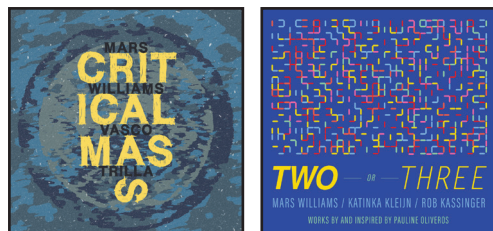


former GDR where Peter Metag (d. 2013) and Ulli Blobel have been promoting jazz events since 1973. Longtime collaborators, and two generations apart, veteran Alexander von Schlippenbach (piano) and Christian Lillinger (drums) are on hand for two long freely improvised tracks, “Auf ein Neues” (32:21) and “Freie Improvisation” (10:28). Both tracks are introduced by piano and drums, with Petrowsky entering later in response. At 77 at the time of this recording, Lutén sounds energetic and full of humor, his partners swiftly following the leader’s twists and turns, changes of intensity and mood, from soft, tender sounds to high-pitched squeals. Schlippenbach often hints at his early inspiration, Thelonious Monk. Powerful piano clusters establish waves of energy; meditative piano-percussion duo segments allow respite, focus and instrument changes for the reed player. The much younger percussionist sometimes takes a second to follow the telepathic communication between the two old accomplices, but his dry, to-the-point comments always add something significant, spurring the partners to further experimentation. The trio increases the tempo in a final breathtaking succession of fireworks and a brief coda. Impassioned and absorbing, this music is a fitting tribute to the late German saxophone pioneer.

For more info visit jazzwerkstatt.eu



Critical Mass
Mars Williams/Vasco Trilla (Not Two)
Two or Three
Mars Williams/Katinka Kleijn/Rob Kassinger
(Amalgam)
by Mike Shanley

The first two minutes of “The Shaking Hand That Leaves a Mark” in *Critical Mass* evokes a scene in an old clock shop. The sound doesn’t conjure the chaos that occurs at the top of every hour; percussionist Vasco Trilla creates an array of low, tranquil chimes, of the kind that a roomful of timepieces might produce at the bottom, or quarter, of the hour. The effect is soothing, and when saxophonist Mars Williams (who passed away Nov. 20, 2023 at the age of 68) joins Trilla, his alto begins cautiously with long tones, so as not to disturb the serenity. This is the duo’s second (and final) recording and it also delivers some high-volume blowing, but that comes later.

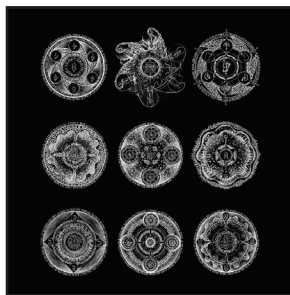
Throughout the album, Trilla draws on extended technique with his trap kit and percussion. His scrapes and rolls in “Fogo” eventually echo the long tones that Williams blows on his soprano horn. The unearthly rumble in the final minutes of “Thin Air” are hard to trace and sound as thick as a wall of overdubbing (though it’s likely all live). Williams, credited with “reeds and toy instruments”, pulls out an exotic double reed instrument (“The Tongue Set Free”), whistles and toy flutes as well as saxophones. The rapid spray of lines in the title track might be his calling card, but the haunting unaccompanied coda of “Fogo” has just as strong an impact.

Shortly before her death in 2016, Pauline Oliveros finished the composition “For Two or Three Instruments”. The piece utilizes a technique called Deep Listening, a heightened state of awareness of sound surrounding the performers, which requires them to determine the duration, dynamics and structure of what they play. Williams (reeds), Katinka Kleijn (cello) and Rob Kassinger (bass)—who collectively bring together Chicago’s Symphony

Orchestra, free jazz scene and big band roots—perform the piece three times on *Two or Three*, with two extended improvisations in between. As a result, the whole 42-minute album flows like a continuous work with a recurring theme.

That’s not to say that each reading of “Two or Three” sounds the same. Sometimes the quick emanations from the players resemble a three-way game of ping pong. Kleijn presses her bow down hard in one passage while Kassinger sits out on another. The act of deep listening continues in the two spontaneous tracks. When Williams gets behind Kleijn’s pedal point in “Improvisation I”, Kassinger responds by playing the wood of his instrument percussively. Much of the lengthy “Improvisation II” consists of little more than faint long tones and string scrapes. The power of the performance lies in the way that the trio bookends this diminuendo with incisive group interaction. It, along with *Critical Mass*, serves as a reminder that Williams’ passing last November was a big blow to creative music.

