

Uwe Oberg/Christof Thewes/Michael Griener
Lacy Pool
hatOLOGY 676

Creating something original from an already existing musical cannon is a challenge acknowledged but rarely demonstrated by many contemporary improvisers. Homage doesn't mean recreation, as some players have sadly proven. Instead redefinition of already created compositions involves tinkering with the material while staying true to its underlying ideas. This is what Lacy Pool does

Avoiding the majority of the most recognized tunes composed by American soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy (1934-2004), the trio members instead concentrates on 10 others, interpolating their own instant compositions within two of the Lacy tunes. Also note that there's no saxophone of any size on this CD. Plus, while Lacy had close relationships with trombonists such as Roswell Rudd and pianists such as Bobby Few, the piano-trombone-drum voicing here adds a unique tonal variant to his work.

Sophisticated in their references, the German players manage to expose the influences that created the Lacy oeuvre as they reinterpret it. Offenbach-born pianist Uwe Oberg for instance – who works with dance and theatre creators as well as musicians such as saxophonist Evan Parker – uses his command of Thelonious Monk material to add a Monkish cast of splayed chords to “After Hemline”. Lacy's often-stated admiration for Monk is made that much clearer with Oberg's key sweeps and portamento runs. Then as the piece gathers steam, its bouncy, skipping narrative, which lurches and swerves but never frays, is reminiscent of the solos of Misha Mengleberg, with whom Lacy also had an association.

Affiliated throat glossolalia with a Dixieland tinge displayed by trombonist Christof Thewes on this tune and others imply that he may be one of the few ‘bonemen able to adopt Rudd's primitivist-modern style to the 21st Century. The trombonist, who also teaches at the Musikhochschule Saarbrücken, is a new member of the Globe Unity Orchestra, with which Lacy often worked. On “After Hemline”, his plunger rhythms share space with relaxed grace notes. Before he plays the theme again in progressively lower tones, Thewes showcases flutter-tongue extension. Meanwhile Oberg's internalized stride work appears to heading towards “Ain't She Sweet”, while Michael Griener's cymbal clacks and thick drum pulses hold the piece together. Nuremberg-born, Berlin-based Griener is versatile enough to work with dancers, mainstreamers, pianist Ulrich Gumpert's octet and, among other groups, another trio with Thewes.

The taffy-pull rubato extensions Thewes brings to a tune such as “Tarte” confirms his resourcefulness. They evolve in a contrapuntal fashion alongside Oberg's low- frequency chording which outlines a separate but harmonically congruent line. Griener's dramatic drum rolls second both men's work. The trombonist's speech-like textures and slippery narratives ejaculates duck-like blats if needed, as on “Flakes”. But here these extensions are partnered with gamelan-like hand bell strokes from the drummer plus some low-frequency syncopation from the pianist.

This sort of strategy recreates the Lacy compositions in an original fashion, as do other tracks, which add what could only be described as a 1950s rock backbeat or key-clipping from Oberg; gutbucket slurs from Thewes; and rim shot clatters from Griener as at junctures the three seem to be channeling Willie “The Lion” Smith, Kid Ory or Baby Dodds respectively.

Nevertheless, a piece such as “Retreat” turns Lacyism on its head. Slithering and stopping, its linearism is confirmed by forte and staccato piano patterning, drum pops and plunger growls that combine with the other timbres to resemble Scottish bagpipe expositions.

Confirming that the music of a true original like Lacy is best celebrated by adding to it rather than copying, the three leap into the Lacy Pool at the deep end. Accepting this challenge, they still manage an Olympic medal-like performance.

-- Ken Waxman

Track Listing: 1. Stamps 2. The Crust 3. Blinks 4. After Hemlines 5. The Dumps 6. Flakes 7. The Whammies! 8. Retreat 9. Tarte 10. Raps

Personnel: Christof Thewes (trombone); Uwe Oberg (piano) and Michael Griener (drums and percussion)

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