

Michael Blake *Tiddy Boom*

SUNNYSIDE 1396

★★★★½

With composition titles that allude to both Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, saxophonist Michael Blake signals that he is reaching back six decades and more for inspiration on *Tiddy Boom*, while the presence of fellow modernists—and members of the Jazz Composers Collective—pianist Frank Kimbrough and bassist Ben Allison lets listeners know this will not be a mere nostalgia trip. Instead, it is more like a quick spin on a fun-house ride, with Blake's tenor burbling and barking out references to past masters while remaining firmly planted in the present.

Just listen to the 80-second solo coda on the

Fred Frith/John Butcher *The Natural Order*

NORTHERN SPY 060

★★★★

Forty years ago, Fred Frith turned the guitar world on its collective ear with his 1974 landmark, *Guitar Solos*. A generation of six-string skronkers, including Nels Cline, Elliott Sharp and Marc Ribot, were profoundly affected by that improvising manifesto. Nearly 70 albums later, the iconoclastic guitarist is still at it, creating otherworldly sounds with his table-top guitar approach and a remarkably fertile imagination. On this adventurous outing, Frith goes head-to-head for the first time with avant-garde saxophonist John Butcher. The 10 distinctive tracks they cut in a single stretch in 2009 were done live in the studio and appear here in the order they were created.

Of course, some won't recognize this as music at all. There are no songs, but rather sonic episodes that cover a vast range of dynamics, from harsh squalls and overtones ("The Unforgettable Line") to some surprisingly delicate moments ("Turning Away In Time") to the purely ambient ("Be Again, Be Again"). For sheer over-the-top skronking, go no further than "The Welts, The Squeaks, The Belts, The Shrieks." To see just how fast Frith's mind works, listen to his rapid-fire flood of ideas on "Butterflies Of Vertigo."

Regarding Frith's fabled unorthodox vocabulary, it's hard to understand just what he is doing to produce these otherworldly tones and textures from track to track. His trademark extended tech-

niques (brushing and smacking the strings vigorously with his hand or a whisk broom) combine with Butcher's percussive slap-tonguing on the soprano saxophone to create a frenetic dialogue on the 13-minute "Colour Of An Eye Half Seen." Jim Hall and Lee Konitz it ain't. But these two kindred spirits do share a similar sense of exploration and discovery that is strictly in the moment, just as those jazz giants do. Even if it is musically on a different planet.

title track: a roller coaster of slithery asides, roaring exclamations and raucous squawks, all delivered with authority and wit. On "Hawk's Last Rumba," he rolls the slow, sultry, grainy sound of his horn around like good whiskey on the tongue. The risk with high-concept projects like this is that not every player will be equally engaged, or that the idea of dipping into the deep past will come off sounding stale or ironic. Those dangers are never realized here. This is a quartet that sounds like it is operating with one mind; witness the boppish unison head and tight drums-bass hookup on "Coastline" or the way that Kimbrough's rollicking piano break on "Letters In Disguise" gives way seamlessly to Blake's tenor solo. On "A Good Day For Pres," Rudy Royston hints at a second-line rhythm in his rolls, but the focus remains on a stunningly gorgeous duet between Blake and Allison, and the beauty of the saxophonist's tone. In places like the gospel-influenced "The Ambassadors" and the aptly titled "Boogalooop," the years fall away, and it is clear that this is music unbound in time—as fresh-sounding today as it might have been in the '50s.

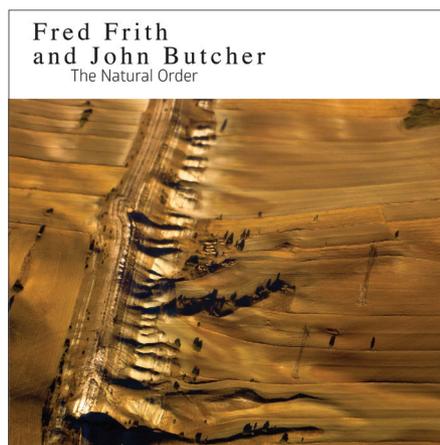
The frugal consumer might flinch at the sub-50-minute timing of *Tiddy Boom*, but with a package that sounds this perfectly executed, that seems banal.

