



Share the Wealth
The Nels Cline Singers (Blue Note)
 by Robert Bush

Guitarist Nels Cline is one of the few who can push the envelope yet remain accessible to a large audience. For the last 20 years, one of Cline's most arresting ensembles has been The Nels Cline Singers, a trio with Trevor Dunn (bass) and Scott Amendola (drums), who began making records with *Instrumentals* (Cryptogramophone, 2002). Cline has doubled the group, adding Skerik (saxophone), Cyro Baptista (percussion) and Brian Marsella (keyboards) for this latest document. *Share the Wealth* functions as a potent love letter to the jazz-fusion era of the '70s, especially Herbie Hancock, Weather Report and Miles Davis.

The disc opens with "Segunda", the lone cover (written by Gal Costa.) Droning guitar sets up a hypnotic vamp for saxophone to shriek in the manner of mid '60s Pharoah Sanders or early Gato Barbieri. On "Beam/Spiral", the band makes effective use of space and the additional instrumentation. Especially striking is the rubato ballad "Nightstand", which features Skerik and Cline having a conversation recalling the Joe Zawinul/Wayne Shorter duet on "Blackthorn Rose" from the Weather Report album *Mysterious Traveler*.

Of course, it wouldn't be a real Cline album without some wicked, over-the-top distortion, delivered up on "Princess Phone", a jam straight out of Davis' *Big Fun*. This one serves as an effective calling card for Marsella's Fender Rhodes and the leader's fuzz-tone, wah-wah explorations. Dunn gets the spotlight on "The Pleather Patrol", laying down a super funky Bootsy Collins vamp over the slamming beat of Amendola. Cline and Marsella unveil an enticing duet between Dobro and toy piano on "Ashcan Treasure", one of the most concise moments on the album.

There are two epic jams that characterize the expanded lineup. The first, "Stump the Panel", is a prolific free-jazz-rock groove that encourages ball-out contributions from the entire band. One can easily hear strains of Davis' *Live/Evil* or Hancock's *Crossing*, with perhaps a dash of Sun Ra tossed in for good measure. The other epic jam, "A Place On The Moon", veers off into a Weather Report-inspired exploration that wouldn't sound out of place on *I Sing the Body Electric* or other monumental records of that era.

For more information, visit bluenote.com. Cline live-streams Mar. 21st at alternativeguitarsummit.com.



Flow States
Marshall Allen, Roscoe Mitchell, Milford Graves,
Scott Robinson (ScienSonic)
 by Kyle Oleksiuk

Flow States is an answer to the question: what would a free jazz arcade game sound like? The album, by reedplayers Roscoe Mitchell, Marshall Allen, Scott Robinson and the recently-deceased drummer Milford

Graves, includes long stretches in which the only sounds to be heard are electronic chirps backed by light drums and saxophone. This is by no means the majority – it takes up probably 15 of 70 minutes – but it is by far the most striking thing about it. The purpose of these 15 minutes seems to be to convince the listener that the cutting edge of jazz is in fact the *Super Mario Bros.* soundtrack. This is said just to tease the album, not demean it. It is a strong album that can withstand teasing and is an adventurous album that invites it.

The adventurous approach taken likely has something to do with the unique recording location: ScienSonic Laboratories, a New Jersey recording studio/record label/dispensary of "creative and far-reaching musical experiences", run by Robinson, who describes its recordings as including "a miniature symphony for contrabass sax and 7-ft. banjo... a solo multi-instrumental performance based on doctoral work in chaos theory... [and] the giant bells of Space Farms." Among this milieu, the 15 electronic minutes of *Flow States* are well within the bounds of normalcy.

The remaining 55 minutes are a high-energy free jazz atmospheric fugue (in the "fugue state" sense), worthy of addition to the browsing music of any adventurous record store. This section is relatively standard; it is the kind of thing that most free jazz fans will feel they've heard a thousand times before but, like the blues, one never gets tired of hearing it.

For more information, visit sciensonic.net. Robinson live-streams Mar. 26th at kerrytownconcerthouse.com/edgefest.



