



Take One

Christian Sands/Thomas Fønnesbæk/Alex Riel
(Storyville)

by Phil Freeman

Pianist Christian Sands started out as a child prodigy, releasing his first album, *Footprints*, at 14 and a second, *Harmonia*, two years later. He's currently a member of bassist Christian McBride's trio while continuing to work on his own, as this two-CD set documents. For this live set from Copenhagen's Jazzhus Montmartre, he's teamed with two Danes, bassist Thomas Fønnesbæk and veteran drummer Alex Riel, for a collection of extremely standard standards and a few surprises, including one original composition.

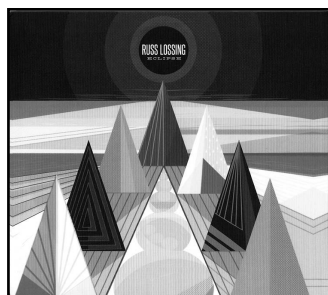
Sands was mentored by Billy Taylor early on and pays tribute to the late master with a version of his "Lonesome Lover". It's a slow blues, with melodic ornamentations tumbling smoothly from his fingers; the bass is rock steady, the drums nearly imperceptible save the occasional soft cymbal crash as punctuation.

Cedar Walton's "Bolivia" is taken at a bouncy tempo, Sands seeming to hint at a modal approach before launching into almost McCoy Tyner-esque extrapolations. He hammers the keys into place without exploding into full-on free play, as Fønnesbæk and Riel gallop behind him, the drummer dropping bomb after bomb to encourage the pianist to greater and greater heights. Mary Lou Williams' "Syl-O-Gism" is tackled in a muscular, '70s manner recalling players like Kenny Barron, George Cables and Barry Harris. The piece has an emphatic swing and Fønnesbæk takes a patient but emotionally resonant bass solo.

"Sand Dune", the sole Sands original performed here, finds the pianist adopting a frilly, but still powerful style reminiscent of Ahmad Jamal, full of heavy chords and extended melodic runs, sweeping across the keys. In the piece's final moments, Riel attacks the kit with furious energy. It makes a good argument for Sands as more than an interpreter, something that's not always true of players who first enter the public eye as children.

The set also includes versions of "Stella By Starlight", "So What", "In a Sentimental Mood", "Moanin'", "Body and Soul" and "Someday My Prince Will Come". They're all fine.

For more information, visit storyvillerecords.com. Sands is at Village Vanguard Dec. 1st-6th with Christian McBride. See Calendar.



Eclipse

Russ Lossing (Aqua Piazza)

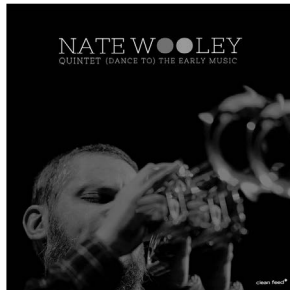
by Fred Bouchard

When I read that this solo piano album was performed as a consecutive series of short improvisations, I tried to experience it as such—put the album on, stretched out and listened intently, unarmed with pen and pad. Impressions flew in, but I suppressed a habitual desire

to jot and scribble, instead listening and reflecting, trying to identify Lossing's favored textures, effects and results. Next time through, I ventured a few comments and aural analogies: "Paul Bley. Not for driving! Horace Tapscott. Angry gnomes. Elliott Carter. Taut abstractions. Dark humors." On the third pass, I tried track-by-track: "Chattering intensity; single-note runs with overlapping hands; slow-creeping chromaticism; spidery, atonal motifs; pointillist moments; occasional bluesy thirds. Clouds of Bill Evans (or Federico Mompou) post-Impressionism." That was all from the opening "Eclipse"! "Moving Shadow": slow single notes and triads yield (not build) to graceful arabesques; an oblique reference to Debussy's "Golliwog's Cakewalk". "Distant Earth": febrile dippy-doodles meet raggy galumphing—with momentum! "Upper and Lower Unite": leaves slowly, silently turn yellow. "If Ever": low, damped gallopings alternate with reverberating plucked strings. Macabre!

There's lots going on during Lossing's hour alone with his piano and his thoughts (aptly dubbed 'mercurial' by guitarist Ben Monder) have more galaxy-wandering freedom than in his duos with bassist John Hébert, but lightning turnarounds, too. By the time he winds down this intense, introverted, demanding excursion Lossing goes hushed, cosmic: "Not So"—a pulsating nebula—is followed by "Water Over Fire"—a starburst and asteroid shower. Fade to black.

