

Lee Konitz/Dan Tepfer/Michael Janisch/Jeff Williams

First Meeting: Live In London, Volume 1

WHIRLWIND 4638

★★★★

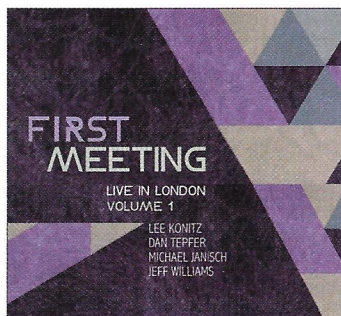
It's impossible to write about saxophonist Lee Konitz without treading a fine line of appearing ageist. How to appreciate the music he makes today without reflecting on his 60-plus years of creativity and noting the allowances and alterations he has had to make to stay vital in his 80s? And vital he most certainly remains. His mind is as inventive as ever, and if he has lost some instrumental power to time, just listen to what is still intact. This 2010 live recording, instigated by bassist Michael Janisch, was cut when Konitz was 82. As is his wont in recent years, Konitz refused to designate a set list or even call tunes on the fly. He loves to keep his bandmates on edge, and keep his own senses sharp. A glance at what compositions were played tells you nothing; being in the moment is everything. Among the most enticing moments here are the engaging interplay between pianist Dan Tepfer and Konitz on "Billie's Bounce" and a hard-grooving Janisch solo on "All The Things You Are." Above all, this is a live recording that captures the essence of improvisational musical dialogue—dull spots and all. The mind may wander a bit during the front half of "Alone Together," where Konitz sits out, but it snaps into focus at things like Tepfer's wry, unaccompanied introduction to "Stella By Starlight," which prompts Konitz to exclaim, "Wise guy!" Half the fun is guessing the response to various musical gambits and where the conversation will lead next.

—James Hale

First Meeting: Live In London, Volume 1: Billie's Bounce; All The Things You Are; Stella By Starlight; Giant Steps; Body And Soul; Alone Together; Subconscious Lee; Outro. (68:10)

Personnel: Lee Konitz, soprano saxophone (2, 5, 6), alto saxophone (1, 3, 7, 8); Dan Tepfer, piano; Michael Janisch, bass; Jeff Williams, drums.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com



Jack Bruce

Silver Rails

ESOTERIC ANTENNA 6278

★★★★

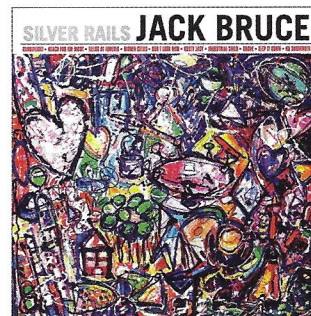
Rock has seldom known a recording artist as intent on following an adventurous solo career path as Cream singer-bassist Jack Bruce. Down his years involved with jazz, blues, r&b and rock, he's been on equal artistic footing with a host of ace associates, including guitarists John McLaughlin, Albert Collins and Frank Zappa; drummer Tony Williams; pianist Carla Bley; keyboardist Bernie Worrell; and, most recently, his fellow members in Spectrum Road—Vernon Reid, Cindy Blackman Santana and John Medeski. Bruce is still going strong at 71. On *Silver Rails*, his first album in a decade, his enthusiasm for intelligent, off-kilter rock is as genuine as ever. The album exudes powerful presence and personality, not unlike his long-ago rock gems *Songs For A Tailor* and *Harmony Row*. Despite some fraying, his supple, one-of-a-kind voice has aged well, with its high-noted sweetness in balance with a bluesy middle range. All 10 songs here, each impressive, are originals, with longtime lyricist Pete Brown contributing his cleverly ambiguous boho-poetry to seven. The material runs the gamut from distorted-bass grunge ("Drone") to catchy, welcoming rock ("Fields Of Forever"). The electric blues "Rusty Lady" (Margaret Thatcher) evokes the best of Cream. "Industrial Child," with only voice, piano and acoustic guitar, is gentle, wistful, beautiful.

—Frank-John Hadley

Silver Rails: Candlelight; Reach For The Night; Fields Of Forever; Hidden Cities; Don't Look Now; Rusty Lady; Industrial Child; Drone; Keep It Down; No Surrender. (47:36)

Personnel: Jack Bruce, vocals, bass guitar, piano, Mellotron; John Medeski, Hammond organ (1, 4, 5, 9), Mellotron (5); Phil Manzanera (1), Bernie Marsden (9, 10); Tony Remy (1–3, 5, 7), Uli Jon Roth (4), Robin Trower (6), Malcolm Bruce (2, 5, 6), Pearse MacIntyre (3), guitars; Derek Nash, tenor saxophone (1–3); Russell Bennett, trumpet (1, 3); Winston Rollins, trombone (1, 3); Frank Tontoth (1–3, 5, 6, 9), Cindy Blackman Santana (4, 10), drums; Milos Pál, djembe (1), drums (8); Rob Cass, percussion (1, 3, 6), backing vocals (10); Aruba Red, Kyla Bruce, Chantelle Nandi, Julie Iwheta, backing vocals (4).

Ordering info: mvdaudio.com



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JD Allen

SAVANT 2139

★★★★½

JD Allen's run at Savant Records—which started with *The Matador And The Bull* in 2012—has encompassed a shifting roster of musicians. After moving away from his longtime rhythm section of Gregg August on bass and Rudy Royston on drums, Allen has tinkered with his lineups. On *Bloom*, he's expanded to a quartet (2013's *Grace* also included a quartet), giving the piano chair to Orrin Evans. Evans—a pianist with a soft touch who provides a rich chordal bed for Allen's extended improvisations—collaborated on the tenor saxophonist's 2002 album, *Pharaoh's Children* (Criss Cross Jazz). Drummer Jonathan Barber is a holdover from *Grace*, and Alexander Claffey, on bass, represents the newcomer of the group. Though the assembly of previous musical partners might seem to invite nostalgia, *Bloom* expands Allen's musical concepts, nurturing melodic lines organically, and continues to step outside traditional jazz boundaries. The focus here is Allen's clean, pure saxophone tone and expansive improvisational abilities. In the liner notes, Allen writes that Olivier Messiaen's harmonic language drove the ideas behind *Bloom*, and on every track, the saxophonist delves deep into non-functional harmony, steering clear of obvious harmonic resolution. The end result is an album full of rewarding, complex music—Allen's unaccompanied version of "Stardust" is a standout—that provides another wrinkle to Allen's jazz outlook.

—Jon Ross

Bloom: Jack's Glass; Bloom; The Secret Lives Of Guest Workers; The Dreamer; A Throng Of Millions Can Be One; If You Could See Me Now; Stardust; The Rule Of Thirds; Pater Noster; Car—Car (The Blues). (40:12)

Personnel: JD Allen, tenor saxophone; Orrin Evans, piano; Alexander Claffey, bass; Jonathan Barber, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

