



Eponymous
The Spirit Farm (SLAM)
by John Sharpe

The Spirit Farm represents the eponymous debut of an outfit convened by pianist Adam Fairhall comprising six young improvisers based in the north of England. Although culled from a live performance, thought has gone into sequencing, so three improvisations featuring the full band are separated by three shorter cuts from subsets of the group. But even when the complete unit combines not everyone plays all the time. One of the most notable features is the distinctive group approach focused on timbre, texture and sound, alongside willingness to use diverse idiomatic materials.

That open-mindedness is demonstrated by a fondness for rhythmic patterns not always present in improv settings. Each of the pieces is episodic and incremental, drawing on unusual combinations, like a series of tenuously linked short stories. So in "All", after an enigmatic beginning of percussive clanging, most likely emanating from Fairhall's electric piano preparations, Johnny Hunter's tappy drums and Dave Kane's twanging bass join. Eventually a pulse emerges as Kane rhythmically bounces the back of his bow on the strings while French saxophonist Christophe de Bezenac breaks up his lines to good effect by alternating

long tones and eruptions of overblown squawks.

De Bezenac further shows his predilection for unusual timbres in duet with Anton Hunter's stumbling guitar stylings on "Anton Christophe". Although not generally jazzy Fairhall's piano in "Adam, Dave, Johnny" almost verges on the conventional in its lilting flow and slight blues inflections. More typical is "Adam Corey" where vibraphonist Corey Mwamba's spare phrasing contrasts with Fairhall's distorted keyboard motifs. The overall trajectory increases in density, culminating in "All Once More", where layers of overlapping rhythmic activity bring the cast together. Rocky drums and driving guitar fuel an intense crescendo before an abrupt halt. It's a set that declares intent, imagination and prowess and as such promises much for the future.

For more information, visit slamproductions.net. Adam Fairhall is at ABC No-Rio Sep. 13th. See Calendar.



VOLK
Ochion Jewell (s/r)
by Donald Elfman

VOLK arose from a dark incident in saxophonist Ochion Jewell's life. The victim of police brutality, he took the opportunity to create a powerful recording

that finds beauty emerging from that place of darkness.

Four suites draw inspiration from different places. The first, "At the End of the World, Where the Lions Weep" and "Pathos/Logos", is inspired by Andalusian music. The opening theme and ensuing improvisation feel chant-like with Jewell's tenor intoning, almost shofar-like, themes of longing and unity. In the second suite, "Kun Mun Kultani Tulisi" is dark and tragic but its very expression, with Amino Belyamani inside the piano and Jewell exhorting on the tenor, gives purpose and beauty to Finnish folk melody. "Give Us A Drink Of Water", a jig, suggests both dance and the pulse of modern classical music, while "Pass Fallow, Gallowglass" is based on Scottish ballads with bassist Sam Minaie suggesting bagpipes. In the third suite, North Africa meets the Delta for "Gnawa Blues", guitarist Lionel Loueke taking the melody and wailing in his solo until Belyamani enters for some deeply rooted piano, followed by "The Master", guitar and tenor coalescing over a strong rhythm for music based on the drumming of the West African Ewe people, meeting the forces of what Jewell calls "in-your-face-hard-bop".

Jewell looks to Appalachia for the final suite. "Oh Shenandoah" spins variations on the dark theme with each player digging into the melody: a melancholy opening with Jewell and Minaie, then the saxophonist with the whole band and a contemporary classical sound in the piano section. Finally, Jewell 'sings' "Black is the Colour (of My True Love's Hair)" on tenor, evoking the sounds of traditional country voice.

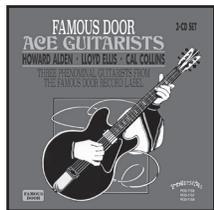
Ochion Jewell plays to find meaning and has made a recording both brilliant and original.

For more information, visit ochion.com. This project is at Cornelia Street Café Sep. 23rd. See Calendar.

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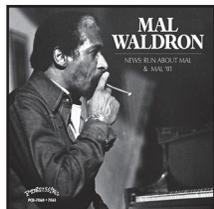
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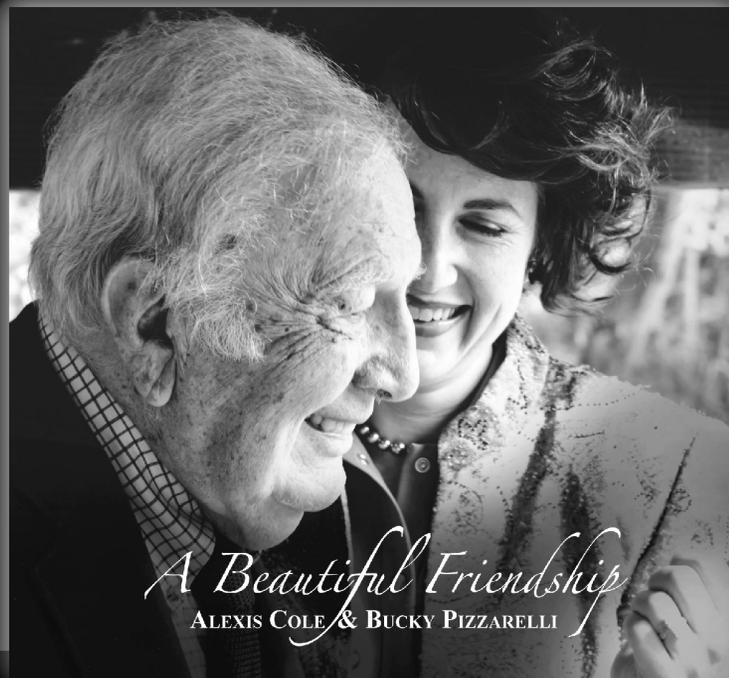
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