—James Hale

Tiddy Boom: Skinny Dip; Tiddy Boom; Hawk's Last Rumba; Boogalooop; Coastline; Letters In Disguise; A Good Day For Pres; The Ambassadors. (47:03)

Personnel: Michael Blake, tenor saxophone; Frank Kimbrough, piano; Ben Allison, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

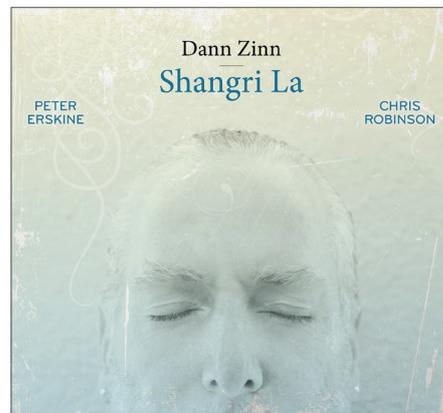
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



The Natural Order: That Unforgettable Line; Delirium Perhaps; Dance First, Think Later; Faults Of His Feet; Colour Of An Eye Half Seen; Turning Away In Time; The Welts, The Squeaks, The Belts, The Shrieks; Butterflies Of Vertigo; Be Again, Be Again; Accommodating The Mess. (54:57)

Personnel: Fred Frith, guitar; John Butcher, saxophones.

Ordering info: northernspyrecords.com



Dann Zinn *Shangri La*

Z MUSIC 103

★★★★

Shangri La features a bassless trio consisting of tenor, guitar and drums. While one may at first think of the Paul Motian Trio with Joe Lovano and Bill Frisell, the music of Dann Zinn's group sometimes sounds closer to that of world-music group Oregon, although played with more fire.

The versatility of guitarist Chris Robinson, who sounds equally at home getting an acoustic folk sound as he does sounding rockish, is a key to the group's success. Also quite significant is the sensitivity of drummer Peter Erskine, who often plays quietly in a supportive role yet gives the group a strong forward momentum when it is needed.

Dann Zinn is generally the lead voice, displaying a large tone on tenor. He contributed eight of the 11 selections on *Shangri La*, also interpreting themes by Brahms, Puccini and Green Day. "Daydreams" could be considered folk music except for the fairly free improvising during the solos. On "Voodoo," Zinn plays octave jumps effortlessly, and his free-form flights are more rhythmic and accessible than one might expect. The loose ballad "Shangri La" precedes an intense tradeoff by his electrified tenor and Robinson's passionate guitar on "Wanderlust."

The statements by guitar and tenor on "Rain" are often out of tempo but never run short of ideas. After a brief flute interlude, Zinn uplifts Green Day's "Good Riddance," turning it into a folksy piece that one could imagine Charles Lloyd exploring. "The Bullfighter" is catchy, fits its title well and could be adopted by other musicians. Lyrical ballad treatments of themes by Brahms and Puccini (the latter has some fiery interplay by tenor and guitar) sandwich an exciting jam on the catchy and funky "Tic Tac Toe."

All in all, *Shangri La* is a continually intriguing set of adventurous music that is often surprisingly melodic.

—Scott Yanow

Shangri La: Daydreams; Voodoo; Shangri La; Wanderlust; Rain; Flute Intro; Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life); The Bullfighter; Brahms 3rd Symphony, 3rd Movement, Poco Allegretto; Tic Tac Toe; Chi Bel Sogno Di Doretta. (70:05)

Personnel: Dann Zinn, tenor saxophone, processed sax, wood flute; Chris Robinson, guitar, baritone guitar, guitar loops, ukulele; Peter Erskine, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: dannzinn.com