For more info visit nottwo.com and amalgamusic.org



Memoria
John Zorn/Bill Laswell (Tzadik)
by Tyran Grillo

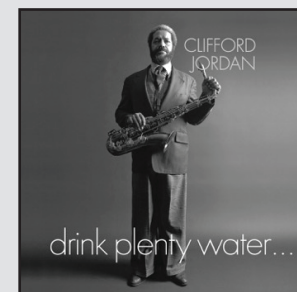
Building on well over four decades of collaboration, *Memoria* convenes two musicians—saxophonist John Zorn and bassist Bill Laswell—at their most exposed. While their duality has often been magnified in ensemble settings (most notably in Painkiller), they have often performed as a unit live. Here, the intensity of those performances leans toward ambient music but also toward elegy, as the album pays tribute to three fallen visionaries: Pharoah Sanders (1940-2022), Milford Graves (1941-2021), and, most recently, Wayne Shorter who died on March 2, 2023 at the age of 89.

Zorn seems to always have something (or someone) firmly in mind as a catalyst for his recorded music, and in these tracks, we feel the depth of the blues in his playing, while Laswell offers an embrace of brotherhood. Sanders gets a proper eulogy: Laswell’s harmonics shimmer like a body of water cut from living rock, while Zorn’s expectorations are gut-wrenchingly heartfelt. The music moves with an unforced flow that eschews rhythmic impulses. At the other end is the duo’s nod to Shorter, which brings the heaviest sense of finality. The gentleness of Laswell’s echoing lines serves to highlight Zorn’s feel for detail. There is more to every gesture than meets the eye: a sense of history, of having been somewhere important, and of eternity.

Between these two spirits is Graves, no stranger to the Zorn universe (having at one time graced the stage with Painkiller). Zorn’s alto unleashes keening, warped brilliance, using circular breathing not as a technical flourish but as a way of sustaining the override of his multiphonic chatter, before ending with the light patter of footsteps on puddles soon to dry and fade. Thus, *Memoria* returns to the shadows but leaves us a light to hold on to. This is not a catharsis, if only because too much of what has been expressed remains on the inside to be emotionally digested.

For more info visit tzadik.com

UNEARTHED GEM



Drink Plenty Water
Clifford Jordan (Harvest Song)
by Tristan Geary

Recorded in 1974 and brought to light in 2023 by tenor saxophonist Clifford Jordan’s widow Sandy Jordan, *Drink Plenty Water* reveals another dimension of an already kaleidoscopic musical personality. The album marks a departure from recordings of brooding intensity that Jordan was enmeshed in. As pianist Franz Biffiger recounts in the liner notes, *Drink Plenty Water* is “the pure opposite of [Jordan’s] album *Glass Bead Games*”, released the year before. Recounting the recording session, trombonist Dick Griffin recalls how Jordan set the musicians up in a semicircle, rather than isolated in booths. The democratizing effect of this permeates the album’s sound. Splitting bass duties with Sam Jones and spearheading the album’s arrangements was none other than the legendary Bill Lee (who passed away May 24, 2023 at age 94).

Dulcet vocals in lush harmony immediately grab the listener on the powerful opening track “The Highest Mountain”, sung by a quartet of singers including the leader’s daughter Donna Jordan Harris and sister-in-law Denise Williams. The bond, both familial and friendly, between the musicians on the album works its way into the sound of the music: it too is close-knit. Catchy and danceable, the brief “My Papa’s Coming Home” rolls along with an infectious lilting vamp. Williams recalls rehearsals full of laughter and warmth, noting one particular episode where a mid-rehearsal blueberry cobbler was devoured without a trace by the singers to hilarious effect. The playful repartee between the musicians throughout the recording process is felt deeply in the music itself.

Underneath the singers, Clifford Jordan’s quartet (Stanley Cowell, piano; Billy Higgins, drums; Jones or Lee, bass) is a sophisticatedly understated swinging unit. They are joined by Griffin (trombone), Bill Hardman (trumpet), Charlie Rouse (bass clarinet) and Bernard Fennell (cello), and the resulting ensemble operates as both a collective improvising machine and a tightly orchestrated voice, as if in conversation with the singers themselves. Although often snappy, the album is equally expansive. The title track is a wise and melancholic spoken word parable delivered by David Smyrl, underscored by meandering collective improvisations; Fennell’s cello is particularly effective in creating a moody atmosphere. Similarly, “Talking Blues” is delivered with swagger by Smyrl, as the band wails behind him.

Today, the memory of the recording, touchingly recounted in the liner notes, informs the listening experience. The recent passing of bassist Bill Lee makes this belated release especially poignant. A convivial cohesion shines in the music, akin to an apartment party amongst family and friends, full of love and depth.

For more info visit shop.mapleshadestore.com