

Arcades

Anthony Coleman/Brian Chase (Chaikin)
...im Gebirg
 Studio Dan/Anthony Coleman
 (Records & Other Stuff)
 by Kurt Gottschalk

In a career dating back 30 years (at least counting from his neo-klezmer *Disco by Night* debut), pianist/composer Anthony Coleman has proven himself a veritable hydra of musical reconsideration and reworking. He has applied his many heads, with great success, to early jazz and ragtime, Jewish traditions, 20th Century classical and Downtown improvisation, sometimes with self-effacing humor, sometimes with great seriousness. It is hard to know what to expect next from a musician so fascinating because he seems so endlessly fascinated himself, but it is rare that his projects don't hit at a high level.

Two recent releases suggest the variegated prongs of the trident he wields like some new music Neptune (and, yes, I'm quite willing to flog this metaphorical Pegasus to death). In one, we hear Coleman in free-flow in an intimately recorded dialogue with drums. In the other, a commission from an Austrian ensemble with a proven interest in the NYC downtown, Coleman the composer responds to the great history of 20th Century Viennese music, but doesn't close the door to other strains of inspiration and contemplation.

Adding to the headiness, *Arcades*, Coleman's duo with Yeah Yeah Yeahs drummer Brian Chase (released on Chase's Chaikin imprint) takes its cues from Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, an unfinished critique of the Parisian bourgeoisie to which the philosopher devoted more than a decade leading up to World War II. There is plenty of grist for the mill there and, if one so chooses, one can listen for (and find) opulence, decadence and hectic urban pace in the music. One can also, of course, ignore all of that, but either way, the album is a cerebral joy: five active and often ebullient tracks, beautifully recorded and mixed by Jeff Cook. The detail of the recording is as enjoyable as the spirit in the playing.

It takes a mind like Coleman's to draw a connection between Second Viennese School composer Anton Webern and '70s punk minimalism, but it is there plain as day in the short outbursts of singular expression. Coleman goes further to draw connections to Thelonious Monk's gestural language in the liner notes to *...im Gebirg*, his truly exciting album with Studio Dan. The ensemble was founded in 2015 and has commissioned and worked with Anthony Braxton, Fred Frith, George Lewis and Elliott Sharp, among others. They are, in other words, quite adept at realizing the ideas of composers who color outside the lines.

As with the Walter Benjamin inspiration, however, the influences at play on *...im Gebirg* aren't worn on the sleeve. Journalist Thomas Mießgang draws further allusions in the liner notes, finding links to Glenn Branca, Morton Feldman and Sun Ra. Those are certainly all ingredients in Coleman's cooking pot, but the half-dozen pieces aren't cheeky pastiche. He makes good use of the small chamber orchestra: three strings, two woodwinds, two brass, a drumkit and both himself and Michael Tiefenbacher on piano and harmonium. The music is very much composed (improvisation would seem to be at a minimum) and, if not without precedent, singular in its exposition and singularly Coleman's. Recorded live at Porgy & Bess in Vienna in 2019, the pieces (with the exception of the opening track) fall into a tidy five-seven minutes each, with a through-line suggesting an

emotional arc, if not a narrative one. The exception that proves the rules in place comes in the penultimate "Orgelstück", a quartet improvisation for bass, drum and both keyboard players, which is nicely uncentered and sadly seems cut short.

Coleman is quite too humble to be called a god. He makes no claims to Neptune status. He is no Perseus freeing Pegasus from the head of Medusa only to be beaten by an unimaginative journalist thirsty for allusion. But he is an absolute master of improvising upon, composing within and advancing the traditions born of jazz. These two records are neither the first nor the last times he has proven that, but prove it they do.

For more information, visit anthonycolemanandbrianchase.bandcamp.com and studiodan.at. Coleman is at *The Stone at The New School* Jul. 1st. See Calendar.



Smoke Sessions [Remixed]
 Nicholas Payton (Smoke Sessions)
 by Jim Motavalli

There is nothing inherently wrong with smooth music—it doesn't all have to be jagged edges. Nicholas Payton's original *Smoke Sessions* with bassist Ron Carter, drummer Karriem Riggins and two guests—George Coleman (tenor saxophone) on "Big George" and Isaiah Sharkey (guitar) on "Gold Dust Black Magic"—is a pretty laid-back affair. Payton's Fender Rhodes work smooths it out somewhat, but it is still firmly jazz, or what Payton calls "#BAM" (Black American Music).

