

A Master Speaks
George Coleman (Smoke Sessions)
 by Eric Wendell

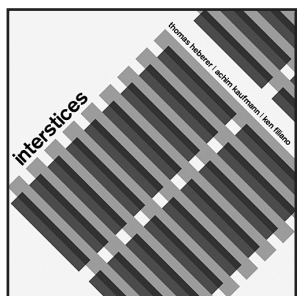
What makes a jazz musician a “master?” Is it the cumulative years of being a workhorse in an evolving art form or the reality that there might be more solos behind than ahead of them? On tenor saxophonist George Coleman’s latest album *A Master Speaks*, master means having the ability to translate emotion through the bell of a horn, deciphering the human condition through beautiful sonority and that the only thing age proves is that there is still so much to say.

On his first release in nearly 20 years, Coleman’s tone and melodic clarity are as crisp as ever. Beginning with opener “Invitation”, he puts his stamp on this popular standard by displaying a warm, inviting tone that easily spreads across the whole album. The subsequent “The Shadow of Your Smile” exploits this warmth to near smooth jazz levels without quite going the distance, walking the fine line between light and syrupy.

Coleman pays tribute to his mentor, guitarist B.B. King, with “Blues for B.B.”, a glossy blues that shows the leader in a more unbridled style, perfectly playing into the dedicatee’s Memphis-inspired tone and providing listeners with the best performance on the record. Coleman shows how well he grooves with his band on “You Will Never Know What You Mean To Me”, pianist Mike LeDonne expertly locking into Coleman’s phrasing, resulting in a lively musical dialogue. The most poignant moment comes on “Sonny’s Playground” when Coleman and his drummer son George Jr. playfully trade four-bar solos, conjuring the image of father and son sharing an impromptu repartee.

While *A Master Speaks* marches along the footsteps of past tenor saxophone-led albums, it’s exciting to hear Coleman living fully up to the title of “master” and confirming that when he speaks, we had better listen.

For more information, visit smokesessionsrecords.com. This project is at Smoke Apr. 8th-10th. See Calendar.



Interstices
Thomas Heberer/Achim Kaufmann/Ken Filiano (Nuscope)
 by Brad Cohan

New York City, “the jazz capital of the world”, may own another distinction to which, arguably, no other musical locale can stake its claim: “trumpeter capital of the world”. The list of visionaries is a long one and for the past several years, Germany’s Thomas Heberer has been on it.

As esteemed *TNYCJR* scribe Clifford Allen noted in last month’s Artist Feature, Heberer’s career arc (longtime membership in the ICP Orchestra and early stint in the Berlin Contemporary Jazz Orchestra) and his workhorse modus operandi (nine recordings as

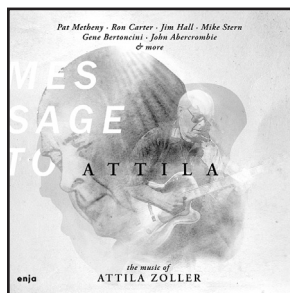
co-leader and collaborator since 2014) has kept him busy on both sides of the pond. That spurt of productivity continues here.

While Heberer and pianist Achim Kaufmann have teamed up on record before (most recently on 2011’s duo set, *Knoten*), *Interstices* welcomes bassist Ken Filiano and it marks the recorded debut of a trio dating back to the mid ‘80s. Unsurprisingly, the decades-long kinship translates sublimely on record. Comprised of four compositions (a pair by Heberer and one each courtesy of Kaufmann and Filiano) and five improvisations lending an elastic and airy ambience sprinkled with knotty spasms, *Interstices* exudes discipline and elegance with an unhinged mindset.

The 61-minute set manages to be a breezy affair given its mostly free-improvisational bent; the trio may rumble, squelch and clatter on the opening “Annoatok”, but *Interstices* is far from abrasive. In fact, the vibe—led by Heberer’s gorgeous and soaring bluster—is warm, melodic and spirited. Kaufmann is on fire here: his high-wired piano fingering wizardry helps elevate *Interstices* to swinging and hardbopping sonic heights. His playing is a frenetic revelation, constantly in motion through Heberer’s wails and whispers and Filiano’s beefy, plucked rhythms and bow-on-strings scraping. Cuts like Kaufmann’s nine-minute “Passagg Amnesia” and collaborative “Qts 4 Ct” are angular and bouncy jolts crystallizing the trio’s unmistakable conversational interplay.

