

Anthony Braxton & Miya Masaoka – Duo (DCWM) 2013 (2016)

Written by bluesever

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Anthony Braxton & Miya Masaoka – Duo (DCWM) 2013 (2016)



1-1 Experience 1 51:25 2-1 Experience 2 34:59 2-2 Experience 3 18:58 Anthony Braxton - Sopranino Saxophone, Soprano Saxophone, Alto Saxophone, Electronics Miya Masaoka - Koto [21 string Koto]

Typically for acclaimed reedman, composer and educator Anthony Braxton his encounter with the Japanese koto, played here by Miya Masaoka, is not even the first such duet in his voluminous discography. That was 11 Compositions (Duo) 1995 with Brett Lerner (Leo Records, 1997) which interpreted written materials. For all intents and purposes, Duo (DCWM) 2013 is freely improvised, but with the notable addition of Braxton's interactive electronic textures which add an air of mystery through generally unobtrusive washes, shimmers, tinkled chimes and sine wave chords, making the self-styled Diamond Curtain Wall moniker all the more appropriate.

Over the course of 2CDs containing three cuts, Braxton switches between soprano, soprano and alto saxophones, but whatever the register his attitude remains the same. He runs the entire gamut of expression, from pure-toned whistles, cool school phraseology, his characteristic double time gallop, querulous murmurs, lyrical fragments, and keypad pattering to wheezy vocalizations, like an old man reminiscing about his life.

He never goes for broke, but seems always on the verge of transforming to something else. Masaoka calls on an astonishing range of non chordal, non linear rejoinders. She strums, swipes, picks, bends notes, bows strings, offers detuned twangs, rapidfire arpeggios, blues guitar sonorities and booming rubbed vibrations.

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While sometimes the results might seem like two unassociated tracks (three even, when the electronics kick in), that view is discredited by an often shared sense of dynamics, common pauses, and simultaneous changes in attack, as opposed to melodic or rhythmic continuity. In some ways this meeting most resembles Braxton's discs with iconoclastic guitarist Derek Bailey, and it is comparable in that their differing tactics reach rapprochement through attentive listening.

It's not possible to discern any cause and effect in what triggers the electronics. At points you can almost hear Masaoka testing the computer program, essaying rippling glissandi or isolated sallies and then pausing to hear what if any response it draws.

Extended techniques by both participants, especially Masaoka, make for a kaleidoscopic exchange of unalloyed sound with instrumental norms transcended: a conversation in unfathomable languages with unknown syntax. Overall the session conjures a dreamlike, trance inducing state. For a jazz audience the passages that perform best are likely when staccato koto plucks punctuate flowing saxophone, but perhaps that is just down to similarity to standard procedures. As with much of Braxton's work, this is sui generis and both aficionados and those with open ears will find much to savor. ---John Sharpe, allaboutjazz.com

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