

Cadence

THE REVIEW of JAZZ & BLUES: CREATIVE IMPROVISED MUSIC

TOM GURALNICK, BROKEN DANCES FOR MUTED PIECES, WHAT NEXT 17.

Broken Dance / Whirled Weary / Tone Farm / Memory Link / Slides Peak / Blown Logic / Mobile Motive / In Different Version / Different Inversion / Foam Tones / In the Out-take / Spoken Pedals / Reading Sample / Invisible On It. 54.56.

Guralnick, ts, ss, homemade instruments, electronics. 1/25-27/94, Albuquerque, NM.

Upon first listen, this CD sounds like a series of computer or tape pieces accompanied by either real or sampled reeds. And indeed that is how Guralnick got his start. Reviewer Robert Iannapolo described his first release (10/86, p.32) as that of a "reed player showing the influences of European free players... playing with and against backing tapes." Three years later (3/89, p. 77), the reed player had begun to evolve his "Mobile Saxophone and Mute Unit," consisting of tenor and soprano saxophones modified by homemade mutes and extensions. *Broken Dances for Muted Pieces* builds on his modified reeds, incorporating an extended range of real-time electronic processing augmented with a battery of invented and modified wind instruments recorded live and direct to DAT. The result is a flowing, organic set which artfully integrates reeds and electronics into compact improvisations. The music brings to mind early versions of George Lewis's improvising software, with exotic percussive and electronic textures either shadowing or triggered by the reed instrument. Polyphonic webs build as lines loop and stutter, tracing and refracting each other, making it impossible to tell how they are created. Some pieces are free, spare linear bagatelles. Others seem almost conversational as split and fractured voices prod each other. Some sputter and lurch, creating waves of pulsing, cyclic patterns that tumble along, while spinning off kaleidoscopic variations. With this release, Guralnick presents an engaging synthesis of modified acoustic and electronic music, creating a spirited, personal approach to free improvisation.

Michael Rosenstein

FRIDAY
DEC 22 1995

Mobile sax creates heady improv brew

Guralnick
releases
solo CD

2147
By DAVID PRINCE

Tom Guralnick, whose first-ever solo CD *Broken Dances for Muted Pieces* has just been released on What Next? Recordings, wears a dizzying array of artistic hats. He's an accomplished and original improviser on all the members of the saxophone family, and he writes the relatively linear-free jazz themes his "in the tradition" trio and quartet play.

Moreover, he founded The New Mexico Jazz Workshop, and today he runs the Outpost Performance Space (112 Morningside SE, Albuquerque), a non-profit storefront listening room that's entering its sixth year of musical excellence.

He's also an inventor and inveterate tinkerer, which is how the Mobile Saxophone & Mute Unit, the cumbersome yet elegant behemoth of an instrument he plays on *Broken Dances* came into being.

"It's like a drum kit," he said recently, "but an extended drum kit more along the lines of what the Art Ensemble (of Chicago) and (avant-garde percussionist) David Moss have done."

Set into the Unit's frame are stands for two saxophones, which are often modified with the addition of tubing, tin foil and other materials. Up until

now, he's used tenor and soprano, but now he's toying with the idea of replacing these with alto and soprano.

The sounds of the saxophones are further modified by the array of mutes that are set in place with the use of foot pedals. Topping it all off are a battery of microphones and electronic gadgets that can take a phrase Guralnick creates, reproduce, modify and play it back in a matter of moments.

The net result of this musical magic can be heard to good effect on the 14 spontaneous improvisations that comprise *Broken Dances for Muted Pieces*. It's a thoughtful, uncompromising series of hydra-headed conversations with himself.

The Mobile Saxophone & Mute Unit first came into being around 1979, after Guralnick had settled in New Mexico after completing his studies at Vermont's Bennington College.

It was at Bennington that he came under the influence of trumpeter/free jazz theoretician Bill Dixon.

"That's when I really started playing (saxophone)," he said. "Up to that point, I'd been into blues and R&B, though I had always felt that I'd eventually get into jazz. Bill (Dixon) is a powerful presence. His whole trip was to find your own individual voice."

Although there are times when he intentionally invokes the sound of another player, he's more interested in bringing people into a world free of reference, he said.

"At least, I try to do that as

much as possible. That way, as a performer, you're in complete control."

