

NEAL CAINE, BACKSTABBER'S BALL, SMALLS 8.

intro / D E A / Good Gooold / W M D Interlude / W M D / Late Night Living / Corporate Jazz / Conversation for Two / W M D Interlude / Crescent City Reflections / Clare Evermore / W M D Interlude / The Hempire Strikes Back / Backstabber's Ball / outro. 65:55.

Caine, b; Ned Goold, ts; Stephen Riley, ts, alto cl; Jason Marsalis, d. Recorded in New Orleans (no dates given).

Stripped down to its essentials, this music is built on the rock solid foundation forged by Caine and Marsalis. Caine has longstanding relationships with each member of this quartet—and the two-tenor line is a fine choice here, as the tough but elusive players conjure a distinct sound and make great work of the rich harmonies in Caine's writing—and their considerable experience (Caine joined Elvin's band when he was only 20!) pays off here. "D E A" has dark corners and world weariness that suggests a lost Joe Henderson date from the '60s. The light and shade of the title track has a like charm to it. But while the songwriting has character and presence, the music is supple and gives ample room to each player. There are nice solos by all concerned, but Caine's are especially impressive—he's a fine storyteller, as evidenced on "Good Gooold" (and the dedicatee sounds fine as well, with a nice polished tone and graceful legato playing). There's also some nice, fractious double-reed work on "W M D," with Riley's querulous alto clarinet a nice counterpoint to Goold's tenor. It's tunes like this and the sprightly "Corporate Jazz" that recall some of Matt Wilson's excellent dates. And Marsalis is a nice surprise here, playing with power combined with subtlety—swinging well, judiciously accenting and coloring, or even lightly funking things up as on "Conversation for Two." Overall the album's a bit too long considering how brief many of these tunes are; I'd rather hear this band stretch out as they do on fine pieces like "Crescent City Reflections." This music is tough and graceful at once, rootsy but without its head in the sand.

Jason Bivins

PLASTIKMUCKE, [POLIMER]ISATION, KONNEX 5151.

nirli zitel / propen prabel / glicidil fenil / hexa eten / kar krlilase / uretan platel / urotel zinom / akulon / noiril riton / kondoo plaste / iso stilen / maleik strol / oktil vinil / deltrin butadien / lupolen nodal / polia mid. 49:04.

Julean Simon, el sax; Ernst Bier, el d. No date or location indicated.

Back in the Sixties, the duo of Perrey and Kingsley recorded a pair of albums for Vanguard using all electronic instrumentation. *The In Sound From Way Out* and *Spotlight On The Moog (Kaleidoscopic Vibrations)* were campy, chirpy romps through pop songs and silly originals. That's the music that I immediately thought of when confronted with this CD by the duo of Julean Simon on electric sax and Ernst Bier on Yamaha electric drums. At least Perrey and Kingsley allowed them-

selves the luxury of melody. These guys are content to isolate a random patch of interesting (or not) noises, give it an equally meaningless title, and move on to the next track. Maybe someone with ideas will sample some of the cool sounds here and make some music from it, but as it stands, this is cold, soulless, and frequently annoying. Pass.

Stuart Kremsky

ALEX WARD/LUKE BARLOW/ SIMON FELL/STEVE NOBLE, HELP POINT, COPEPOD 2.

The Night Watchman / The Snap / The Devil's Head / The Mumbles / The Needles / The Cronk / The Noup / The Skares / Help Point Shut. 66:08.

Ward, cl; Barlow, Rhodes, Oberheim OB3; Simon Fell, b; Steve Noble, d. September 3, 2003, London, England.

Neither the Fender Rhodes nor better yet, the Oberheim synthesizer, are instruments usually found in the credits for improvised music. However, believe it or not, Brit Luke Barlow makes a case for the instruments on this session, though, despite the fact that he is plugged in, he sometimes gets lost (or more fittingly, talked over), given the zeal of his bandmates. But, what of this summit of clarinet Alex Ward's devise? For this new quartet (and record label), clarinetist Alex Ward brings in folks from different groups into this improvised project filled with mystery and energy that rises and falls like mercury. As for his associates, the aforementioned Barlow's keys hum, dance, and stab, Simon Fell's bass tugs and sings and Steve Noble's drums tussle and color the extremes. As for the program itself, the quartet provides nine instant compositions that are heavy on tension, providing little release other than splashes of invigorating, upbeat propulsion. Given that, this is the classic sort of free improv that relies on simmering group interplay with just glimpses of the whole picture as it progresses.

The dense expedition commences with the steady "The Night Watchman," as the protagonist starts out unsteady into the night before encountering a flurry of activity (thanks to Noble's percussion rattles) before the excitement subsides and the sounds of the evening take over. On "The Snap," Fell's muscular plucks incite Ward's jittery counterpoint, Noble's clatters and Barlow's mysterious keyboard see-saws before the sea subsides. But what these two tracks demonstrate is that these improvisers are fearless journeymen, seemingly trekking into the unknown and emerging with something often exciting and usually, quite dramatic. Drawing upon the group's communal spirit, tracks like "The Devil's Head" and "The Mumbles" are the high points of the record, with the former, a mysterious excursion before Fell explodes and the latter, a continually compelling conversation before the excitement subsides, with sounds reminding of your local zoo's bird house. But like any good improvised music record, listeners are taken along to unexpected places, like the