

Recollections - Seven

This is Dripping

The Drip Hards

Carl DEWHURST - Evan MANNELL - Cameron UNDY

Review by Phil Treloar

Released November/December 2010 this, it seems to me, is a work in progress. Despite the title's overtones the reference turns an ear towards the kind of rhythmic complexities one is witness to when listening intently to water – a sense of layering created by unpredictable coincidences together with discernible events in juxtaposition.

The overwhelming aesthetic is eclectic though this style-laden environment is anything but imitative other than when tongue-in-cheek, and in this some humor is brought to bear. This imaginative trio explores a clearly etched ethos; one I perceive of as trajectories within trajectories; a process of creating layered textures. It is inspiring in its egalitarian foundations and, beyond the music itself, this is made salient through the balance of track composition – four by group collaboration and two each by the individuals. The aesthetic, overall, is one I'm not immediately attracted to. It's a little too up-front and unnecessarily forceful... though I don't mean muscular. For me, implication will inevitably outweigh the overtly stated while concurrently enabling intrigue. Enter the listener as participant. The creative maturity and instrumental finesse so obviously embodied in each of these musicians is, to my mind, subsumed to some extent, thus tending to render the obvious *too* obvious. The feeling I get is that the mechanical hovers in threateningly close proximity. But this does give rise to its own magnetism and sense of anticipation.

Call me an old romantic if you like, but I found Undy's *Mountain* with its windy filter-swept ambience, gently rolling cymbals, and slowly evolving melody, an offering of profound pan-aural beauty. The title track, *This is Dripping*, is a collaborative event and the longest of the ten at 10:13. And while this doesn't necessarily mean a whole lot in and by itself, each track is actually quite plateau-like. There is little taking place by way of development – motivic, rhythmic, or emotive – so in this light the track durations are actually well measured. The tracks tend to be isolated events. The trio tends to latch onto a particular vibe or energy characteristic which then becomes track content. A greater incidence of 'no-mind' and consequent malleability will no doubt emerge over time and with it a more expansive sense of formal undulation. This said, and despite the music's up-front stated-ness, there is little here that is defined by hammered-home down beats. Dripping, it would seem, obviates such crassness.

The playing by all three is mighty. The spontaneous nature so essential to this music is, ultimately, transmitted through and dependent upon an acoustic phenomenon ... the ear. Rather uncharacteristically, much of Dewhurst's guitar sounds are trimmed within the readily identifiable yet this serves to clarify what is, in my view, the music's primary *raison d'être*, to wit, the rhythmic domain.

It seems to be increasingly the case among aspiring ‘virtuosi’ these days that music’s rhythmic topography be complex and provable. And emphasis, it appears, generally falls on the latter. The impact made by various so called ethnic musical practices has been escalating in Western environs since the 1960s and shows no sign of abating. Indian systems of rhythmic complexity are particular favorites and that these lend themselves to intricate rationalization allows for highly evolved technical expertise to be perceived, predictable, and provable. That is, for those in the know. For better or for worse these technical mountains are being scaled by other than those who have lived with and grown through a lifetime of devotion and in the event the mountains become somewhat less peaky. This regrettable picture leaves little to delight in other than the colours seen by politicians, pseudo sensation seekers, and accolade collectors. May the force be with them! Outside of the wonder-filled world inhabited by the devoted ones, exceptions are rare and when experienced, utterly breathtaking, not to mention replete with positivity, for they spell out exchange for the very best of humane reasoning. Exception, however, seems to be akin to an oasis in the Sahara ... life-saving if stumbled upon!

It is in light of this that I find The Drip Hards bearers of nectar. They venture forth on their own turf with their own terms of engagement. Neither elegance nor precision seem consciously contingent on their ballpark. But then, I hardly feel this to be significant. Though egalitarianism is fundamental, they don’t seem to me to be seeking to prove anything at all. Their game plan is, I think, limited by few rules and left as open as possible so as to embrace coincidence while realizing planes of self-motivated impetus; to find a measure of balance for their collective energy; to decide on the terms of communication en route; to cast gestural arcs as phenomena intrinsic to the process; to comment upon each other’s gestures without judgement; to stack comment upon comment and thus allow form to emerge, or submerge; and in pursuit of these goals seek to emulate no model other than the one they create for themselves. If, for example, the ‘cycle of fifths’ or the ‘blues’ happen to be alluded to it is no more than that, allusion. Some might perhaps exclaim, “But that’s not jazz!” And they may be right. But then I’m reminded that some exclaimed the same upon hearing Miles’ *Bitches Brew*. I may well be off the mark with some of these observations but whatever the case, I highly respect their effort, enjoy their challenge, and greatly look forward to their next installment. This trio is onto something. The mantle of The Drip Hards secretes a fecund essence.

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