Consequently, the allusions in Guralnick's music are fleeting and shadowy. On the current disc, for example, *Whirled Weary* sounds a bit like the wildly woolly group improvisations The World Saxophone Quartet created in the '80s (hence the title).

But like the now-famous disclaimer goes, any resemblances are, if not purely, then mainly coincidental. More often, the pieces on this album walk an exceedingly fine line between jazz and contemporary improvisation, which is itself a pretty amorphous distinction.

"Well, for one thing, I can't really say that what I'm doing is totally improvised," Guralnick said, "because I've lived with these structures for a long time in some cases, so I know what I'm aiming for. And, whereas my trio and quartet stuff is definitely jazz, (the music on *Broken Dances*) is more abstract. It's about jazz, but it isn't necessarily jazz."

However you define it, the combination of pure and electronically modified sounds Tom Guralnick and his Mobile Saxophone & Mute Unit make on *Broken Dances for Muted Pieces* are a welcome addition to the recorded legacy of improvisation.

Like the Braxtons, Coltranes and Colemans who inspired him, Guralnick has concocted a heady brew that effortlessly spins its way into the outer reaches of the rarefied ether.

OLTRE IL SILENZIO

Periodico d'informazione sulla multimedialità delle arti anno uno numero 1 dicembre 95 L. 8.000

Dall'altra parte degli States operano molte altre vitalissime realtà. Andiamole a vedere brevemente. Ad Albuquerque in New Mexico, c'è la WHAT NEXT? che fa uscire il nuovo CD di *Tom Guralnick*, sassofonista ed inventore di una sax-station futuristica, dal titolo **Broken Dances for Muted Pieces**, mentre in California troviamo la ARTIFACT RECORDINGS di *John Bishoff* che ci propone **Gang of two** a nome *The Bifurcators*. I due *Bifurcators* sono *Philip Perkins* e *Scott Fraser* ed operano commistioni fra computer music e strumentazioni

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BROKEN DANCES FOR MUTED PIECES

Tom Guralnick

If all you want is music to tug at your emotions, or a driving beat to shake your bootie to, don't look here. If, however, you are looking for adventure in a sonic playland you've come to the right place. Tom Guralnick is a witty and versatile experimenter who has developed a highly personal and surprisingly imagistic sonic vocabulary for the saxophone. Or, more accurately, for a one-man orchestra of "prepared" instruments (in the Cagian mode). Not only does he extend the sound-producing capacities of his alto and tenor saxophones, but his inventive improvisations are full of surprises, and unexpected evocations of places — a distant fog horn, a passing train, come in and out of focus amongst a gaggle of high-pitched squeals bouncing through the air. A simple little "tune" repeats itself over and over and wanders in to a uproarious party of competing rhythms. A whisper of wind brushes your ear. Particularly amusing are the quiet spaces surrounding thoughtfully placed riffs that pop up like individual members of an audience singing out from various locations. Though these moments of silence are a broadcaster's nightmare (dead air) they are charged with an energy that ignites what follows. *Broken Dances for Muted Pieces* is about as close to the spontaneity of Guralnick's live performance as you can get. ●

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JACKIE APPLE

Carlo Actis Dato

Uratu

LEO LR 220

Peter Brotzmann

Nothing To Say

FMP 73

Tom Guralnick

Broken Dances For Muted Pieces

WHAT NEXT? WN 0017

Particularly it would seem in improvised music, solo playing is practised with increasing regularity, despite the view held by some that improvisation only really makes sense when executed with other people. For the artist it presents both a challenge and an opportunity to be literally more singleminded about which avenue to follow. For the audience or listener it is a unique way to get close to an individual's concept, and is often the easiest way into the music. These three CDs are prime examples of how varied the approaches can be with a single instrument, in this case the saxophone.

On first hearing I found the Carlo Actis Dato CD a bit lightweight, but have since been seduced by its exuberant charm and wit. A member of Italy's Instabile Orchestra, he is obviously a musician on top of his technique and relishing the chance to show it off in all its variety. He is most interesting on baritone, but also plays tenor and bass clarinet, on which he is able to circular-breathe almost effortlessly, creating fast, fluid, overlapping lines — or on one track a kind of didgeridoo impersonation based on closed tube harmonics and vocal inflexions. The improvisations are all constructed from ideas, motifs or themes. There are loose versions of 'Autumn Leaves' and 'Round Midnight,' and he uses his voice extensively to affect tonal variation and inject humour.