Now we have four of the tracks remixed, three by Riggins and one by producer/instrumentalist Tomoki Sanders. The results take out even more wrinkles, but it is plenty jazzy. The immediate antecedents are the records of French producer St. Germain and the entire *Jazz is Dead* series, which resurrects '60s-'70s star players in decidedly modern, hip-hop-influenced settings. Some of that music works and some of it doesn't. These remixes mostly do, as chill-out music.

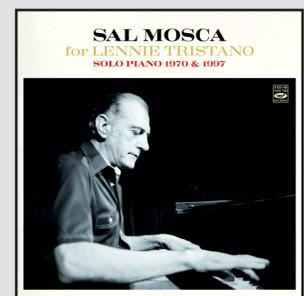
Coleman's saxophone is still upfront on "Big George", but now surrounded by bubbling percussion. It is definitely funkier, though Coleman—now 87 and in fine form here—is always going to sound like himself; no Tom Scott commercialism enters his grooves. "Levin's Lope" is larded with ghostly vocals, handclaps (maybe electronic), a more insistent beat from Riggins and the bassline from Payton's own "Cyborg Swing". It goes down easily.

"Gold Dust Black Magic" is now dub-inspired and Payton, playing a few repetitive phrases, sounds like late-period Miles Davis, dropped into a packaged background. The results aren't better than the rather spare original—probably not the intent—but it did produce a track much more likely to be played in a club.

Sanders' one track, "Hangin' In and Jivin'", is a lot like "Gold Dust Black Magic", but also has what sounds like sampled voices, lots of percussion and an insistent electric bassline. The New York City-based saxophonist is just 28, so there is a real reaching across the generational aisles here. Payton himself commented about these tracks: "I hope it highlights there's not such a disparity between more traditional styles and current ones." Fair enough. Keep the original *Smoke Sessions* for Sunday morning and maybe play the remixes at the Saturday night party.

For more information, visit smokesessionsrecords.com. Payton is at *Blue* Jul. 5th-10th. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM



For Lennie Tristano (*Solo Piano 1970 & 1997*)
 Sal Mosca (Fresh Sound)
 by Marc Medwin

"Individuality is such a big part of creation," states Sal Mosca in *Un-Sung*, the only documentary on the still-underappreciated pianist (who died 15 years ago this month). He could just as well have been speaking of his mentor, equally neglected Lennie Tristano, for whom much of the material on this superb disc was apparently recorded in 1970.

This is the earliest available documentation of his solo pianism. Again, we owe this bounty to Mosca archivist Don Messina, who also provided the material for the November 1992 concert *Talk of the Town* on Sunnyside. Here we have some of that repertoire more than 22 years earlier, recorded in Mosca's home studio and having somehow escaped the fire that destroyed everything, including his piano. On the box was written: "For Lennie Tristano".

What is abundantly clear is the staggering musicianship and contemplative dedication imbuing every gesture. Dig the accented right hand opening "All the Things You Are". The diverse ingenuity of phrase, displacements, chromatic inflections and arpeggiated harmonies, implied or otherwise, can be traced back to Tristano only in their unpredictability as the left hand whispers the slightest intimations of stride. The multifarious freedoms reached from within the tune's harmonic framework, which may be the real constant in both Tristano and Mosca's musicianship, are overwhelming. How many melodies are we actually hearing at 3:26 beyond the right-hand complexities? Similar ambiguities pervade "Talk of the Town", especially when the right hand heats up at 1:24, sweeping aside everything preceding with rocketing and diving runs at lightning speed. The harmonic invention exhibited over the next 10 seconds is equal parts confounding and exhilarating. It would be difficult to imagine the block chords that then take over the texture failing to please Mosca's teacher in this fresh and historically multivalent context. We are even treated to the medley approach that would become such an integral component of Mosca's later work. The way "Night and Day" lopes and swings effortlessly into "These Foolish Things" is a wonder.

The two 1997 selections, recorded for a WKCR broadcast, speak to an increased introspection, a loosening of virtuosity's hold in favor of temporal exploration. What a joy it is to hear Mosca's ruminations on Bix Beiderbecke's "In a Mist", that rollicking mixture of Scriabin, Debussy and ragtime he would tinker with and finally record on piano. Mosca elongates both rhythmic and harmonic activity in the service of spontaneity, making the piece his own as he discovers the ramifications of each tone and chord. Each statement of the melody is slightly different, but none of it prepares for the harmonic challenges of "Stella by Starlight" capping the program. It is late Tristano again but transmogrified, viewed through the floating lens of a Bach chorale. The juxtaposition of the two tracks seems to sum up both Mosca's multifaceted playing and the disc as a whole, a magnificent entry in his catalogue.

For more information, visit freshsoundrecords.com