

Free-Jazz and Soul Grooves

Hallelujah for beautifully produced objects d'art in the virtual age—particularly when they're devoted to living artists and not just bygone icons. The eight-CD box set **Wood Flute Songs: Anthology/Live, 2006–2012** (AUM Fidelity 080–87 ★★★★★) encapsulates the protean spirit of William Parker—bassist, composer-poet and leader of multiple bands on the New York scene. Totalling some nine hours of multitrack concert recordings, the set attests to the 61-year-old Parker's ability to invoke both "the history and the mystery," as he describes the living art of jazz. The Bronx native played extensively in groups led by Cecil Taylor and David S. Ware, but he has grown increasingly prolific as a leader over the past decade-and-a-half. A majority of Parker's compositions in this box are making their debut on record, with some rivaling his previous best. His music breathes the air of Ornette Coleman and Curtis Mayfield, Beat-era Marrakech and the Caribbean; it's free-jazz and medina wails, soul grooves and psychedelic lyricism.

This set has at its core the William Parker Quartet, founded in 2000 and featuring alto saxophonist Rob Brown, trumpeter Lewis Barnes and drummer Hamid Drake. *Wood Flute Songs* includes two double-disc live documents of the band—one recorded at Yoshi's in Oakland in 2006, the other the next year in Houston at DiverseWorks. Both shows brim with ensemble invention, the instruments entwining as second nature. One of today's most underrated altoists, Brown is the group's prime mover of emotional energy, particularly at full cry. Barnes' horn glints with silvery incisiveness, while Drake is a drummer of heavy-hitting physicality, all roiling polyrhythms and African accents. If not as lithe as some, Parker's bass playing throbs with sinewy phrasing and old-wood tone, driving the band through the strength of his imagination.

Highlights from the quartet's Oakland concert include a fantastical 43-minute sequence of "Alphaville/Daughter's Joy/Golden Bell." From the Houston gig, there's a great version of the tuneful swinger "O'Neal's Porch," plus "Red Desert"—where Parker makes like a tripping muezzin as he plays a *gralla*, an archaic double-reed instrument that here evokes *Naked Lunch* as much as *The Sheltering Sky*.

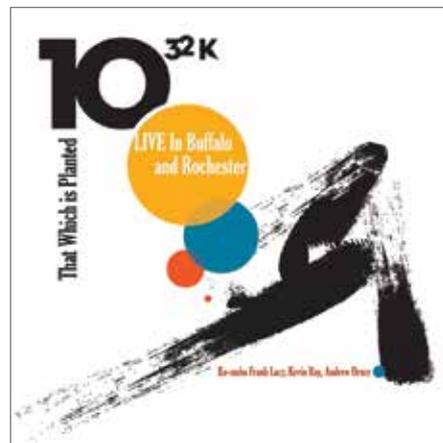
Augmented by shamanistic pianist Cooper-Moore, the Parker quartet morphs into the latest incarnation of his quintet, In Order To Survive. The band's powerhouse show at the 2012 Vision Festival in New York was captured for this box. Parker calls Cooper-Moore as a player "full of the blues and African funk," and that description



suits the band as a whole, with an admixture of noir lament on "Theme For Rondo Hattan." Another Parker band expanded from the core quartet is Raining On The Moon, which adds pianist Eri Yamamoto and deep-soul vocalist Leena Conquest. This set's 2012 live recording of all-new material from Montreal starts with "3+3 = Jackie McLean," a sublime folk-jazz homage not only to the titular alto hero but to Sidney Bechet, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Zora Neale Hurston and the legacy of Harlem. When Conquest delivers such lines as "bring him his horn, let him blow strong" in her proud, clear, golden-hued voice, she taps a bottomless well of feeling. "For Abbey Lincoln" and the nostalgic "Sweet Breeze" are further stunners, with Parker's melodies fit to charm snakes.

In addition to the limited-edition box, this set's concerts are available as individual downloads. Hardcore avant-improv fans will be drawn to the album showcasing a one-off septet with Parker's quartet joined by violinist Billy Bang, cornetist Bobby Bradford and alto-sax vet James Spaulding, taped at the Vision Festival in 2009. Bang brought his "Alabama magic," as Parker puts it, to an untamed take on "Wood Flute Song," the bassist's singing, dancing tribute to Don Cherry. The box's remaining disc documents a 2011 concert at Switzerland's AMR Festival where the quartet became the Creation Ensemble when enlarged by four saxophones, second trumpet, bass clarinet, additional double-bass and voice. The arrangements are exciting, even if vocalist Ernie Odooom's rough expressivity won't be for everyone. That show's heart is "Psalm For Billy Bang," written for the mortally ill fiddler, who passed just five days after the concert. **DB**

Ordering info: aumfidelity.com



10³²K *That Which Is Planted: Live In Buffalo And Rochester*

PASSIN' THRU 41231

★★★★½

In Ecclesiastes, it is written that there is a time to plant, and a time to pick that which is planted. Ku-umba Frank Lacy planted his free-jazz seeds in the '80s and '90s, when he worked with Henry Threadgill and Lester Bowie; more recently, he's split his time between acts like D'Angelo and the Mingus Big Band. But when bassist and long-time Lacy fan Kevin Ray sought to play with him, that older material is what he wanted to play. Lacy had to get reacquainted with territory he had not inhabited in quite some time. Nonetheless, there were still some crops available to be pulled from the ground, and with the help of an essential third pair of hands—drummer Andrew Drury—10³²K has obtained a thoroughly respectable yield.

The group has not, however, lived up to the promise of its name, which refers to the Planck temperature. This is the highest temperature at which known physics work; get any higher, and the understood properties of particles and energy seem not to hold. While this group generates appreciable warmth, its jazz is never *that* hot. Instead, the trio plays from a book that closed during the first Reagan administration. The newest tunes here, Joe Ford's "Give It Some Thought" and Steve McCall's "BK," date from the early '80s, while tunes from Albert Ayler, Charles Mingus and Henry Threadgill go back even further.

The performances are full of energy and appreciation. Lacy's horn playing is brash and soulful, and Ray's upright bass sound is satisfyingly big, while his phrasing is yielding where it needs to be. But this feels like the work of musicians playing what they know. It falls to percussionist Drury to shake things up, but even though he does what is required by throwing in arrhythmic pure-sound explorations and rock-derived grooves, it's not enough to make this music sound like a fresh harvest. —Bill Meyer

That Which Is Planted: Ghosts; Give It Some Thought; Ecclesiastics Intro; Ecclesiastics; BK; Midnight Sun.

Personnel: Ku-umba Frank Lacy, trombone, flumpet, vocals, percussion; Kevin Ray, bass; Andrew Drury, drums, percussion. (65:59)

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