

Archive Selections, Vol. 1
Creative Music Studio (Innova)
by Ken Waxman

Woodstock, N.Y.-based Creative Music Studio (CMS), brainchild of Ornette Coleman, Karl Berger and Ingrid Sertso, has had an influence that continues to resonate past its physical presence from 1971-84. Dedicated to erasing the false barriers among different musics, its workshops and concerts not only helped spread freer sounds among players identified with jazz or so-called classical music, but with participants from overseas welcomed, helped birth a sophisticated variant of world music. The first volume of over 400 hours of hitherto uncollected performances and workshops CMS is making available through the library of Columbia University, the three hours of music recorded in the late '70s and early '80s highlight familiar names, plus those no longer on the scene. Most valuable are tracks where jazzers try out concepts in large or small groups but there are also works-music surprises.

Of the tracks featuring the mostly unidentified CMS orchestra, Roscoe Mitchell's 14-minute untitled track is the most compositionally sophisticated. Iridescent ensemble harmonies accompany the sharp bites and barks from the composer's alto saxophone plus skimming tongue flutters from Garrett List's trombone in the frontline. Olu Dara's three contributions come from a contradictory space. He segments Sun Ra-like grooves pushed by florid horn section riffs with fitful asides from a percussive flute, clanking guitar, staccato piano chording and his own lead trumpet on one track; puffing harmonica and vocalizing on another song, he gets the ensemble to add drum backbeats and blues guitar licks, resulting in a big band variant on what could be a Sonny Boy Williamson II number. Oliver Lake's tracks fall in between those of the other composers. As Michael Gregory's near psychedelic guitar lines reference jazz-rock, the rest of the group clings to a basic big band structure on three 1976 tunes, encouraged by Lake's brittle alto tone. Better recorded, 1979's "Two by Two" adds the punch needed to achieve the uninhibited excitement missing from earlier tracks.

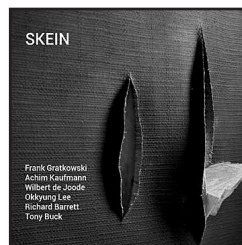
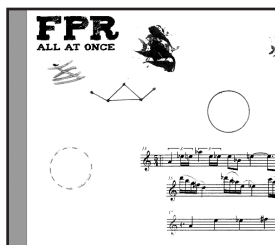
Moving to small groups, the four 1980 selections featuring drummer Ed Blackwell with soprano and tenor saxophonist Charles Brackeen are standouts, doubly precious since the drummer died in 1992 and Brackeen's fitful career of the '70s and '80s has been stalled for years. Justly celebrated for his intuitive duo work with Dewey Redman, Don Cherry and others, Blackwell is appropriately matched by the saxophonist, who recorded in the reed chair of what eventually would become Old and New Dreams. If the drummer's snappy clanks approximate a second line parade on their own, Brackeen amplifies the mood with what sounds like reverse bugle calls. Brackeen's harsh Trane-ism gets a proper workout on the penultimate and final tracks as he jabs the themes from side-to-side before revealing an inner sensitivity that joins Blackwell to give the endings happy lilt. Although his discography is equally sparse, the contributions from bassist David Izenzon (1932-79) are buried somewhat on the three tracks under his name, with more space given to Sertso's hippie-era vocals and Berger's vibraphone and piano. More substantial are two tracks matching Leroy Jenkins' tart fiddle licks and James Emery's animated guitar playing. Sympathetically comping or roughly strumming, Emery demonstrates

the commanding presence that would soon allow him to co-found the String Trio of New York. New music pianists Frederic Rzewski and Ursula Oppens play a version of Berger's "7 in C"; formalist presentation and careful voicing connect the two as neo-Ragtime mixes with time suspension.

