



Like listening with your fingertips
Agustí Fernández/Johannes Nättesjö (Konvoj)
Spontaneous Soundscapes
Agustí Fernández/Artur Majewski/Rafal Mazur (Not Two)
Sons Of Liberty. Live at Granollers
Memoria Uno (Multikulti Project)
 by John Sharpe

Catalan pianist Agustí Fernández spends a lot of time under the bonnet for someone so gifted on the keys. While such post-John Cage manipulations are almost obligatory for contemporary pianists there are few who have developed such a distinctive style. As a consequence he has established an international reputation and become a mainstay of bassist Barry Guy's New Orchestra and Blue Shroud Band as well as saxophonist Mats Gustafsson's NU Ensemble. Between times he's also led his own groups and partook in numerous ad hoc encounters.

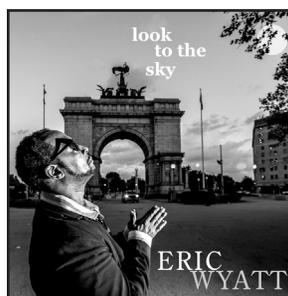
Where such meetings uncover a particular connection they can evolve into a more regular partnership. That's the case with *Like listening with your fingertips*, Fernández' second duo album with Swedish bassist Johannes Nättesjö. It documents a 36-minute performance in 2014 from Malmö, Sweden and presents the two operating in consort at the extremes of their instruments. Fernández draws a huge assortment of sounds from the piano's innards, encompassing spectral reverberations created by rubbing and working the wires, thudding reiterations from dampened strings and plucked harp-like sonorities. Nättesjö does just what's needed rather than pursue virtuosity for its own sake, from gentle ticking to dashing bow work. They take an unhurried approach, beginning with slides along the strings confronting resonant pizzicato inflections. It's spacious with a conspicuous sense of give and take. Fernández' almost rhythmic massage of the strings elicits a wavering sawed response, which, in turn, prompts an equivalent sound from the piano guts. Hammered keys and careening dark arco hint at a trajectory. And indeed a piano tremolo ringing with overtones supplies the first crescendo. But thereafter they exercise restraint, droney and tappy, until the rattling rises to another peak from which emerges a bass soliloquy and an uncoiling keyboard line. In this way they shape a palpable and dramatic narrative arc, which ends with an almost mournful coda of picked strings and soft abrasion.

Fernández also has previous experience with Rafal Mazur, who wields a custom-built acoustic bass guitar. They are joined on *Spontaneous Soundscapes* by Mazur's fellow Pole cornet player Artur Majewski for six on-the-fly collectives. In a typical opening gambit, they begin in conversational mode on "Soundscape 1", but then gradually the silences fill with more interplay up to a climax. Fernández fashions a lovely contrast between resounding key strikes and koto-like picks at the outset, later generating a rippling bedrock for Mazur's bubbling woody twang and Majewski's melodic flurries. Majewski's use of echo dominates "Soundscape 2" to mixed effect, as the predictability of the duplicated phrases, no matter how incisive, becomes tiresome. Much better is "Soundscape 3", which begins sparsely and ascetically as Fernández obtains an almost electronic effect from stroking the strings. After a scratchy middle section, Fernández offers bursts of twisting lyricism. Majewski once again utilizes the echo effect but this time as a decay, which recedes into a backdrop for a nimble bass guitar/piano exchange. On "Soundscape 4", Fernández' ratcheting chafing contributes to an explosive knotty start, which becomes more impressionistic and low-key as it progresses, while on "Soundscape 5" his ghostly shimmer blends

with muted cornet sustains in another fine episode.

On *Sons Of Liberty. Live at Granollers*, Fernández takes his place alongside 12 other musicians for a pair of conductions by Ivan Gonzalez. The concept has taken root across the improvised music universe, though often the seed can be traced back to the work of the late Butch Morris, whose influence on Gonzalez was made overt on *Memoria Uno*'s second release *Cook For Butch*. Similarly, Gonzalez has assembled a group of improvisers who know his working methods but are proficient in their own right. His input can largely be discerned through the rapid dynamic changes, selection of instrumental combinations and some cushioned unison figures. While this is not necessarily the place to appreciate Fernández best, it demonstrates his range. He thickens the ensembles and provides a clanking undertow that unifies the first sections of "Conduccion #75". Some of the most satisfying passages derive from subsets of the ensemble. "Part III" features an accomplished twosome between overblown tenor saxophones and rumbling drums, supported first by ensemble interjections and then by Fernández' rolling bass register, which incrementally becomes more wide-ranging and expansive. In "Part V" of "Conduccion #77" Fernández enjoys a pulsing duet with dancer Sonia Sanchez' footfalls, later outlining an aching melody that wouldn't have been out of place on his wonderful *El Laberint De La Memoria* (Mbari, 2011). Unfortunately the CD is marred by jarring two-second silences inserted into the unbroken performances every time the piece moves from one part to the next, so Bandcamp might furnish the smoothest listen.

For more information, visit konvojrecords.bandcamp.com, nottwo.com and multikulti.com. Fernández is at *Spectrum* Jul. 5th and *Ibeam Brooklyn* Jul. 6th-7th. See *Calendar*.



