



**Construct 1: The Stone
DEK Trio (Audiographic)**

Escalator
Ken Vandermark/Klaus Kugel/Mark Tokar (Not Two)
Trébuchet
Made to Break (Trost)
by John Sharpe

Almost two years have passed since Chicago reed player Ken Vandermark's 2016 residency at The Stone, where he presented a dozen different lineups. A glance at Vandermark's website reveals 15 active bands, alongside a host of dormant entities, so in his case the challenge must have been what to leave out. Working units of various vintages furnish the three discs considered here, two of which did make the cut.

In fact *Construct 1: The Stone* documents the U.S. premiere of the DEK Trio, one of the newest of Vandermark's outfits, during the aforementioned residency. The acronym draws on the first names of the drummer Didi Kern, pianist Elisabeth Harnik and Vandermark. It's not only in instrumentation that the band invokes such illustrious forebears as the '60s Cecil Taylor Unit and the still-extant Schlippenbach Trio. Particularly on "Speed Table", the first of two lengthy improvisations, the high-octave waves of dashing invention make a strong statement of intent. Vandermark and Harnik generate extreme visceral exhilaration as they lock into a glorious high-velocity colloquy of reiterated skronk and hammered notes. After such a bravura start inevitably the momentum subsides as rattling percussion and squeaking clarinet multiphonics come to the fore, underpinned by a tolling bell-like keystroke. But before long increasingly assertive clarinet sets out a rallying cry and we are back into the initial gambit, with fractious tenor back in the frame. As a threesome they call on a wide range of options: Harnik hails from a contemporary classical background while Kern has roots in experimental rock and depending on which way Vandermark leans, that informs the direction they take. "Stop The Clocks" is, if anything, more direct than the opener. But nonetheless lurching drums avoid meshing with emotive tenor cries, creating unresolved tension while energetic repeated piano kernels suggest minimalism.

Recorded at Krakow's Alchemia, the scene of many significant events for Vandermark, *Escalator* represents the recorded debut of a fiery co-operative trio completed by Ukrainian bassist Mark Tokar (part of Vandermark's Resonance Ensemble) and German drummer Klaus Kugel. The driving fire music of the opening "13 Lines" establishes the template for the five pieces. It bursts out of the gate with an accelerating tenor saxophone riff, urgent almost walking bassline and pulsing cymbals, presaging incantatory overblowing from Vandermark, before halting on a dime. "Automatic Suite" begins with more reserve. Bass clarinet alternates between percolating flutters, sustained tones and squirreling falsetto, amid a soundscape derived from buzzy twangs and metallic washes. However, when Vandermark switches to baritone, it's clear this is only going to end one way as he ramps up to red-lining intensity. Indeed, Vandermark seems especially to favor broad strokes and R&B-derived figures, delivered with a wide vibrato and mantra-like fervor. But with form-seeking improvisers like these, the seat-of-the-pants excursions turn into something more satisfying than a blowing date while sacrificing none of the excitement. Vandermark maintains a particularly responsive dialogue with Tokar throughout, well-evidenced by the braiding of squalling clarinet piping with rapid sawing during the striking introduction to "Flight". On "End Numbers", Tokar destabilizes breathy baritone balladry with splintering

bow work, prompting a further bout of sermonizing, as the band exits in the manner in which it entered.

Another longstanding outfit, which also featured at The Stone, is Made To Break, who recorded *Trébuchet*, their eighth release, in the studio at the end of a North American tour. The sleeve contains the slightly cryptic information that the three compositions are by Vandermark, but the music is improvised by the four members. That's a reference to Vandermark's modular approach, which means that the compositional framework can be reconfigured afresh for every performance. The result is multi-part pieces characterized by sudden gear shifts, created either by instruments dropping out or seemingly telepathic moves in and out of charts ranging across jazz, funk, contemporary and improv territories. One of the other distinctive traits of this group is the electronics of Christof Kurzmann, whose ppool audio software proves a maverick presence. At times his electronic crackle and pop serves to undercut the reflective chamber mood, but elsewhere he actively deconstructs, as when real-time processing of wailing baritone evokes a swarm of demented bees in a wonderfully stirring passage at the conclusion of "Hydroplane". He pulls a similar stunt early in "Contact Sheet", repurposing slinky tenor phrasing to supply a horn obbligato before maxing out the distortion. With his ferocious riffing, incisive dovetailing counterpoint and innovative textures it's easy to see why electric bassist Jasper Stadhouders is on board while longtime Vandermark drumming associate Tim Daisy negotiates the instantaneous shifts between modes with aplomb. There is a clear sense here that the individuals sublimate themselves to the ensemble.

