



Soundscape 1979
Thomas Buckner/Roscoe Mitchell/Gerald Oshita
(ScienSonic Laboratories)
 by Alex Henderson

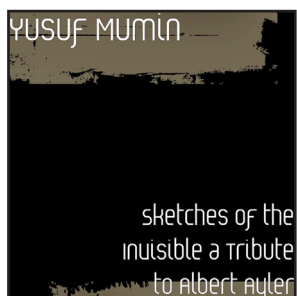
Reedplayer Roscoe Mitchell, who turns 81 this month, has had an enormous influence on avant garde jazz. His first album as a leader, *Sound*, which was produced by the recently departed Bob Koester for Delmark in 1966, did a lot to put Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians on the map. And the AACM aesthetic is impossible to miss on *Soundscape 1979*, a previously unreleased live recording from the titular Manhattan loft on Aug. 17th, 1979. Mitchell is found alongside horn player Gerald Oshita (who died in 1992) and vocalist Thomas Buckner, who himself turns 80 this month.

Mitchell concentrates on the soprano and bass saxophones while Oshita mostly plays the contrabass sarrusophone. Although billed as a trio, Buckner is only on two of the selections: "Textures for Trio" and opener "Marche", both by Oshita. Buckner brings a strong classical influence to both performances, but in different ways. While "Marche" combines avant garde jazz with elements of opera, the hypnotic "Textures for Trio" is more mindful of European church music.

The other tracks are improvisations featuring Mitchell and/or Oshita, an Idaho native who moved to the San Francisco Bay Area. Oshita clearly appreciated the AACM mindset that Mitchell brought to his performances, an outlook alive and well on "Open Side A" and "Solo Improvisation", both making maximum use of space to approach free-form jazz with subtlety and nuance rather than ferocity. Even when Oshita's improvisations become somewhat abrasive on "Prelude" and "Composition 40Q", it is something to which he builds.

While Mitchell has built a huge catalogue over the years, the same cannot be said about Oshita unfortunately. ScienSonic Laboratories head Scott Robinson has provided listeners with a valuable document, which not only underscores Mitchell's bold individuality but is also a rare chance to hear the appealing but underexposed Oshita in a live setting.

For more information, visit sciensonic.net



Sketches of the Invisible: A Tribute to Albert Ayler
Yusuf Mumin (Phillips Enterprise)
 by Pierre Crépon

In the place and date fields of Albert Ayler's death certificate, the word "found" has been typed over the word "death". The exact circumstances of the saxophonist's passing remain unknown and seem to cap the mystery that was '60s Cleveland free music. Besides a hometown, saxophonist Yusuf Mumin—who turns 77 this month—shares with Ayler an ability for otherworldly evocations through sound. Until now, it had been on display only on two late '60s sessions:

Black Unity Trio's remarkable *Al-Fatihah* (recently reissued) and *Burn Baby Burn*, taped with Ayler collaborator/trumpeter Norman Howard. This new digital release contains previously unheard music from the '80s gifted to Ayler's father as a tribute.

Mumin possesses a unique sound, with a dark undertone strictly his, a somber quality imbuing some of the 'sketches' that make up this album, short pieces clocking at around three minutes that seem extracted from wider streams of music. Rather than attempt the obvious renditions of Ayler themes, Mumin at times bends his saxophone sound to channel eerie flashes of Ayler, demonstrating an understanding of its inner mechanics. When Mumin left Cleveland for Los Angeles in 1969, he performed on bass with musicians such as Charles Tyler and Horace Tapscott. This is the first extensive showcase of his work on the instrument. Several others are added—piano, cello, small tuned percussion—through unobtrusive overdubs. Tenor and bowed strings dominate the overall sound.

"I'd like to play something...that people can hum," Ayler famously said. The album's lone sung piece, sorrowful ballad "Sad Miss Holiday" with lyrics by Howard, belongs to this category. Other standouts include strings piece "Counting the Tears" and gripping "Albert's Cry in the Wilderness". Mumin expresses himself within the kind of highly personal realm that lives lived outside of music's commercial circuits make possible.

