



Michael Wollny Trio
Weltentraum

ACT 9563
★★★★★

Innovative, widely versed and also obliquely romantic, German pianist Michael Wollny is making some impressive and artful noise in the realm of the new piano trio tradition, especially in the post-Bad Plus era. He steps upward and outward on his ambitious and delightful new trio album, *Weltentraum*. With his allies, bassist Tim Lefebvre and longtime drummer Eric Schaefer, Wollny makes a taut ensemble pact over unexpected terrain.

On this intriguing 14-track set, Wollny focuses on the thematic and picturesque rather than overstating his prowess as soloist. He also abides by the new piano trio aesthetic of finding worthy material from whatever surprising cultural corner he finds suitable for reframing. Thus, we get material by indie rock heroes The Flaming Lips (“Be Free, A Way”), famed contemporary German classical composer Wolfgang Rihm (“Hochrot,” played with a Brad Mehldau-ish minimalist tremolo effect) and 20th-century icon Edgard Varèse (“Un Grand Sommeil Noir”). Even music composed by Friedrich Nietzsche (yes, that Nietzsche) works into the album’s high-low cultural mosaic, with two variations on “Fragment An Sich.”

Adventurism takes too wide of a turn on the album’s final track, the extended, 8-minute-plus version of Pink’s “God Is A DJ,” featuring vocalist Theo Bleckmann. It’s an art pop anomaly that seems ill-fitted to the otherwise instrumental expanse of the album. That disorienting step aside, *Weltentraum* succeeds in pushing the proverbial envelope and lending new insights into the shifting paradigm of what makes a jazz piano trio tick, and think.

—Josef Woodard

Weltentraum: Nacht; Be Free, A Way; Little Person; Lasse!; Fragment An Sich I; In Heaven; Rufe In Der Horchenden Nacht; When The Sleeper Awakes; Hochrot; Mühlrad; Engel; Un Grand Sommeil Noir; Fragment An Sich II; God Is A DJ. (57:30)

Personnel: Michael Wollny, piano; Tim Lefebvre, bass; Eric Schaefer, drums; Theo Bleckmann, vocals, electronics (14).

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Oran Etkin
Gathering Light

MOTÉMA 141
★★★★½

Recording projects that attempt to create a pan-national amalgam or are self-consciously thematic are often doomed to fail. So why is clarinetist Oran Etkin’s *Gathering Light* nearly perfect? A lot of the credit goes to the tight relationship between the leader and bassist Ben Allison’s lyrical playing. Nasheet Waits’ lithe, telepathic drumming also contributes mightily. But, what really pushes the recording close to 5-star status is the seemingly effortless chemistry among the five musicians and their relationship to compositions that span several continents without making much fuss about creating

truly global music.

Etkin is a sprightly player with beautiful intonation and articulation. His tone covers a lot of territory. As an improviser, he can make traditional Israeli songs like “Der Gasn Nign” and “Shirim Ad Kan” and the Japanese lullaby “Takeda” sound like organic pieces designed to be expressed through a keening bass clarinet with a sharp edge. His compositions—most notably the trio of dance-themed songs—display an ability to balance adeptly between freedom and structure.

The range on *Gathering Light* is also notable, stretching from Etkin’s spare tribute to Louis Armstrong—his piping clarinet sailing over the barest whisper of bass and brushes—to the rich, layered “Gratitude,” which features resonant, woody textures between bookends of bass clarinet that burbles and groans like a didgeridoo.

The only misstep is Etkin’s “Scattering Light,” the composition and performance that comes closest to contemporary jazz, with Waits’ prominent broken rhythmic gestures and Lionel Loueke’s bluesy guitar solo. While it completes the global circle by centering the recording in Brooklyn, it lacks the character of what precedes and follows.

—James Hale

Gathering Light: Gambang Suling; Taxi Dance; Shirim Ad Kan; Gratitude; Takeda (Homesick Blues); All I Really Want To Do Is Dancel; Scattering Light; Tony’s Dance; Der Gasn Nign (Street Song); Distant Sounds Of Change; Guangzhou Taxi; When It’s Sleepy Time Down South. (55:56)

Personnel: Oran Etkin, clarinet, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone; Curtis Fowlkes, trombone; Lionel Loueke, guitar, vocals (4); Ben Allison, bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

Ordering info: motema.com

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