



Michael Wollny

Michael Wollny Mondenkind

ACT 9765-2 (CD) ★★★★★

Michael Wollny (p). Rec. April 2020



Michael Wollny, now a family man who teaches in academe, put lockdown to good use in April with this exhilarating solo outing – remarkably his first in the idiom. There are moments here when he seems to have four hands not two, such is his command of his instrument, while others where his sometimes eerie angular melodies create haunting reveries or lullabies of ugly beauty. Wollny describes the experience of playing solo piano as characterised by “awareness, anticipation, satisfaction, confidence, almost exultation”, words used by astronaut Michael Collins as he circled the moon alone after Neil Armstrong and “Buzz” Aldrin had landed on its surface. It’s a vivid description as he explores aspects of “being alone” while drawing on, or being inspired by music by Tori Amos, Timber Timbre, Sufjan Stevens, Bryce Dessner, Nico Muhly plus Alban Berg and Rudolph Hindemith (brother of you know who), a collection guaranteed to keep anyone awake at night.

But this album is not about spot-the-influence, it’s about inspiration in the moment, something Wollny has become a master at of late.

Stuart Nicholson

WorldService Project Hiding in Plain Sight

RareNoiseRecords RNR0121/RNR121LP (CD, LP) ★★★★★

Dave Morecroft (ky, v), Ben Powling (s), Kieran McLeod (tb), Arthur O’Hara (b, v) and Luke Reddin-Williams (d, perc). Rec. March 2020



WorldService Project’s personnel have changed markedly since

their first embattled Brexit response, *Serve* (2018), but the assaultive, defiant intent remains. “Politicians used to have to at least pretend to be statesmen... trying to do things for the good of the entire population,” leader Dave Morecroft says in press notes written from self-imposed Roman exile. “Now the whole thing is blown wide apart and it doesn’t seem to matter anymore.”

It’s a council of seeming despair, for a record released just as UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson breezily prepared to break international law. ‘Sex, Lies, Lies and Lies’ is one response, Morecroft’s murmured Italian vocal rising from the miasmic tension of his thriller keyboards into a raging aria declaring unity with Europe. The Higgly Giggly Wiggly Woo’ sees the return of regular outsider clown character Mr. Giggles – part Babadook, part Royston Vasey resident, part ‘sink estate’ victim, ancient as Mr. Punch but mostly Morecroft’s capering alter ego. The stiff, one-legged beat of the doomy ‘Where Am I?’, which achieves more antic abrasion as space-age fuzz guitar and keyboards prance and shriek over a glowering bass-line, is among the more interesting preludes to the many anthemic choruses which stud the album, ready to trigger audience reactions when they can. The effectiveness of such confrontation is always uncertain. The hymnal quiet of ‘Onward’, an inclusive embrace to wander into the night with, is therefore a welcome conclusion, Morecroft’s solo quite beautiful.

Nick Hasted

CD Shortcuts: New Releases

Maria Chiara Argirò + Jamie Leeming Flow

Cavalo Records ★★

This Italian London-based young pianist together in duo with jazz-orientated guitarist Jamie Leeming are inspired by Mediterranean/middle-eastern folk, post-rock and classical music, and create unfussy, serenely atmospheric chamber music that borders on New Age.

The Awakening Orchestra Vol II: To Call Her to a Higher Plain

Biophilia Records ★★★★★

Composer-bandleader Kyle Saulnier doesn’t do things by half: the sequel to 2014’s *Vol I* is ambitious yet lyrical with Nine Inch Nails and Bill Frisell tunes, a jazz symphony thrown in, and the politically-inspired, titular violin concerto, yet it’s convincingly handled by all concerned.

Bright Dog Red Somethin’ Comes Along

Ropeadope ★★

Founded by drummer Joe Pignato, five-piece Bright Dog Red’s mash-up of Maceo-style funk, old-school rap and jazz-rock riffage is an oddly unsatisfying one on the whole.

Jesse Fischer Resilience

Self-released ★★

The young Brooklyn-based multi-keyboardist’s contemporary mainstream groove pop-fusion draws subtle influences from folk roots music but it’s rather bland and too reliant on its guest stars including Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah and Becca Stevens.

Hazar feat. Al Di Meola Reincarnated

RecordJet ★★

Formerly recognised as a virtuoso on the Turkish Saz, Hazar has attuned his skills to the acoustic guitar mixing his folk and classical roots with bossa and flamenco: the duo with Al Di Meola on Chick Corea’s ‘Spain’ works, but he’s out of his depth on the jazz standards.

Chien Chien Lu The Path

Self-released ★★★★★

A young Taiwan-born vibraphonist is joined by members of Jeremy Pelt Quintet (of which she’s a member) including the leader for her debut, she has an effervescently mainstream jazz voice subtly enhanced by her background in classical and indigenous folk music.

Emi Makabe Anniversary

Greenleaf Music ★★★★★

This haunting, folk-pop inspired singer-songwriter who also plays shamisen is a bit like a Japanese

Sandy Denny and has sensitive support from first-rate jazz personnel that includes Thomas Morgan, Kenny Wollesen and pianist Vitor Gonçalves.

Raphaël Pannier Faune

French Paradox ★★★★★

French drummer Pannier’s dynamic debut features bassist François Moutin, saxophonist Miguel Zenón and pianist Aaron Goldberg and draws from his classical and jazz background for jazz rearrangements of piano pieces by Messiaen, Ravel to Wayne Shorter and choro bandolinist Hamilton de Holanda.

Quintopus The Adjacent Possible

ears&eyes Records ★★★★★

Quintopus, a quirky quartet from Rochester New York, do avant-garde quietly with inspiration from alt. rock, blues and jazz; the new recording, released only on cassette and download, favours static harmony, circular improv and extended technique.

The Royal Bopsters Party of Four

Motéma Music ★★

A male-female MOR jazz vocalese quartet (with guests Bob Dorough and Sheila Jordan) inspired by Lambert, Hendricks & Ross and Manhattan Transfer but without the pungency of their forebears sing rearranged standards and a more unusual vocalese repertoire.

Dominik Wania Lonely Shadows

ECM ★★★★★

The pianist, a member of the Maciej Obara quartet, goes solo with a series of spontaneous improvs on his ECM debut, mainly informed by 20th century impressionism and more abstract composition and executed with elegance, poise, fleetness of touch and an organic-sounding flow of ideas.

WHO Trio STRELL

Clean Feed Records ★★

This Swiss-based avant-jazz trio (drummer Gerry Hemingway, pianist Michel Wintsch, bassist Bernanz Oester) was formed in 1998 and their idiosyncratic Ellington and Strayhorn covers are playful, spaciouly percussive and quirky while remaining melody-driven.

Miki Yamanaka Human Dust Suite

Outside in Music ★★

This Japanese-born, New York-based pianist-vibraphonist’s quartet (which includes bassist Orlando le Fleming) offers enjoyable tributes to Lee Konitz, Mulgrew Miller and Randy Weston, even if a more reflective, extended central suite feels too subdued overall.

Selwyn Harris