

Cadence

THE REVIEW OF JAZZ & BLUES: CREATIVE IMPROVISED MUSIC

NAKED ON THE FLOOR, NAKED ON THE FLOOR, VALID 1010.

Jonathan Freyfish (aka The Jonathan Freakish) / Possible Reflections (On Your Most Humorous Fears after Leaving the Haunted House) / Cultural Confusion / The Semitic Problem / Fears Dress in the Subconscious (and then go out dancing) / The Little One / Reward for Big Man Morricone. 52:33.

Mark Difflorio, d; Jonathan Freilich, g; Tim Green, s; James Singleton, b; Rick Trolsen, tbn. New Orleans, LA. 07/10/02.

This record was still hot in my hands when, reading the February *Cadence*, I came across Larry Hollis's happy celebration of "yet another new voice from down around Big Easy way" (2/03, p.110). To this reminder that there's way more going on down there than we hear of in New York, let me add another. Here is—as Hollis says, "yet another new voice" from New Orleans. Or at least an almost new voice: Naked on the Floor has apparently been playing together since the early '90s, when they formed as an outlet for material from Jonathan Freilich that wasn't appropriate for The New Orleans Klezmer Allstars. That very idea spins my head a little: I'm glad to know of jazz in New Orleans that is not about tradition—whether suited up for the museum crowd or clowning-out in boaters and suspenders for the diversion of the tourist trade. There's very little about Naked on the Floor that necessarily says "New Orleans." Neither does it seem a downtown act somehow lost far from home. If I had to locate this record anywhere I say it feels something like Sun Ra on a particularly sunny day. "Naked on the Floor" playfully dances over and back between inside and outside, between irresistible grooves and free exploration. Everyone in the band contributes, and it's hard to imagine any of the tracks without all five members of the ensemble involved. This is quite simply a terrific record—one of those lucky assignments where I quickly forgot that I was supposed to be reviewing the record and not just surrendering to its many pleasures.

Track one starts off with a slightly funky guitar riff that after about four bars is joined by a hooky, six-note figure on Singleton's bass: the strings are already swinging before the horns join in on what sounds a little like an outcat's take on "A Night in Tunisia." All the elements come together here. Difflorio's drumming is loose, leaving plenty of space for everyone else to play without ever letting anyone's feet rest. Green takes a long first solo, playing melodically (usually) but not sweetly, and letting the rhythm section carry him forward. Freilich comes in for his solo after about four minutes. His solo eventually leads back to the opening figures—which would, incidentally, be inconceivable without Trolsen's trombone.

The second track opens like it wants to outdo the first. If you know Sun Ra's recording of "Pink Elephants on Parade" you can imagine the feel of this one. Slightly macabre yet very fun: exactly what the title would suggest—"Possible Reflections (on your most humorous fears after leaving the haunted house)." But just under a minute in, the oom-pah drive of the head breaks down. The rhythm section backs off, with Singleton bowing, and Trolsen sounding like he's come in off a Franz Koglmann record. Some three minutes later, Freilich and Difflorio lead everyone back into tempo. This is the longest track on the album, and before it's over the music has morphed and reinvented itself several times over.

The next three tracks are less immediately—I mean to say this without even the slightest condescension—"radio friendly." Less immediately, but I found them growing on me with successive listenings. They continue to be inventive, with the ensemble play imaginatively interactive and the solos full of ideas. There is a nice hook in the head for "The Semitic Problem," and the rhythm here is steadily mid-tempo until Freilich's guitar picks things up; at this point we get the album's

first distinctively New Orleans element, as Difflorio lays down a Crescent City shuffle (about 3:40-5:20). Track five, "Fears Dress in the Subconscious" etc., is the most adventurously "outside" track on the album.

Things come back home with "The Little One," which features a developed Freilich solo, and then some nice interplay between the horns. This track feels quite bluesy, with a nice modulation from a minor verse to a major release. But perhaps the most infectious track on the entire record is the closing number, "Reward for Big Man Morricone." Once again, opening with a Freilich lick, this one delivers some real hooks, and like the first two tracks in particular leaves me admiring Freilich's compositional talents.

I haven't had so much fun with a record in months, and can't think of many other recent examples where a musician's determination to be "beyond category" encouraged so much *play*. I wasn't familiar with these musicians before hearing this record, but I'll be watching for them from now on and waiting for their next release. While I'm waiting I'll be spinning this disc for anyone I can get to lay down their burden for a few minutes and listen.

Michael Coyle