



Conversations with Owls
Jeff Cosgrove/Frank Kimbrough/Martin Wind
 (Grizzley Music)
 by Mark Keresman

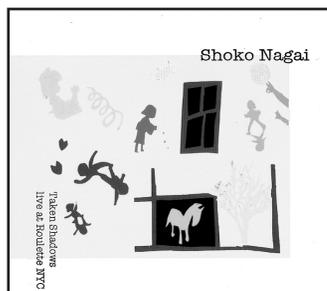
It could be argued that two of the most influential jazz musicians ever were pianist Bill Evans and drummer Paul Motian. Their inspiration is so universal their impact can be discerned in musicians that sound nothing like them. Drummer Jeff Cosgrove's style is nothing like Motian's, but both have an impressionistic approach, applying percussion almost as a painter does to canvas, a beat here, a rumble there. Evans and pianist Frank Kimbrough share what Miles Davis said of the former: [A] "quiet fire". Kimbrough, like Evans, can say a lot with but a few notes and both are decidedly lyrical players but Kimbrough's approach is a more assertive, more inclined to judicious dissonance and free passages. Joining them is Germany-born, NYC-based bassist Martin Wind, who has got a pliant throb and employs extended techniques to coax forth cello- and un-bass-like sounds.

Most of the pieces comprising this album are credited to the trio, with no mention if these are group improvisations. They could well be, but this group plays with such a palpable unity of purpose and subtle interaction that it scarcely matters. "The Shimmer" swings in a somewhat angular fashion, Kimbrough playing pointedly but maintaining a contemplative vibe while Cosgrove and Wind propel the proceedings forward without a fixed beat. "Stacks of Stars" begins with Wind's rippling, almost guitar-like plucking, segueing into cascading piano and haunted, cyclic drumming, then into some ominously dark swing—this would be perfect in the context of a film mystery.

One of the few non-originals here is a brilliant deconstruction of "My Favorite Things" in a unique re-harmonization, as if the trio stripped the song down to its barest essentials and then stripped it down even further. With just wisps of the original melody, Cosgrove rumbles like distant thunder, Kimbrough ruminates and Wind discreetly plucks and throbs. It's a rendition of a standard that's unsettling, haunting and strangely beautiful all at once.

This album is aptly titled. It's a slightly disquieting excursion into the world of an inscrutable creature of the night, conveyed by some wizards of loose-form (as opposed to free-form), heartfelt jazz with the accent on probing group interaction.

For more information, visit jeffcosgrovemusic.com. Kimbrough is at Jazz Standard Apr. 1st with Michael Blake and Jazz at Kitano Apr. 16th with Jay Clayton. See Calendar.



Taken Shadows (Live at Roulette NYC)
Shoko Nagai (Animul)
 by Wilbur MacKenzie

Since her arrival in New York at the end of the '90s, pianist Shoko Nagai has appeared in numerous

contexts. Of particular note is her superb improvisational duo Vortex, with percussionist Satoshi Takeishi. Her newest project, *Taken Shadows*, was premiered live at Roulette and it is the recording of that performance that appears here on CD.

The group includes guitarist Jonathan Goldberger, drummer Jim Black, electric bassist Stomu Takeishi and violinist Todd Reynolds. Nagai has assembled a great band that supports her work as both a pianist/synthesizer player and as a composer. Not only do these players each bring a huge breadth of experience and technical ability to the table, they also gel musically as an ensemble in a deeply compelling way.

The album breaks the continuous performance into three tracks, demarcating transitions into new written sections. The music begins in a relatively calm statement of some melodic material, but quickly spirals into a robust mess of electronic sounds and careening rhythms. Things build and recede, each time organically entering into new beautiful textures. As the music builds again towards the second track, "Solid Angle", some spirited free playing between Takeishi and Nagai (on piano at that moment) gradually settles into a groove—facilitated not by the entrance of the drums, but rather violin. It's always nice when instruments are able to function in different roles and it makes the entrance of the drums at the top of "Solid Angle" all the more meaningful, freeing up Reynolds to lay out some beautiful soaring melismatic phrases. Goldberger then brings a blazing guitar solo, which again leads into some beautiful airy, open textures about five minutes in. Some of the most abstract free improvising is saved for the lead-in to the final track and the top of "LUCY" builds to the final melodic ideas—a ripping unison lick that jumps out and then hides again, revealing a piano cadenza, and then comes soaring back for the finale.

For more information, visit animul.info. Nagai is at The Stone Apr. 4th with Lukas Ligeti. See Calendar.



The Stereography Project
Marike Van Dijk (BJU Records)
 by Donald Elfman

Marike Van Dijk, a composer and saxophonist from the Netherlands, has created a chamber group artfully blending composition and improvisation. A string quartet suggests the classical, but the players work in the city's jazz arenas.

The music evokes images and sensations of Van Dijk's past in the Netherlands and her new life in New York. "I Am Not a Robot" is introduced by the bass of Rick Rosato, whose pulsations call forth first the strings, then ultimately everyone to music that is hardly all robotic but instead animated and evolving. Rosato's bass is ever-present through a piano solo by Manuel Schmiedel that carries the bass and Mark Schilders' drums with it to expressive heights. The strings return underneath the rhythmic energy and then stand alone to bring the tune to an elegiac close. "32243" begins with a lonely repeated note on the piano that becomes the underpinning of the rhapsodic strings. Ben van Gelder takes a soaring and germane solo on alto and Van Dijk is deft in her turn on soprano.

Throughout this marvelous outing, the composer displays a remarkable flair for thematic development and subtle, understated instrumental color. Out of the funk of "Christmas" comes an effusive trombone solo

by Alan Ferber over horns that are also garrulous but work their way into a something more celebratory, at one point accompanied by the wordless vocal of Defne Sahin. And speaking of vocals, listen to the remarkable take on The Beatles' "She's Leaving Home". After an ever-so-sad intro from horns and strings, Sahin and Ruben Samama sing this dirge made more fully real and melancholy in the instrumental writing.

All of this beautiful music reflects the power of improvisation and ensemble writing tinged by the sadness of loss. It's strikingly exhilarating.

For more information, visit bjurecords.com. This project is at ShapeShifter Lab Apr. 5th. See Calendar.

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- Cassandra Wilson—*Coming Forth By Day* (Legacy)

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N E W R E L E A S E S

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- James Falzone/The Renga Ensemble—*The Room Is* (Allos Documents)
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