

Mannyoka
Kaoru Abe/Sabu Toyozumi (NoBusiness)
 by Pierre Crépon

After years of delicate polishing and marketing, some discographies resemble the bronze statues enshrining historical figures in the urban landscape. Japanese free jazz saxophonist Kaoru Abe's discography would be more akin to an untamed mythical beast. Nearly entirely posthumous and insular, it includes a ten-disc solo set, an extensive CD-R series recorded in Fukushima and one of its most heralded releases, *Winter 1972*, existing only as a 500-copy bootleg.

Mannyoka is two previously unreleased sets recorded in 1978, the year Abe died of an overdose of sleeping pills at 29 (he would have turned 70 this month). Both feature "Overhang Party", Abe's duo of the final year with drummer Sabu Toyozumi. The two sets, recorded by an audience member, showcase very different sides.

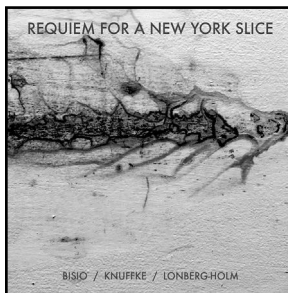
"Song for Mithue Toyozumi" probes the realm of quiet intensity, without ever resorting to the usual tricks of low-volume playing. Toyozumi encircles the bursts of harsh tone coming out of the saxophone, delimiting a perimeter that progressively shrinks toward near silence. It is not easy music, but points in the direction of an untrodden, mysterious path.

In "Song for Sakamoto Kikuyo", through speed,

precision and power, the pair construct a towering mass of intense sound. Even in a musical context, sound remains a physical phenomenon: the hardly understandable, relentless interplay builds up such an amount of pressure the sound mass actually seems to bend, where less complete musicians would have been left with shattered fragments of broken noise long ago.

Something in the cover's white background, framing a picture of Abe as a child in postwar Japan, brings to mind the great Improvising Beings label. It is therefore no surprise to discover that the deep liner notes have been penned by Julien Palomo, founder of that label. *Mannyoka* manages to add to the sprawling Abe discography and makes sense, pointing toward yet something else to hear in the late saxophonist's music. In the mastered creation lies the answer to the question of why Abe left such a mark on those who heard him.

For more information, visit nobusinessrecords.com



Requiem for a New York Slice
Michael Bisio/Kirk Knuffke/Fred Lonberg-Holm (Iluso)
 by John Sharpe

Although their titles mirror Gustav Fauré's *Requiem*, there is nothing either liturgical or premeditated about the five spontaneously composed pieces included here

under the more prosaically extended name *Requiem for a New York Slice*. But what the two works do have in common is a response to death through the medium of music. In this case it was the sudden demise of Mike Panico, co-founder of Relative Pitch Records, which provides the focus for this session convened by his friend bassist Michael Bisio three days later. The slice in the title refers to Panico's perennial search for the best pizza in town, a quest that Bisio often shared.

Alongside Bisio are the volatile stylings of cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm and downbeat lyricism of cornet player Kirk Knuffke. They unite in an outpouring of feeling transmuted into peerless chamber-inflected music. Although collectively conceived, Bisio plays an anchoring role, imparting movement and mood through his choice of steady resonant pizzicato or keening bow work. "Sanctus" shows how such masters can invent form on the fly as it progresses through three distinct sections: at first serene and funereal with overlapping drones; then with lightening atmosphere as the strings braid and cornet whinnies joyfully; before a final more abstract conclusion with rattling percussive noises supplementing the bowing and fragmented cornet phrases.

On the longest cut, "Pie Jesu", they create a shifting tableau from parallel streams, with a particular beauty in the continual convergence and divergence of sweeping arco cello, melancholy-tinged cornet and subtly modulated bass notes. Another highlight is the closing "In Paradisum", where once again Bisio steers proceedings, generating a grieving cry, which, as it becomes more energetic, takes on a transcendent preaching quality. This tribute is deeply moving.

For more information, visit ilusorecords.com. This project is at Michiko Studios May 25th. See Calendar.

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VINCENT HERRING saxophones
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DAVID WILLIAMS bass
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