



Miner's Pick

Thomas Heberer/Pascal Niggenkemper (FMR)
by Brad Cohan

Both German-French bassist Pascal Niggenkemper and German cornet player Thomas Heberer call New York City home and for the last several years the pair have made their inventive presence reverberate on a wealth of notable recordings and in the local jazz underground, particularly as two-thirds of HNH, alongside drummer Joe Hertenstein. In his sideman and leader guises, Niggenkemper has been on quite the roll, from his integral role in Gerald Cleaver's transcendent Black Host quintet to *Lucky Prime* (Clean Feed), the sprawling offering from the bassist's Vision7 collective. Brooklyn's avant-jazz scene has also provided a haven for the community-minded Niggenkemper, as co-organizer behind Zé Couch, a house concert series. Meanwhile, his counterpart Heberer has enjoyed long-term membership in the Instant Composers Pool (ICP).

For *Miner's Pick*, these European virtuosos present ten composed-yet-experimental-leaning sketches, running the gamut from serene introspections to intense fits of piercing dissonance. But unlike the upcoming solo set *Look With Thine Ears* (Clean Feed) and in PascAli, his thunderous contrabass duo with fellow bassist Sean Ali, Niggenkemper opts to roam a mostly subtle path, keeping his stash of usual found objects at a poking-and-stabbing-at-the-strings minimum.

That quietude suits *Miner's Pick's* aesthetic just fine. Sure, the labored breaths and grunts heard throughout the minimalist and conversational explorations exude a primal energy and sinister bow scraping lends horror film-noir-esque touches but for the most of its sound journey, the vibe is akin to a hypnotic classical music-meets-improvisational current. While bass provides the rhythmic backbone—however screeching—cornet conveys the impassioned heartbeat. On haunting vignettes like "79" and "Topaz Mountain", Heberer expresses both soaring and meditative phraseology; on "47" and "The Lion Cavern", it's Niggenkemper's squeals and thrusts taking the reins. With album art by Mike Joyce a sublime complement to the trance-inducing ambience of *Miner's Pick*, the tandem of Heberer and Niggenkemper speak an ecstatic language of their own.

For more information, visit fmr-records.com. Heberer is at Roulette May 6th-8th with ICP Orchestra. See Calendar.



East of the Sun
ICP Orchestra (ICP)
by Ivana Ng

On the surface, the somber and hymnal "Psalms" is an uncharacteristic way for the ICP Orchestra to kick off their latest album. Listen closely though and the band's playful nature is simmering beneath the surface. Disparate harmonies come to a sweltering crescendo, setting a transcendent tone for the Amsterdam-based

nonet's latest record.

The ICP Orchestra is prolific and consistent in its swing-infused avant garde compositions and *East of the Sun* is no exception. Nods to jazz standards and bebop are abundant, but the band's deliberate chaos and spontaneity is ever-present. This is the first album in the band's decades-long history in which co-founder and pianist Misha Mengelberg does not appear, but it is filled with his spirit and energy. Pianist Guus Janssen carries the torch with aplomb, bringing a soulful languor that is refreshing yet entirely appropriate to the ICP Orchestra aesthetic.

Comprised of tunes hand-picked by co-founder and drummer Han Bennink, the record transitions from chaos to classic swing in a way that feels both unique and completely natural. After "Psalms", the group moves into "Oorwurm", a spritely limerick with Mary Oliver's strings front and center, leading the band and keeping Bennink's rollicking percussions at bay. Calamity quickly descends into "Browse of Morning", an orchestral piece imbued with tension; Michael Moore's clarinet stretches past the tinny, squeaking notes of its upper registers while Walter Wierbos' trombone meanders into deep, guttural notes.

The ICP Orchestra's shows are known for physical theater and that frenetic energy is palpable in "Bolly Wolly" and "Impro Een". Oliver and cellist Tristan Honsinger engage in a jarring call-and-response as the band swings effortlessly on the former. Rooted in free improv, with flourishes of Ellingtonian whimsy, the latter showcases the band's masterful ability to inject subtle anarchy into classic bebop-inflected tunes.

In "Lavoro/Moten Swing", the band pays tribute to the late South African/Amsterdam-based saxophonist Sean Bergin. This Bergin and Bennie Moten mashup is an archetypical ICP Orchestra piece—a deft mix of free improv and jazz standards. With the bravado of a big band and sustained freedom of an avant garde chamber ensemble, Honsinger channels Bergin's growly vocals, as Wierbos accompanies with shouting brass.

The band concludes with Brooks Bowman's "East of the Sun, West of the Moon", a jazz standard infused with joyous chaos. It's the perfect bookend to "Psalms", marking the end of an album that feels like an uplifting sermon.

For more information, visit icporchestra.com. This group is at Roulette May 6th-8th. See Calendar.



NUNC!

Misha Mengelberg/Dirk Bell/Ryan Carniaux/
Gerd Dudek/Joscha Oetz/Nils Tegen (Nemu)
by Ken Waxman

With Dutch pianist, composer and ICP Orchestra founder Misha Mengelberg now sidelined with advanced Alzheimer's Disease and unable to perform, new examples of his work become more precious. This nearly 80-minute 2011 ad-hoc session from Cologne with his contemporary—tenor saxophonist Gerd Dudek—plus a band of younger players—trumpeter Ryan Carniaux, guitarist Dirk Bell, bassist Joscha Oetz and drummer Nils Tegen—takes on added resonance. Yet until the sextet loosens up enough to slide into freer territory, the disc is more Mengelberg-lite than expected.

With the first portion of the album given over to the seven-part group composition "Eleven Steps to Heaven", connections to Miles Davis-influenced freebop are clear. Dudek spends time joining Bell's fleet

modulations in counterpoint that resembles Stan Getz-Jimmy Raney more than Peter Brötzmann-Sonny Sharrock and whose Coltrane influences are expressed with slurry roughness in the penultimate sequence. Carniaux' fine-boned "Part 3" solo and playing elsewhere is likewise firmly in the modern mainstream, advancing call-and-response choruses with a straining Dudek. Add to this Tegen's clatter-click drumming and the effect is that of an updated Jazz Messengers at a relaxed jam session. Bell's flowing lines, as when he solos lucidly on "Part 5", add to this pre-free impression while master of understatement Mengelberg, chameleon-like, mostly sticks to comping. Only Oetz, who has recorded cutting-edge solo bass CDs, puts aside boppy thumping to unveil a bowed multi-string solo on "Part 7"; abrasively nearly scuffing the finish off his strings spurs Tegen to arrhythmic pops and moves the tune into the 21st Century.

With the band now apparently more comfortable in each other's company, the concluding 35-minute, two-part "Zok!" is closer to Mengelberg's usual milieu. Starting off with a shaking Monk-like piano dissertation, he and Bell, now employing a harsher tone, negotiate tempo shifts that in turn bring out blunt line variations from Dudek. By the time "Zok! Part 2" rolls forward, the pianist is mixing stride references with Monk-ish key splatters, Carniaux is blaring staccato crackles alongside fiery sax blasts and Tegen doubles the intensity of his initial playing with craggy rumbles. As the horns bring a touch of the blues to the climax, jazz connections and sly timbral extensions from the pianist combine for a sleekly satisfying ending. Featuring a different side of Mengelberg's whimsical quirkiness, the CD, while uncharacteristic, still celebrates his skills.

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