Look to the Sky
Eric Wyatt (Whaling City Sound)
 by Marco Cangiano

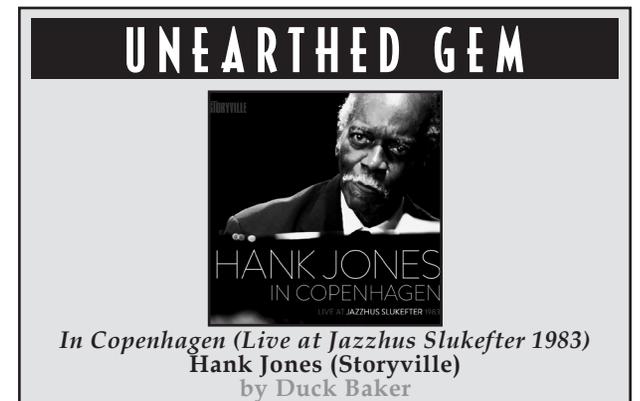
There is an underlying passion in saxophonist Eric Wyatt's dedication to his late parents. The music is deeply rhythmic and energetic, with mostly uptempo originals and a handful of standards.

Pianist Benito Gonzalez is blistering and yet melodic in his best McCoy Tyner-like mode, providing exquisite solos and setting the pace with powerful intros. Trumpeter Keyon Harrold is authoritative and thoughtful, choosing his notes carefully along the whole range of the instrument. The rhythm section is a pleasure, with Kyle Poole and Shinnosuke Takahashi alternating behind the drums and Eric Wheeler's bass deserving perhaps a bit more solo space. All that said, Wyatt and his reeds are the protagonists. His compass points between the late '50s-early '60s Rollins-Coltrane poles, but combined into his own style.

Following the uptempo opener "E-Brother", "Look to the Sky" is a waltz-like medium, characterized by a very open, almost singing theme. "Jolley Charlie", a joyous tribute to Wyatt's father, kicks off in a tight trio setting with splendid bass walk supporting tenor and very creative fours by Poole; then all of a sudden as the trio vanishes Gonzalez emerges playing a series of runs reminiscent of the purest bop tradition. When he is rejoined by Wheeler and Poole the climate turns festive, leading to the final exciting exchanges between Gonzalez and the leader. This is followed by a tribute to Wyatt's mother, "A Psalm for Phinnie", taken at a

slower pace and with a bit more of a blues-modal feel. Herbie Hancock's "One Finger Snap" picks up the pace again with Wyatt alternating on tenor and soprano and Harrold's most forceful solos of the album; Poole's solo is remarkably supple, introducing the final exchanges between saxophone and trumpet. Mongo Santamaria's "Afro Blue" inevitably conjures Coltrane's sound and phrasing, particularly in Wyatt's upper register. Walter Gross' "Tenderly" appears as an outlier but aptly rounds up the album on a more somber note.

For more information, visit whalingcitysound.com. Wyatt is at *Brooklyn Borough Hall* Jul. 6th and *Socrates Sculpture Park* Jul. 12th. See *Calendar*.



In Copenhagen (Live at Jazzhus Slukefter 1983)
Hank Jones (Storyville)
 by Duck Baker

Few musicians have ever been as supremely consistent as Hank Jones. He seemed incapable of playing a bad note during the course of a 65-year career. Arriving in New York in 1944 as the war was winding down and modern jazz was revving up, Jones quickly established himself as one of the first pianists to combine the innovations of Bud Powell with the elegance and polish of Teddy Wilson. In this he is comparable to Al Haig and Duke Jordan and, like them, he made some very memorable recordings with Charlie Parker, but was never a member of Parker's working band. In fact, his regular gig was with Ella Fitzgerald, something that sharpened his skills both as an accompanist and as a soloist who could contribute concise melodic statements.

But descriptions of a player's style don't tell us whether that artist convinces us, something that is especially important when the artist in question wasn't really aiming to be a great innovator. Jones at his best did just what he does on this previously unreleased set; he finds ways to arrange and voice familiar standards that make them sound fresh. And the things he does to bring the tunes out always feel like they are just right for the tune—in other words, he convinces us. Likewise, he structures his improvisations as if every note and every flourish is just right for what came before and leads inevitably to what follows. Standards as well worn as "Tangerine" and "Just Friends" come to new life and bop tunes like "Budo" and "Scrapple From the Apple" are effervescent and buoyant.

For this date Jones was backed by the gifted Danish bassist Mads Vinding and the great drummer Shelly Manne and the sound balance for the most part is perfect. The former is a virtuoso of the post-LaFaro school and, as is true of many in this camp, his tone is not as full as that of earlier bassists, but unlike some of them he knows how to keep out of the soloist's way and his pitch is dependable. His strong suit is his consistently engaging soloing. Manne, of course, never takes a false step. Neither will any fans of mainstream piano jazz who seek out this excellent release.

For more information, visit storyvillerecords.com. A tribute to Jones with pianists Dick Hyman, Rossano Sportiello, Aaron Diehl and Bill Charlap is at *92nd Street Y* Jul. 18th as part of *Jazz in July*. See *Calendar*.