crackling until a martial cadence over which dissonant solos (over-blowing, spooky growls, etc.) interlock and wail good-naturedly. Rising intensity gives way to genial riffs and grand, classy passages.

The most ambitious piece is the 11-minute "A Walk in the Rain". It includes earnest swing, burlesque passages, sizzling solos (especially Ward on guitar—get too close and choke on the smoke) and sharp phrases in that insistent Count Basie manner. Hawkins, like Basie, makes his few notes count, driving the band/tune as much as the rhythm team. This number, oozing uptown swagger, has enough joie de vivre for two parties, on that you can bet—this swings hard in whimsical fashion.

There's a tradeoff here—we don't get to hear Horvitz the wiz of keys, but as a composer/leader, we get plenty and these European hepcats really bring his earthy, witty concepts to life. Get this for that cranky person in your life that thinks modern jazz is too full of itself and, of course, a copy for yourself.

For more information, visit novarajazz.org. Horvitz is at Soup & Sound Mar. 28th. See Calendar.

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