

Francois Couture, *All-Music Guide*, 2003

**Uwe Oberg & Xu Fengxia - Looking (NurNichtNur CD 102 10 23)**

Even though she now works mostly in Germany, the guzheng player Xu Fengxia maintains deep-running roots in Chinese tradition. Her instrument of choice, the guzheng, is often described as a smaller version of the Japanese koto. It shares its heavy microtonal pitchbend but has a tone closer to the dulcimer. Fengxia can make it sound like a harp, a banjo, a twangy violin (when she bows it to create full-bodied drones) and, believe it or not, like a guzheng -- which in itself is highly unusual in improvised music. Her partner for this studio session is German avant-garde pianist Uwe Oberg, a man who allies the lightning-fast technique of Borah Bergman with Sophie Agnel or Sylvie Courvoisier's highly developed inner-piano playing. So Oberg shifts between prepared and unprepared piano, Fengxia alternates between straight guzheng, prepared/bowed guzheng and voice (she possesses a rapturing voice), and the many combinations provide a variety of colors and dynamics. Some of these short improvisations (all between one and six minutes), like the two pieces "Beautiful Mountain" and "Five and Some More" have a very traditional Chinese ring (yes, the metallic gamelan-sounding piano in "Beautiful Mountain, Touched" plays a geographical hoax), while a track like "Same Source" (where the guzheng is played like a tabla) and "Inside" (bowed guzheng) seem to originate from another world. Beautiful sonorities and acute listening have turned this album into one of 2003's best improv records.