For more information, visit russlossing.com. Lossing is at Ibeam Brooklyn Dec. 2nd with Terrence McManus and 11th-12th with Samuel Blaser. See Calendar.



(Dance to) The Early Music

Nate Wooley Quintet (Clean Feed)

by David R. Adler

Maintaining the quintet personnel from his 2010 gem (*Put Your Hands Together*), trumpeter Nate Wooley embarks on a journey through the landmark early '80s repertoire of Wynton Marsalis. This is material "that stoked a very powerful fire in me," Wooley writes of his 12-year-old self in the liner notes. But (*Dance To*) *The Early Music* is not a tribute to Marsalis, Wooley insists; it's "a person's attempt to look at his history and to remember what it feels like to be home."


Wooley goes about this with integrity and intelligence and what he documents is through and through the sound of his own band. But one comes away with renewed wonder at the compositional richness and sheer swing fervor of Marsalis' tunes. "Hesitation", from the trumpeter's eponymous debut, leads off with its tricky staccato head and punishing tempo, returning to end the album as the more expansive "Hesitation/Post-Hesitation". "For Wee Folks" is more tempestuous than the version on *Black Codes (From the Underground)*, though the rubato duo intro by bass clarinetist Josh Sinton and bassist Eivind Opsvik preserves its chamber-jazz essence. "Blues" and "On Insane Asylum", more loosely derived from pieces on *Black Codes* and *J Mood* respectively, find Wooley in capricious form on trumpet, blurring and bending and wailing, bringing his experimental vocabulary to bear on the music. The unaccompanied trumpet intro on "Skain's Domain" is another case in point.

Sinton, playing bass clarinet exclusively as he did on *Hands Together*, brings an improvising sensibility and sonic imprint quite unlike the tenor saxophone of Branford Marsalis and the same can be said for

vibraphonist Matt Moran in regard to prized Marsalis pianists Kenny Kirkland and Marcus Roberts. Opsvik and drummer Harris Eisenstadt are burning, endlessly responsive, highly attuned to the layers of color and space in the music. Wooley's arrangements push the band even further into the unfamiliar: "J Mood" becomes a thick and dissonant rubato ode and a drum feature while Sinton opens "Phryzzinian Man" with solo bass clarinet in an almost Braxton-ian vein before bringing in the tune's telltale bassline. These are among the slickest moves in an album full of them.

For more information, visit cleanfeed-records.com. Wooley is at The Stone Dec. 4th with PROOFReaders. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM



CREATIVE MUSIC STUDIO
Archive Selections
Volume 2

Creative Music Studio: Archive Selections, Volume 2
Various Artists (Planet Arts)
by Duck Baker

Here is a second batch of recordings culled from performances recorded between 1971-84, at Creative Music Studio (CMS), the Woodstock-based collective dedicated to bringing together musicians from different cultural backgrounds. The three CDs cover, respectively, small ensembles, large ensembles and world music. CD 1 runs the gamut from straight-ahead bop to an invigorating piano duet by Karl Berger and Frederic Rzewski. Hearing Lee Konitz jam with George Lewis is delicious, as is Charles Brackeen with Paul Motian and David Izenzon. But the first meeting of Anthony Braxton and Marilyn Crispell takes the cake. An amazing moment to have been captured, it lives up to all expectations.

The large-ensemble tracks on CD 2 are led by Don Cherry, Baikida Carroll and Gerry Hemingway. The orchestras are mostly filled by CMS students and records of who was on hand seem not to have survived. Cherry leads his mostly unidentified group through a series of riff-like themes, allotting solo space to himself and a few others, including flutist Steve Gorn. Carroll's track moves from shimmering impressionism to a section somewhat reminiscent of *Ascension* and then into a modal/postbop line and features strong blowing from the leader and Crispell, among others. But Gerry Hemingway's "Revolution Poem" is the most ambitious. Evoking a sped-up George Russell big band, this uptempo romp presents a series of very hot soloists over dense but effective writing.

A built-in danger with cross-cultural musical meetings is that things can easily boil down to the lowest common denominator of shared musical language, the highly rhythmic modal jam being a usual result and this does loom at times on CD 3, though of course with modal jamming this good and rhythms this hot, it hardly matters. Even on tracks that do go on a bit (Amoudou Jarr's track, for example), things can get very interesting at a moment's notice. But the lack of information about performers here is somewhat frustrating. The track credited as being led by Collin Walcott on sitar instead features a santoor player, to give one example.

For more information, visit planetarts.org. Karl Berger is at El Taller LatinoAmericano Dec. 5th. See Calendar.