JAZZIZ

# Wayne Horvitz – The Snowghost Sessions (Songlines) / Those Who Remain (National Sawdust Tracks)

Wayne Horvitz has enjoyed a long and eclectic career as a pianist and composer. These two albums showcase opposing sides of his musical nature.

The trio outing *The Snowghost Sessions* — named after the Montana studio in which it was recorded — features bassist Geoff Harper and drummer Eric Eagle. The band improvises on new and existing compositions during the freewheeling sessions and, through a mix of styles and methods, explores various terrains: chamber-like austerity on "Apart from You #1" and "Trish"; electronic experimentation on "IMB" and "For James Tenney." The airless sonics and slow backbeat of "Northampton" recall Brad Mehldau's pop-jazz excursions on his 2002 album *Largo*. Some songs combine elements, as when electronic overdubs add texture to the delicate ballads "Yukio and Nao's Duet" and "American Bandstand" (the latter a bonus track on the digital version of the album). Some tracks — such as "Apart from You #2" — don't move much beyond their atmospherics. But what ties the entire album together is a dark-hued, cinematic atmosphere. Over the course of these 14 tracks (15 on the digital version), Horvitz and company conjure a hazy, dreamlike effect that sticks with you.

Whereas *Snowghost* captures on-the-spot creation, *Those Who Remain* focuses on two large-scale works of Horvitz's notated music — one a concerto for orchestra, the other a piece for string quartet. Each work features an improvising soloist.

On the two-movement title track, which was inspired by the poetry of Richard Hugo, the soloist is guitarist Bill Frisell, another musician who refuses to be reined in by genre boundaries. During the first movement, the unhurried, twangy melodicism of Frisell's signature country-jazz sound counterpoints the shifting orchestral passages. In the second movement, a gentle opening horn section yields to a hallucinatory string passage, then a nightmarish combination of Frisell's distorted guitar on top of the Northwest Sinfonia's orchestral dissonance. The conclusion at first appears to settle back into the relative tranquility of the opening statement but then closes with an anxious charge. Compared with the propulsive energy of the orchestral pieces, there's more of a brooding eeriness to the four-movement "These Hills of Glory," although featured clarinetist Beth Fleenor's sinuous phrases add a touch of lightness to balance the dense, often dark harmonies delivered by the Odeonquartet.

Whether working in a loose or tight structure, on a small scale or large, Horvitz evokes a strange beauty.—**John Frederick Moore**