

**Solidarity**  
**Matt Lavelle's 12 Houses (Unseen Rain)**  
 by Ken Waxman

Multi-instrumentalist Matt Lavelle, true believer in the latitude of free jazz, has worked in ensembles with such advanced figures as William Parker and Butch Morris. Now, like a post-doctoral fellow ready to take his mentors' research in new directions, Lavelle has organized a 16-piece band, whose in-the-moment unity splendidly reflects the experiences designated by the horoscope's 12 houses.

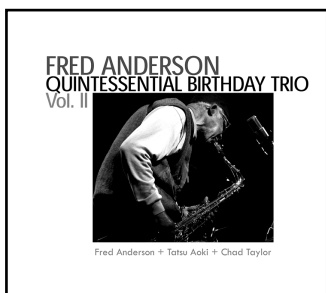
The six tracks are satisfying because Lavelle has blended additional currents into the program. Building on the large-group acumen in Parker's bands and utilizing conduction Morris initiated, Lavelle, who plays cornet, flugelhorn and alto clarinet here, moves beyond expected jazz tropes and instrumentation. Besides the usual saxophones, piano, guitar, bass and drums, 12 Houses is inhabited by piccolo, bassoon, violin, cello, percussion, banjo and mandolin plus the wordless vocalization of Anaïs Maviel.

The result is chameleon-like themes, which, for example, have pianist Chris Forbes cracking out dynamic kinetics in "Brooklyn Mountain" as if he was Cecil Taylor on *Unit Structures*, yet playing so straightforward on "Faith" that the linkage is to 19th Century Romantic tropes, with a detour into a devotee's parlor for a church hymn.

Besides Lavelle, the standout soloists are alto saxophonist Charles Waters and tenor saxophonist Ras Moshe, especially during those moments of altissimo ecstasy on the title track and elsewhere as if they were Archie Shepp and John Tchicai on *Ascension*. Maviel too has the ability to alter her tessitura to blend with the strings or double the reed parts. Lavelle harmonizes the bowed and plucked strings to provide interludes of delicate reserve. It's an indication of his wit and the group's freedom that on "Cherry Swing", prodded by bassist François Grillot's symmetrical pulse, cadence turns to cacophony when banjo player Jack DeSalvo uncorks a salvo of twangs as if Earl Scruggs has pushed his way into a Count Basie jam.

*Solidarity* is the equivalent of research that builds on its antecedents to affect a breakthrough. But it's a lot more fun than an academic paper—dig the gospel-like handclapping at the climax to "Faith".

For more information, visit [unseenrainrecords.com](http://unseenrainrecords.com). This project is at Nublu Sundays. See *Regular Engagements*.



**Quintessential Birthday Trio, Vol. II**  
**Fred Anderson (Asian Improv)**  
 by George Kanzler

Tenor saxophonist Fred Anderson, who died six years ago this month at 81, was one of those formidable musicians who fall through the cracks, never garnering the reputation he deserved because he spent his working life in Chicago, much of it operating his own

jazz club and mentoring local talent. He was a founding member of the AACM but, unlike its members, rarely ventured far from his Midwest base. Presumably—the CD lacks discographical information—this album was recorded at the same concert as *Vol. I*, March 22, 2000 (his 71st birthday), at his Chicago club The Velvet Lounge with bassist Tatsu Aoki and erstwhile Chicago drummer Chad Taylor.

For a point of reference, the pianoless trios of Sonny Rollins from the '50s-60s are a good start. Like Rollins, Anderson exhibits an orotund tone and copious, proliferating ideas in solos that pour out with fertile, seemingly boundless imagination.

Opener "It's Us" finds him reeling off dozens of choruses in an initial ten-minute-plus solo, all constructed over a teeming background with bass suggesting half-time and drums double-time to his intrepid swing pace. Then he returns with another long solo over slower, more syncopated rhythms.

For a bare-bones trio performance, there's a lot of variety here, with each of the four tracks quite distinctive and developing in multiple sections with changed-up rhythms and textures. "Prime Moment" begins with Aoki's fluttering, vibrating arco ostinato, tenor intimately fashioning lines on top as Taylor enters playing drum heads with his hands. Then tone and texture shift as saxophone creates a staccato rhythm picked up by sticks for the second part. "Hoistin'" begins with a walking bassline introducing a slow drag shuffle beat from drums, tenor deliberate and bluesy. But the piece keeps evolving, the beat accelerating to a fast clip à la Mingus romps.