Future Stride
Emmet Cohen (Mack Avenue)
 by Scott Yanow

Emmet Cohen is a brilliant pianist who has a wide-ranging and flexible style. In fact, as he shows on this CD, he has several. Cohen has featured such greats as Benny Golson, George Coleman, Ron Carter, Jimmy Cobb and Albert "Tootie" Heath on his albums and works regularly with Christian McBride, Herlin Riley and Veronica Swift.

Naming one's CD *Future Stride* could lead listeners to believe that the set features futuristic stride piano as it could have been played by Ran Blake or Jason Moran. Actually the title of Cohen's Mack Avenue debut should not be taken too seriously for it is simply the name of an original, not the concept behind the set.

The enjoyable trio project, with Cohen's longtime rhythm section of bassist Russell Hall and drummer Kyle Poole, begins with the most exciting performance, a wonderful revival of the obscure "Symphonic Raps", a piece rarely played since the 1928 recording of Carroll Dickerson's *Savoyagers* featuring Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines. Cohen's playing (particularly his two unaccompanied choruses) makes the case that he can hold his own with any stride pianist around today. He also plays stride piano briefly on other selections but mostly is heard in a modern bop style.

Three selections add both tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana and trumpeter Marquis Hill while the closing ballad "Little Angel" has Hill overdubbing himself on a second trumpet. The horns add to the melancholy mood of the atmospheric "Reflections at Dusk", Aldana is particularly adventurous on "Toast To Lo" (which could have been subtitled "Future Hard Bop") and they get to take heated but concise solos to the uptempo romp "You Already Know".

The trio pieces include a slow and quietly emotional "Second Time Around", a witty and surprising "Dardanella" and a relatively straightforward "My Heart Stood Still" with Poole sitting out on Duke Ellington's "Pitter Panther Patter", which has fine interplay between Cohen and Hall. As for the title track, while Cohen plays some hot stride in a humorous way during the opening and brief closing melody, it is otherwise a boppish minor-toned blues.

Perhaps Cohen can be persuaded to record a full-length album of stride. That would be a joy to hear.

For more information, visit mackavenue.com. Cohen live-streams Mondays at emmetcohen.com/live-from-emmets-place.

IN PRINT

Poems and Drawings
Earl Freeman (50 Miles of Elbow Room/Wry Press)
 by Pierre Crépon and David Grundy

In pictures, the face of upright and electric bassist Earl Freeman, who would have turned 90 this month (he died in 1994) is shielded from the camera by heavy goggles and a pilot cap. Tall and thin, wearing custom military attire on and offstage and sometimes carrying a whip, he stood out among the already distinctive ranks of the '60s jazz avant garde. Although the Korean War draft cost Freeman a lung, leaving him with mobility issues, he was widely traveled. Born in Oakland, Freeman entered jazz history via France, by way of Franco's Spain. Already resident in Paris, in 1969 he appeared on several of the BYG-Actuel and America sessions. Without advance notice to the leader, Freeman can be heard reciting poetry on a Selwyn Lissack date. Returning to America, Freeman later counted among his admirers fellow bassist William Parker and recorded ambitious, if sporadic, projects of his own, for which he drew cover art. Something of a renaissance man, in the course of his travels, he left behind poems and ink drawings. 12 of the former and 4 of the latter have now been collected in this silkscreened box jointly published by 50 Miles of Elbow Room and Wry Press.

Reflecting the peripatetic nature of Freeman's life, the material is presented not as a conventional book, but as unbound, unnumbered facsimile postcards. The drawings combine sketchiness and density. Curlicues and tangled lines depict Black Panther George Jackson, a headless nude and patterns left by wind. Radically departing from clichéd ideas of "jazz poetry", Freeman's poems are gothic and surreal, combining out-of-context anecdotal fragments, non-sequiturs and rule-breaking punctuation – piled-up dashes and equals signs, commas breaking into the middle of words. Shadowy forces appear, from a "narc" to "the Anglo Texan tax man" to villains from popular culture. In one instance, the robot gunfighter from sci-fi western *Westworld* joins Dracula as "A true squire to the economy securing our military superiority / over the heathen". Elsewhere, there are fragmentary portraits of people and places. *Poems and Drawings* is a fascinating contribution to our sense of the multi-disciplinary undercurrents of the jazz avant garde.

For more information, visit 50milesfelbowroom.com