For more information, visit audiographicrecords.com, nottwo.com and trost.at. Vandermark is at The Stone Jan. 2nd-7th and 24th. See Calendar.



Radio Flyer
JD Allen (Savant)
by George Kanzler

Tenor saxophonist JD Allen has made a string of acclaimed trio albums with only bass and drums, a format popularized by tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins. But unlike the often-expansive Rollins, Allen has hewn closer to a leander standard. His last album, *Americana*, also on Savant, featured his trio of bassist Gregg August and drummer Rudy Royston playing concise tracks based on the blues or standard song forms. He changes direction here, opting for a less-structured approach with a different kind of sparseness: themes and structures flowing from brief tunes based on modes rather than chord progressions. Allen has also added a fourth member to his group, guitarist Liberty Ellman.

Allen says that for this outing he changed his mouthpiece because he "wanted a 'street sound', a blue collar sound that's closer to the blues and the important folk element of the music." So even though one of Allen's goals here is toward freedom from formal structures, his solos continue to be informed by traditions, his playing structured by his innate sense of story-telling, a penchant for logical progression of melodic line even when using only modes in the absence of much chordal or formal structure.

The seven tracks are unique and individual, from the processional rhythms of "Sitting Bull", sticks-

driven hyper-swing of "Heureux" and the theme doubled by arco bass title track giving way to fleet solo trades by tenor and guitar to the change-up to brushes on leisurely "Sancho Panza". Ellman complements Allen's leanings with a mellow tone, laying down judicious, supportive chords behind the saxophone solos, his own suggesting a similarly narrative goal.

This may be "free" music according to Allen, based on modes, but it is as bluesy and classically in the jazz tradition as Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com. Allen is at Jazz Standard Jan. 4th-7th with Orrin Eoans and Weill Recital Hall Jan. 11th with Lisa Hilton. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM

Just Friends (Live at the Village Vanguard)
Eddie Daniels/Roger Kellaway (Resonance)
by Tom Greenland

Clarinetist Eddie Daniels and pianist/composer Roger Kellaway first recognized their musical and personal compatibility nearly 30 years ago at a "Highlights in Jazz" concert, which soon led to gigs, a studio recording (the former's *Memos from Paradise* featuring the latter's songs and arrangements) and a live date at the Village Vanguard on Nov. 26th, 1988. Fortunately, George Klabin was on hand to capture the excitement via a single mic placed on a front-row table. Although the recording, which had lain around for three decades, lacks the clarity and separation possible with better technology, the tangible vitality and creativity of the set more than compensates for lower fidelity.

Now available as *Just Friends: Live at the Village Vanguard*, the album contains two originals by each co-leader plus the titular cover track. Daniels and Kellaway are both consummate technicians, apparently untrammelled by the physical constraints of their respective instruments, allowing for a sense of free-flowing inspiration between them, that one will easily follow where the other may choose to lead, no matter how circuitous the path. The music—dense, fast, prolific—nonetheless retains ample breathing room amid the onslaught of notes.

Daniels, the busiest of all, demonstrates astounding control of his horn and a strong debt to his classical background while never letting his chops dominate his ideas. Kellaway, possessing the precise, incisive attack of Oscar Peterson coupled with a compositional and orchestral approach to the keyboard, often leaves spaces where little expected. Buster Williams and Al Foster, two of the finest rhythm players of the time, are routinely excellent; their solos on the title track (which opens with a taste of free improv) and frenetic "The Spice Man" are album highpoints.

More than a time capsule, the concert recording, as Kellaway aptly observes in the liner notes, is "jam-packed with imagination and a feeling of life's spirit."

For more information, visit resonancerecords.org. Kellaway is at Mezzrow Jan. 5th-6th and Jazz at Kitano Jan. 12th-13th. See Calendar.