This is homemade music, private for decades, and it should be heard as such. When the mystery of *Al-Fatihah* had the power to challenge accepted conceptions of '60s free music geography, *Sketches of the Invisible* shows the depths of Mumin's prolonged creative work. As a tribute to Ayler, it goes beyond literality to retrieve something of the elusive spirit of one of jazz' true greats, who, less famously, also said "it's late now for the world".

For more information, visit yusufmumin.cosmicforce.bandcamp.com



Entendre
Nik Bärtsch (ECM)
 by Phil Freeman

Swiss pianist Nik Bärtsch, who turns 50 this month, hasn't released a solo album in nearly two decades. Instead, he has focused his creative efforts on small groups, most notably his long-running minimalist jazz-funk quartet Ronin and less-often-deployed ensemble Mobile. But in November 2019, his longtime label ECM celebrated itself with a 50th anniversary concert at Jazz at Lincoln Center and one of the highlights of the evening was a solo performance by Bärtsch, which has apparently led to this studio document. He's always had a strong interest in ritual—he calls what he does with Ronin "ritual groove music" and prefers the word "Modul" for his compositions, giving them numbers rather than titles—and this album has a decidedly ceremonial feel.

Entendre begins with a medley of "Modul 58", from Ronin's 2018 album *Awase* and "Modul 12", from Mobile's 2016 album *Continuum*. "Modul 58" is altered quite radically; on *Awase*, it was an 18-minute journey for the quartet, moving for its first four minutes with the implacable slowness of one of Miles Davis' dubbier early '70s pieces like "Ife". Here, Bärtsch jumps directly to the speedier second phase, playing an arpeggiated

keyboard figure that could remind some listeners of Philip Glass' *Solo Piano* from 1989. "Modul 12", meanwhile, barely had a melody at all on *Continuum*; it was an atmospheric wash of cymbals and throbbing bass, with the occasional single piano note, but here it becomes romantic and even lush, tinkling like raindrops.

Entendre's centerpiece, "Modul 26", is the longest track at 13:54 and also a piece recorded on Ronin's *REA* and Mobile's *AER*, both released in 2004. Buried within a pulsing, cellular melody, Bärtsch strikes a single note with metronomic regularity until it sounds like a sonar ping and he does it for so long that when it shifts slightly the listener could be forgiven for jumping. The longer the piece goes on, the more it starts to feel like a cross between Glass and Isaac Hayes' piano solo on 1969's "Hyperbolicityllabicsquedalymistic" (famously sampled on Public Enemy's "Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos" in 1988). Make jokes about Swiss timing if you will, but when Bärtsch locks into a groove, it'll take a tow chain to get him out.

For more information, visit ecmrecords.com



Coming Yesterday: Live at Salle Gaveau 2019
Martial Solal (Challenge)
 by Joel Roberts

Esteemed French pianist Martial Solal says he didn't know heading into this 2019 solo performance at the Salle Gaveau in Paris that it would be his final concert. He only decided to retire from playing before live audiences, at the age of 91, afterwards. As such, this recording is a valuable document that serves as a poignant valedictory for a career that spanned some 70 years and included important collaborations with jazz giants from a broad range of styles, including Sidney Bechet, Stephane Grappelli, Lee Konitz and Dave Liebman, among many others.

A renowned composer who wrote the score for Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* in 1960, as well as for dozens of other movies, Solal sticks mainly to standards here, using tunes as simple and familiar as Vincent Youmans-Irving Caesar's "Tea for Two", French nursery rhyme "Frère Jacques" and even "Happy Birthday" (infused with a hint of Charlie Parker's "Ornithology") as a springboard for his elegant, expansive, carefully crafted and decidedly modern improvisations.

Despite his advanced years, Solal's playing remains remarkably adroit, technically and creatively, as he spins new life into the well-worn repertoire, digging deeply into a Duke Ellington medley of "Caravan" and "Sophisticated Lady" and providing an emotionally charged reading of Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart's "My Funny Valentine". Influences as disparate as Thelonious Monk, Frédéric Chopin, Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy pop up at various times, as Solal draws on his decades of experience and the full range of the jazz piano vernacular.

There's no indication over the course of the evening that Solal is performing for the last time. He appears to have made the decision, after decades of dedication to jazz, to go out on his own terms while his faculties and his art are still sharp. As he states in the liner notes, matter of factly and without a hint of sentiment, "When energy is no longer available, it is better to stop."

For more information, visit challengerecords.com