Anderson's late '70s composition "Wandering" closes, beginning with a long cadenza from tenor, first acappella, then joined by rubato bass and brushes. That too morphs from the initial expansive ballad into a rolling toms tattoo under a climactic solo to end it.

For more information, visit [asianimprov.org](http://asianimprov.org)



**Zurich (1979)**  
**Joe McPhee (Astral Spirits)**  
 by Stuart Broomer

*Zurich (1979)* is a work that immediately insists on your attention, a single-sided LP with a hand silk-screened jacket. It's a direct invocation of Albert Ayler's *Bells*, his single-sided, white vinyl LP with a silk-screened blank side and jacket, the latter in barely legible yellow print on a black field. More than any other living musician, Joe McPhee has carried forward the Ayler legacy. Though he seems to play alto saxophone and pocket trumpet more often these days, McPhee's tenor sound, like Ayler's, has a certain sweetness that weaves in and out of the harshest blasts, sometimes rising to become the dominant sound.

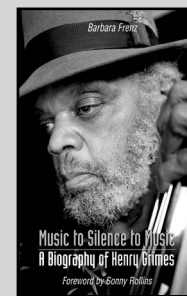
The piece—called simply "Tenor solo" and originally recorded on cassette—stands isolated here in a kind of glory, reminding one of how much musical substance can be pressed into 19 minutes. The music is free jazz, its improvisations hinged to an initial motif to which McPhee returns, a few hymn-like notes suggesting a late Coltrane melodic figure. At the outset it's hesitant, the sound is breathy and there are pauses between the phrases as the tune takes shape, gathering force and determination until it begins to break free. It is as if McPhee is calling up the tune from the greatest depth of memory, as if the work is a collective act that includes Ayler and Coltrane and the anonymous gospel

composers of the 19th Century.

Throughout the solo, McPhee leaves the melody for a series of distinct improvisations: leaping registers; speeding up and playing freely; adding honking rhythm 'n' blues; baring sounding notes to the rhythmic accompaniment of his key pads; or exploring abrasive multiphonics that link low-end roar to squealing highs in a single, complex, massed sound, each time returning to the original material and mood for sustenance and inspiration. It's work of rare and special power.

For more information, visit [monofonuspress.com/astral-spirits](http://monofonuspress.com/astral-spirits). McPhee is at The Stone Jun. 21st as a guest of the Flow Trio. See *Calendar*.

## IN PRINT



**Music to Silence to Music**  
**(A Biography of Henry Grimes)**  
 Barbara Frenz (Northway Publications)  
 by Tyran Grillo

In his foreword to *Music to Silence to Music: A Biography of Henry Grimes*, Sonny Rollins recalls his first encounter with the young bassist in Philadelphia: "He seemed to hear and immediately respond...in an unbroken circuit between muse and man." Likewise, German historian Barbara Frenz' lovingly penned biography wires an unbroken circuit between reader and subject.

Frenz jumps improvisationally from reportage to interview. The resulting portrait is as multifaceted as the man himself. Grimes may not be interested in the anecdotal, but his memories yield a veritable résumé of iconic associations. By the early '60s he was swimming in the deep end of New York City's jazz scene, where collaborations with the likes of Albert Ayler unlocked his evolutionary potential. In 1967, just two years after his first leader date, he left the East Coast for the west and wasn't heard from for nearly four decades. Grimes was forced to sell his bass in Los Angeles, where he sustained himself through odd jobs until he was rediscovered in 2002. He has been playing ever since, much to the glee of listeners and journalists alike, playing hundreds of concerts and surpassing even his own exalted reputation in the process. During the silence, he didn't so much as touch an instrument. And yet, as Frenz makes clear, the music was always germinating inside him, along with a literary worldview that would feed back into his reprisal endeavors. His poetry is dark yet insightful and, like his soloing, focuses its attention on human interaction.

With this biography, Frenz has undone the misconception of Grimes as reticent ghost, arguing instead for his bold expressiveness while further emphasizing his versatility, go-with-the-flow attitude and inner growth. His past contributions are obvious, but, as Frenz is quick to point out, his importance to the future of jazz even more so. Rather than an introvert who almost faded into obscurity, she wants us to see him as someone uninterested in attachments, living as he has—and always will—in the immaterial.

For more information, visit [parkwestpubs.com](http://parkwestpubs.com). Grimes receives the Vision Festival Lifetime Achievement Award at Judson Church Jun. 7th. See *Calendar*.