

Schlachtfest Session II

Various

Klangbad CD

When Improv began to detach itself from jazz around four decades ago, to be generally recognised as a separate genre, the vast majority of its practitioners were jazzers still. Within the last 20 years, however, more and more free improvisors have emerged through other areas of music. Not untypically, the ensemble performing here is comprised of one elder statesman of free jazz (John Tchicai), four avant folk musicians from Glasgow, and three Krautrock pioneers (Jan Fride, Hans Joachim Irmler and Roman Bunka).

Of course, improvisation means different things in different genres. As a rule it involves cautious variations and embellishments for classical performers, incontinent expansions of riffs for rock musicians, and, increasingly in mainstream jazz, the use of a kind of rondo form giving precedence to frequent returns to the theme. This here is the real deal, though, involving performers and listeners in a journey of genuine discovery.

The best Improv always pays close attention to textural considerations, but this group's instrumentation gives it a head start, with the oud (Bunka) and bouzouki (Hladowski) supplying a brittle but highly attractive edge. There's also a gorgeous solo by Bunka on "Aah". Murray plays a splendidly booting trombone.

For several years now Tchicai's main horn has been the tenor, and his sound on the bigger sax is as beautiful and emotionally affecting as his alto tone always was. His unmistakable anthemic lines, stately and ritualistic yet saturated with blues feeling, somehow manage to evoke simultaneously the bleak beauty of Scandinavian snowscapes and the languorous, potentially oppressive humidity of more southerly climes. Even without Tchicai, this would be a marvellous album, but with him it achieves an extra magical dimension.

Barry Witherden