

Reminiscent plus A Xmas Suite
Stanley Cowell (SteepleChase)
Juneteenth (Piano Solo)
Stanley Cowell (Vision Fugitive)
 by Anders Griffen

Stanley Cowell's latest release, *Reminiscent plus A Xmas Suite*, has Jay Anderson (bass) and Billy Drummond (drums) accompanying the virtuoso pianist, who turns 75 this month. The group first assembled in March 2014, when Cowell stepped in for what was to be a Freddie Redd recording, resulting in *Are You Real?* (SteepleChase). The trio established a rapport, scheduled performances at the Village Vanguard and made this recording in February 2015. It includes insightful liner notes by Neil Tesser.

The album opens with "Intermezzo", referring to the first section of the Johannes Brahms Opus 119. In the composer's letter of May 1893 to Clara Schumann he states of this "exceptionally melancholic" piece that "every bar and every note must sound like a ritard[ando], as if one wanted to suck melancholy out of each and every one, lustily and with pleasure out of these very dissonances!" Cowell's approach is not so much melancholy as pensive. "A Xmas Suite" is the centerpiece of the album, bookended by Thad Jones' "A Child Is Born" and Horace Silver's "Peace". Cowell's "A Xmas Melody" introduces a medley of holiday classics and is recapitulated before closing

with "Jingle Bells". "Midnight Diversion" barely breaks the trance with its "Round Midnight" reference. "Hear With Me" is a tune by Cowell's daughter, Sunny, performed by her father on mbira. "Time" is a fantastic rendition of a tune by Richie Powell (brother of Bud, killed at 24 in a car accident). The time signature changes every measure at the top: 4-, 5-, 6-, 7- and 4-beat measures, followed by 6 bars of 4 for the 1st ending, repeat and then 8 bars of 4 for the 2nd ending, then it is 7 bars of cut-time followed by a bar of 2/4. The penultimate title track is one of the most interesting tunes in the set while outro "Sweet Song" is the jukebox track. This album will reward repeated listening.

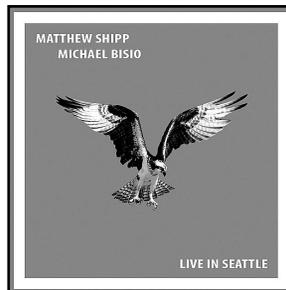
Juneteenth was recorded in November 2014 in anticipation of the 150th Anniversary of Juneteenth, the celebration commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States. On Jun. 19th, 1865, Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had become official Jan. 1st, 1863, two-and-a-half years earlier. The explanation of why it took so long to deliver this news is unclear and has long been contested.

This is a piano reduction of a larger work based on the Emancipation Proclamation; the main theme comes from an earlier Cowell vehicle, "Sienna: Welcome to this New World". Elsewhere, hints of Civil War-era songs are accompanied by unconventional harmonies, which alter their effect (perhaps akin, in part, to the treatment of "The Star Spangled Banner" by Jimi Hendrix). Based on "We Shall Overcome", the bright "We Shall 2" opens the CD, followed by the dissonant introduction to the title suite, which takes up tracks 2-11. This is a major work featuring a dynamic combination of musical idioms. In his notes for *Reminiscent*, Tesser discusses how Cowell "has delightfully frustrated the [would be] dichotomy [between] intellect and emotion." That is especially the case on this album. Deep with soul and intellect, which is the foundation? Like so many contradictions in nature, it's just both.

Cowell's piano speaks clearly on this beautifully recorded album. There are no liner notes included, but there is a thick booklet of primarily Library of Congress photographs from 1861 to the early 20th century, depicting African-Americans before and after emancipation. A version of Lincoln's proclamation is printed as well. The CD itself is completely black.

This is an incredibly beautiful and powerful album, at once heartbreaking and uplifting. It plays as if Cowell performed it straight through. Oftentimes joyous, there are dark undertones remaining unresolved. The performance will evoke a range of emotions individual to the listener. A high point in a spectacular career, this is required listening for Cowell fans.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk and visionfugitive.fr



Live in Seattle
Matthew Shipp/Michael Bisio (Arena Music)
 by Clifford Allen

Pianist Matthew Shipp and bassist Michael Bisio have been working together as part of Shipp's trio for seven years and it would be fair to assume that their duo is just a Shipp Trio distilled to its harmonic essence. That would be partly true but incomplete, for their music is expansive and self-contained and an entity all its own,

based on a close musical rapport developed along the lines of Bill Evans and Scott LaFaro or Sal Mosca and Peter Ind. *Live in Seattle* is their second duo album following 2012's *Floating Ice* (Relative Pitch) and captures an eight-song performance on "International Jazz Day" in the Emerald City, including several of the pianist's compositions as well as two standards and the Roberta Flack-Donny Hathaway hit "Where is the Love?", a staple in Shipp's repertoire.

Following the rickety stomp and grubby rivulets of "Gamma Ray", booming pizzicato flurries and woody grapple intertwining with Shipp's crackling whirlpools, the two slide into "My Funny Valentine" with gentle command, Bisio's arco and ponticello attack threatening to break with tradition. As the bassist tugs on strings and wood, Shipp harps on a fragment of the tune's glassy poise with echoes of Bud Powell, halting to give Bisio a lengthy unaccompanied spot of plucked and snapped gristle. "New Fact", a driving anthem punctuated by spiraling asides, finds the pair in a humming pulse that branches outwards into upper-register clamber and chasing one another into free-time rabbit holes until they naturally slink their way into the resonant gospel of "Where is the Love?"

Live in Seattle captures Shipp and Bisio's ongoing conversation in gorgeous full flight; however, because the music is often quite spare, the LP's noisy pressing interrupts the flow. The balance also sometimes favors the bass and finds the piano rather boxy. If one can deal with these output issues, what's actually going on between Shipp and Bisio is truly transcendent.

For more information, visit arenajazz.com. Shipp is at *The Cutting Room* May 4th. Bisio is at *Muchmore's* May 3rd with Avram Fefer and *Downtown Music Gallery* May 15th with Brian Groder. See Calendar.

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Harvey Valdes
PointCounterPoint

Guitarist Harvey Valdes has a reputation for genre bending, and his debut trio album, *PointCounterPoint*, is seven tracks of rhythmically driven, contrapuntal action that draws from jazz, rock, atonality, noise and more. Featuring Sana Nagano on violin, Joe Hertenstein on drums, and Valdes on seven string guitar. The album is a tapestry of consonance and dissonance grounded in odd time and syncopation. Valdes and Nagano weave atonal melodies into improvisations, Hertenstein holds the trio tight in his pocket, and Valdes' heavy, distorted sound pulsates with urgency on this inspiring, intelligent, and intense debut.

www.harveyvaldes.net