



Jason Roebke & Tobias Delius
panoramic



Han Bennink and Misha Mengelberg called one live duo album (translating) *A Ping Pong Game*, apt cognate: fast, combative, linear and irreplicable. But not unrecordable, though the moment doesn't always translate to disc. Two new Bennink duo discs bring the music back alive.

For a range of musicians the drummer is an ideal duo partner. If you bring your tunes, he'll play along: he has a keen sense of form (despite the wild man rep). Standards? He knows hundreds and can swing all of them. Instant composing? Now you're talking. He's a telegrapher. There's a world of music in his snare drum, not least with snares retracted: he's quick, precise and tonal, manipulating pitch with one stick while striking with the other, or dampening with a dish towel for even more instant decay. (No Bennink, no Paul Lovens.)

The Bimhuis concert that yielded *Sonic Boom* was billed as Han's first improvised duo meeting with Uri Caine – the sleeve places it on April 12, the Bim schedule on the 11th – but they'd crossed paths before. Caine's stylistic breadth as pianist is almost absurdly broad, but this was not a night for Mahler. (A faint whiff of Bach, maybe.) He too has mastered gem-hard percussive attacks in every dynamic range. Like Han he's a virtuoso listener – there are quiet dialogues of Socratic clarity, where Uri lowers the temperature just when the drummer risks boiling over ("Grind of Blue"). The pianist also knows how to set the drummer up, with a rollicking walking bass line and quiet trade of fours ("Lockdown"), pile-up of two-handed syncopations or a hint of a Chicago shuffle ("Hobo"), a Brazilian tinge further tinted with the blues, which is never far from the surface. (Every snare *ping* and rustle on the strings was superbly

recorded by house engineer Marc Schots.) Uri primes him, and then works with Han's grooves; when they wham those downbeats together, the walls move.

Save for "Round Midnight" taken as a stomp, they share (instant) composer credits, but it's hard to believe much of this thematic material wasn't percolating inside Caine's head before they hit the stage, so well does it address both their strengths. They don't just play, they make a varied program.

Given Han's amply documented and variegated duos, partners may now approach such situations as a chance to showcase *him*. Anyone preparing for such a night can study his feints, jabs, timing and rope-a-dope – and also to see the range of friendly experiences playing with him may afford. It's not all thunderdome cage match.

Estonian guitarist Jaak Sooäär knew his man, meeting Han for two nights (in Tallinn and Tartu) that March. They'd worked together some, going back at least to a 2003 trio with saxophonist Mikko Innanen (documented on TUM). On most tracks, the duo improvises on open terrain before a tune breaks out: a Tartu march, "On the Sunny Side of the Street," Misha's "Hypochristmutreefuzz" (taking Han all the way back to Dolphy's *Last Date*), "O Sole Mio" à la mandolin. Sooäär's solid-body work is part Ed Bickert translucent jazzing, part Pete Townsend *Live at Leeds* – the raunchy timbre, rocky momentum and crack timing – and a smidge of Dick Dale. (The title's a tell.) And there are ballads: "Pannonica" and "Darn That Dream," where Bennink lays down a cushion under single-note lines. Uptempo, Sooäär rides Han's wave like that Fender's a surfboard.

The repertoire's an oddly satisfying mix, and ignites Han like a butane lighter. When Sooäär starts romping on "I Got Rhythm" like Charlie Christian at Minton's, Han threatens to put his brushes clear through both snare heads; he follows up with his own solo on same melody, with sticks. It helps when everyone knows their history. Sooäär ranges from Gershwin to the garage, with the door up to annoy the neighbors. How many guitarists know "Hypochristmutreefuzz"?

Bennink's ICP Orchestra colleague and occasional quartet mate Tobias Delius enjoys his own international meet-and-greets. During ICP's spring 2011 US tour he ducked into a Chicago studio to record *Panoramic*, a set of impromptus with bassist Jason Roebke, a mainstay of the city's post-Vandermark generation of improvisers. Delius has one of the most malleable sounds of any tenor saxophonist; he can stage whisper like Ben Webster or bleat like cohort Ab Baars, and cover a lot of sonic/historical ground in between: he's a sound player and a balladeer. A single held note can bloom and undulate and feature different overtones as it ages. He has something of a drummer's timing, too, using slap-tongue and other early jazz plosives, and a modern quiver of smears, growls, sputters, flutters and buzzes. (He plays clarinet also, with a sound to remind you it's hollow/pipe.)

Jason Roebke's resourceful as well, a close listener who keeps up his end without crowding, contrapuntal. Percussive pizz and a nicely noisy arco abet rowdy pointillistic byplay and scrappy phrasal abstractions. But where Bennink works the contrast between open time and swing, Roebke opts for a more atomized pulse and conversational rhythm. Nothing wrong with that, but I miss swing as a leavening agent; a dose of it can catapult Delius up to another level of expression. It's as if one corner of the ping pong table is obstructed. He can't get to some of his best moves.

–Kevin Whitehead

Joseph Bowie & Adam Rudolph

Good Medicineo

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