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Sweeter than the day (/reviews/2176-sweeter-than-the-day)

Wayne Horvitz / The Royal Room Collective Music Ensemble *At the Reception* Songlines ***1/2

Big band sounds, both stylistically familiar and new from the Royal Room, an ensemble founded two years ago that takes its name from a Seattle restaurant/bar venue, playing Horvitz compositions recorded in a Seattle studio over a couple of days in February this year.

Soloists making an impression early on are pianist Ryan Burns, trombonist Naomi Siegel, trumpeter Al Keith, and trombonist Jacob Herring.

Horvitz, who conducts, uses a modified version of Butch Morris' conduction [a way of signalling musical expression and direction to the players] yet the music does not sound avant garde just like contemporary progressively-inclined acoustic jazz with the occasional nod to Mingus (eg 'Prepaid Funeral,' and the rickety 'Disingenuous Firefight'), among other signposting, along the way.

Loosely with an LP shape to it Horvitz says in the liner notes: "Start with Side B sometimes. Think of each side as its own set of music." And why not ('Sweeter Than The Day' the headline above borrows from in the B side is a gem)? There's plenty of imaginative writing here, the tunes and playing are strong with quite a few tender asides and make you think about how this all fits in with jazz today. Horvitz has managed to make space for brass and reeds without anyone tripping over each other amid a charge of solos. Worth investigating, particularly if you like imaginative larger ensembles, but don't want to buy into dull swing nostalgia. SG

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