As for the so-called world music, Brazilian berimbau player Nana Vasconcelos sounds essentially as he does today, if perhaps a little closer to his folksy roots. But it's instructive to hear hand drummers trading fours on Ghanaian kora player Foday Musa Suso's three 1980 tracks, considering the percussionists are a young Hamid Drake and Adam Rudolph. Tellingly, the main emphasis of Suso's Mandingo Griot Society is on gypsy jazz-like string interplay between the leader and electric bassist John Marsh. The three tracks by Turkish reedplayer Ismet Siral's group are closest to the CMS concept of sound intermingling. Still the linkage between the drum-based backing and his fiery ney tones appears a bit forced, two traditions producing exciting rhythmic parallels, but not quite meeting, like Coleman's experiments with the Master Musicians of Joujouka of around that same time.

Vol. 1 confirms that not all the CMS sounds captured were ready for prime time. But the good stuff captured here is very good indeed. The variety also suggests that many other unexposed musical gems are likely to show up on subsequent volumes.

For more information, visit innova.mu. Karl Berger is at *ShapeShifter Lab Dec. 10th*. See Calendar.



All At Once
FPR (Relative Pitch)
Eponymous
Skein (Leo)
by Clifford Allen

As the geographic specificity of improvised music has become more fluid over the last few decades, musicians can define 'place' not so much as where they reside but with whom they work—as in their place in the community. For example, while alto saxophonist/clarinetist Frank Gratkowski (b. Hamburg, 1963) is essentially a German free music instrumentalist-composer, he's quite active Stateside, though often with a coterie of players who have ingested and reflected on European explorations of creative music, such as ex-Bay Area bassist Damon Smith or percussionist Chris Cogburn, who's brought Spontaneous Music Ensemble sparseness to Texas and Mexico.

FPR is another West Coast intersection and finds Gratkowski in a trio with alto/tenor saxophonist Phillip Greenlief and alto/baritone saxophonist Jon Raskin (the "R" in ROVA). While recorded in 2007 and 2010, the nine pieces on *All At Once* retain a contemporary presence—and they are 'pieces', with each member of the trio contributing works to the program. All-reed ensembles aren't exactly de rigueur, but FPR isn't the first Gratkowski unit to hold this structure—Fo[u]r Alto, an alto quartet, actually postdates the latest of these recordings by a year. Gratkowski's "Sound" is a chuffing, drone-like piece with harmonic stutters in the left channel glinting off robust, circular baritone peals and curling, centralized wisps. While the palette may appear relatively narrow, there is a lot of flux within the poles this trio has set. Raskin's "Cirrus/Webern" likewise sets up complementary pedals for Gratkowski's clarinet to clamber and jet across in short cycles. The effect is

much like a concerto for clarinet, Raskin and Greenlief playing orchestral roles that support while encouraging the soloist's slipperiness. In between these two pieces is Raskin's "Qupe", a jittery refraction for alto, tenor and baritone into which one's mind can fill in the clamor of a free rhythm section.

Skein presents an international riff on Gratkowski's long-running trio with Dutch bassist Wilbert de Joode and German pianist Achim Kaufmann. The group is expanded to a sextet with the addition of Australian (by way of Berlin) drummer Tony Buck (The Necks), South Korean cellist Okkyung Lee (who is based in New York) and Welsh electronic musician Richard Barrett. The Gratkowski/Kaufmann/De Joode trio has a wide-ranging sonic imprint, with piano and bass opened up to explore their limits while Gratkowski's harmonic reach plumbs further depths. Adding Buck's dry, versatile percussion, Barrett's sampling and real-time processing and Lee's devilish cello makes the sonic possibilities even greater, as well as the level of interaction. The second piece of this improvised set is a prime example of what the group can accomplish. Eight minutes of spry textural improvisation gives way to three minutes of limber modal interplay, Gratkowski's sinewy Charlie Mariano-schooled lines and bitter pops garbled by Barrett's shattered-mirror programming. The balance may have shifted to include electro-acoustic improvisation—the minimal, ticking pace of "Adze", for example—but the music on *Skein* finds its roots in open, melodic sparring, where form is arrived at through successive over-painting and erasure.

For more information, visit relativepitchrecords.com and leorecords.com. Gratkowski is at *Ibeam Brooklyn Dec. 8th* and *Roulette Dec. 11th*. See Calendar.

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