

Eliot Gattegno/Eric Wubbels: *Intersections* (Spektral Records SRL4-08039, 2009; TT: 72:54)¹

A recent installment in Spektral Records' *GRENZENLOS* series, *Intersections* features performances by young American saxophonist and 2008 Kranichsteiner Prize recipient Eliot Gattegno (b. 1983), and composer/pianist/accordionist Eric Wubbels (b. 1980). Touring across the US and internationally as The Kenners since 2004, Gattegno and Wubbels present an impressive and diverse program of works scored for solo saxophone(s) and electronics (live and pre-recorded), saxophone/piano and saxophone/accordion duo, as well as a two saxophone and accordion trio, on their first official release. The emerging composers represented on the recording, all ranging in age from 24 to 40, have participated in extended collaborations with the duo. Of the seven commissioned pieces, four were composed by graduate students (Clint McCallum, Daniel Tacke, and Nicholas Deyoe) and faculty (Lei Liang) affiliated with the University of California, San Diego, where Mr. Gattegno is currently pursuing a doctorate. Alex Mincek is both a former colleague of Eric Wubbels from Columbia University, and the Artistic Director of the New York-based Wet Ink ensemble, of which Mr. Wubbels is a fellow-member and serves as Executive Director. David Brynjar Franzson and Per Bloland have both recently graduated from Stanford University and are currently residing in New York/Reykjavik and Oberlin, respectively. As such, the recording stands as a reflection of the performers' commitment to premiering and incorporating the works of their peers into their repertoire.

The McCallum and Franzson pieces, both of which I first had the pleasure to experience during a live performance by Eliot Gattegno at the 2008 Darmstädter Ferienkurse, are among the more "iconic" offerings. McCallum's *in a hall of mirrors waiting to die*, for soprano saxophone and prepared piano, focuses upon extremes of resonance and register. Deriving inspiration from the films *Enter the Dragon* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, sustained saxophone "screams" are punctuated by the shattering produced via the placement of a metal chain across the piano strings. *The Closeness of Materials*, Franzson's three-minute piece for soprano saxophone and accordion, also tends towards physical limits, both of the instruments and the performers. Consisting of a variegated surface of objects ranging from the banal (a descending major scale in the saxophone) to the rarified, the sound structures employed emulate aspects of the composer's environment—not as a naïve ecological exercise, but rather as an implied critique of the gratuitous and unreflective appropriation of derivative material evident in much contemporary composition. Avoiding the illusion harbored by some that the two instruments complement each other perfectly at all times, Franzson manages adeptly to highlight certain points of convergence, while reinforcing their salient differences, at times to the point of absurdity.

Chinese-born American composer Lei Liang's *Memories of Xiaoxiang*, for alto saxophone and electronics, pays plaintive tribute both to a tragic event occurring in the Xiaoxiang region of Hunan Province, and to composer Mo Wu-ping, who attempted to complete an opera based upon this event before his untimely death. In so doing, Liang

¹ N.B.: This CD is available via the label's website (www.spektral-records.de), or may be downloaded from Amazon.com or Amazon.de.

pairs the ghostly wailing of the saxophone with field recordings of folk music and voices specific to the region, as well as vocal samples of Mo Wu-ping, forming a coherent constellation of memories and references. By contrast, Bloland's ecstatic *Quintet for Solo Saxophone and Electronics* is characterized by the transformation and amplification of largely improvised source-material.

While Bloland's work tends towards proliferation and polyphony, Alex Mincek's *Perpetuum Mobile* places the congealment of a trio comprising two tenor saxophones and accordion, as well as manifold modes of repetition (as the title would suggest) in high relief. Throughout the work, Mincek demonstrates a degree of versatility in juxtaposing and iterating ostensibly pared-down, monolithic, and unrelated cells in inventive ways. An engaging, tightly controlled, but unpredictable surface fabric ensues, alternating between scarcely audible, refined material and its rather blunt counterparts. The *quiet and lingering violence* intimated by Daniel Tacke's title emerges from tensions among seemingly innocent modal fragments in the saxophone, accordion, and piano, the alterations to which they are subjected, and the expectations of the listener.

Intersections concludes with *POS BTR*, an extended (i.e., nearly 18-minute) work for tenor saxophone and piano by Nicholas Deyoe. Constituting the third piece in a series, this duo examines the relationships and oppositions developed between active, goal-directed materials and their *sotto voce*, static counterparts. Consequently, the shifting dynamic established between the performers, as well as the rich palettes proper to each player, are made manifest.

Indeed, the well-shaped, memorable, and dimensional program captured on this disc exposes the myriad qualities of the performers and the artistic and technical challenges with which they have been presented. Despite the daunting variety of aesthetic outlooks and instrumental combinations represented on the recording, all of the works have been approached critically, conveying a keen understanding of the essence of each...all this, coupled with sheer virtuosity. The electrifying performances and high quality of production (including an attractive booklet of biographies and program notes in English and German) render this recording an ideal audio document of the music. I eagerly anticipate the release of The Kenners' second volume, due to appear in Winter/Spring 2010.

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