With excellent liner notes penned by the aforementioned Allen and album artwork sprung from the creative mind of Mike Joyce (also responsible for the packaging behind 2014’s *Miner’s Pick* by Heberer and bassist Pascal Niggenkemper), *Interstices* is the ultimate package: music, words and design.

For more information, visit nuscope.org. Heberer is at Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center Apr. 8th with Yoni Kretzmer, The Firehouse Space Apr. 10th with Ebran Elisha and ShapeShifter Lab Apr. 14th with Patrick Brennan. Filiano is at Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center Apr. 2nd and 10th with Jason Kao Hwang, The Firehouse Space Apr. 8th and Barbès Apr. 9th with Anders Nilsson. See Calendar.



Message to Attila: The Music of Attila Zoller
Various Artists (Enja)
 by Andrey Henkin

Hungarian guitarist Attila Zoller (Jun. 13th, 1927-Jan. 25th, 1998) was among the few straightahead European jazz musicians to have transitioned to a successful career in the U. S. during the ‘loosening’ of the borders in the ‘60s. Others on the short list include Joe Zawinul, Philip Catherine, George Mraz, Miroslav Vitous, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, Jean-Luc Ponty and Gabor Szabo. Yet, despite being a student of and then collaborator with one of the fathers of modern jazz guitar in Jim Hall, Zoller’s name is likely the least familiar in the above list.

If you can judge a man by his friends then producer/arranger/fellow guitarist David Becker, who met Zoller briefly in the ‘90s, has convened quite the docket for this overdue tribute. Fellow plectrists include Hall, Mike Stern, Gene Bertoncini, Pat Metheny, John Abercrombie and Zoller’s former student Peter Bernstein (to mention only the Americans) while bassist Ron Carter (who made three albums with Zoller between 1966-79) appears to introduce the album with a brief solo/spoken word track and play on three

tracks (heartfelt missives from Bernstein, Bertoncini, Stern, Abercrombie and bassist Michael Formanek end the disc). The music, apart from one live duet between Hall and Metheny on Zoller’s “The Birds and The Bees” made several months after Zoller’s death, comes from 2012 and 2014 recording sessions in California, New York, Zoller’s adopted home of Vermont (where he founded the still-running Vermont Jazz Center) and Germany, the site of his early career.

Most of the tunes had recorded premieres in the ‘90s while three are from Zoller’s ‘60s songbook (8 of the 12 can be found on *Lasting Love*, Zoller’s 1997 solo disc for Acoustic Music). If a complaint can be made, it is that for some reason Zoller’s collaboration with pianist Don Friedman, three amazing albums from 1964-66, is overlooked, both compositionally and through the non-inclusion of Friedman on this album.

With such individual players, this album is not about Zoller’s unique, multi-phasic playing but, rather, focuses on his composing, born of the commingling of his ethnic roots and the international jazz tradition. “Struwelpeter”, a duet between guitarist Helmut Kagerer (see the 1995 duo album *Common Language* by Zoller and Kagerer on Acoustic Music) and vibraphonist Wolfgang Lackerschmid (who also had a duo album with Zoller, *Live Highlights ‘92*); aforementioned “The Birds and The Bees”; a trio take of “Waltz for Joy” with Abercrombie, Formanek (Zoller’s mid ‘80s bassist of choice) and drummer Bruce Becker (David’s brother and bandmate); and Carter/Becker’s reading of the limp “Peace Tune” may not make Zoller a household name but will at least get him inside the door.

For more information, visit jazzrecords.com/enja. An Attila Zoller tribute with Don Friedman and Peter Bernstein is at Jazz at Kitano Apr. 8th-9th. See Calendar.



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