If I have a reservation, it is that I feel a lack of genuine risk-taking and a sense that he has played it all before, but the playing throughout is consummate and full of verve.

By contrast the Brotzmann CD sounds as though he walked into the studio and played the first thing that

came into his head. Titled *Nothing To Say* (his previous solo outing was *No Nothing* — what is he telling us?) and dedicated to Oscar Wilde, it's a monster at over 75 minutes and, as one would expect, drips with emotion. Even at its quietest moments, and there are plenty of those — one tarogato piece contains an extensive passage of breath sounds on the reed — it's as though Brotzmann is trying to wrench every last shred of feeling from the bowels of whichever horn is his hands.

There is something almost painfully honest about this music with its lack of overtly flashy technique and its direct, simple melodies, yet the improvisations constantly take unexpected turns, and there is the perpetual threat of some uncontrollable beast being unleashed at any moment. The humanity and lack of bullshit is what makes Brotzmann as vital and potent a force as ever.

American Tom Guralnick's offering is an altogether different kettle of fish. Much more consciously abstract in approach, it treads a similar path to John Butcher or Luc Houtkamp, and makes extensive use of live electronic processing. Short of seeing this guy in action, I have to rely on the sleeve notes to have any idea of what is going on, and they assure me that all the music is heard as played, which seems pretty incredible on its own. He works within a construction called the 'Mobile Saxophone And Mute Unit,' which allows him rapid access to a wide variety of sound sources and effects, often simultaneously. Consequently he is able to build sometimes very dense and complex soundscapes in a way akin to a modern keyboard player.

However one is never far removed from the original sound, which is either the soprano or tenor saxophone, or one of his invented or appropriated wind instruments, which can also be altered by his use of mutes. This satisfies my need to hear the musicianship at work without distracting from the mystery of the outcome. Not one I'll play often, but a fascinating recording and quite unlike anything I've heard before.

ALAN WILKINSON

March 1996

The Sun

Every once in a full eclipse a musical innovator comes along that really stretches the boundaries or re-invents his instrument. In the case of Albuquerque composer and improviser Tom Guralnick it's through the creation and insightful use of his Mobile Saxophone and Mute Unit.

Broken Dances for Muted Pieces Guralnick's new CD on What Next? Recordings is a live recording from a concert at The Outpost Performance Space in Albuquerque.

There is no better way to experience Guralnick's array of tenor and soprano saxophones, invented woodwinds and electronics, than in a live setting, and this latest recording is a gem.

Utilizing mutes and other sound-altering devices on his horns, manipulation with digital delays and sampling devices, Guralnick's performances witness him performing this nobly creative music all within a 10-foot square sculptural structure of instruments and equipment.

Broken Dances for Muted Pieces is an ear-rub massage for the sound-receptors with sonic juxtaposition of creative saxophone riffs and heavily textured electronically manipulated loops. Each piece has it's own atmosphere, with Guralnick utilizing silence and the space in between as well as melodic and textural composition for an ultimate new music experience.

NONO TOXO

TOM GURALNICK / BROKEN DANCES FOR MUTED PLACES.

GURALNICK ES UN MÚSICO ESTADOUNIDENSE QUE HA DESARROLLADO UN ALTÍSIMO VOCABULARIO TONAL MUY PERSONAL; EN ÉSTE SU MAS RECIENTE DISCO DESPLIEGA SU CREATIVIDAD EN BASE A SAXOFONES MODIFICADOS E INSTRUMENTOS INVENTADOS POR ÉL MISMO CON LOS QUE SE CONVIERTE EN UN EXPLORADOR DEL PENTAGRAMA TRATANDO DE ENCONTRAR BIZARRAS POSIBILIDADES SONORAS QUE FINALMENTE ATRAPA Y BALANCEA ENTRE 14 PIEZAS QUE OSCILAN EN EL CAOS Y EL CONTROL. LA PRODUCCIÓN ES DE WHAT NEXT RECORDING. P. O. BOX 344. ALBUQUERQUE, N. M. 87103, U.S.A.