

Matthew Halsall - On The Go (2011)

Written by bluesever
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01. *Music For A Dancing Mind* (08:54) 02. *Song For Charlie* (07:04) 03. *The End Of Dukkha* (06:41) 04. *Samatha* (09:18) 05. *The Journey Home* (06:55) 06. *The Move* (05:30) Double Bass – Gavin Barras Drums – Gaz Hughes Harp – Rachael Gladwin Piano – Adam Fairhall Saxophone – Nat Birchall Trumpet – Matthew Halsall

Slipping under the radar this low-key reissue of Matthew Halsall's classic 2011 album should not be ignored. Why so? Well rather than just tweak the tapes for a first vinyl issue Halsall, who it appears was not completely happy with the original mix, has taken the opportunity to commission a full remix and remaster by George Atkins, and added a generous 3 previously unreleased contemporaneous tracks inspired by Miles Davis' soundtrack to *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud* (Lift to the Scaffold).

So instead of a six track, 45 minute, single LP we now have a 9 track, 65 minute expanded version. Out goes the original mix credited to Halsall and Brendan Williams, along with Williams' mastering, to be replaced by a brand new sparkling mix by George Atkins. Atkins has been entrusted with the mastering of each Halsall album that followed this one and has mixed or co-mixed the last two, making him a core member of the Gondwana records inner circle. Whether the significant improvements in the overall sound are entirely the result of Atkins work or simply Halsall being clearer on his aims 5 years on, the step change from the 2011 CD was a surprise. The previous version was hardly deficient, *On the Go* was jazz album of the year at Gilles Peterson's Worldwide awards in 2012 after all, but it is clearly surpassed by the reissue.

So, for example, "Journey Home" adds noticeably more punch and propulsion to the sound of Gavin Barras' bass and gives more clarity on the percussion work from Gaz Hughes. Best of all Nat Birchall's saxophone feels broader, percolating into every corner of the mix and making a favourite track still better. There is evidence of attention to detail on "The Move" the final track of

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the 2011 configuration—now the drum ripples in the introduction under Halsall's trumpet are clearer and some general percussive detail is now audible that had previously been drowned out by cymbal. Add that level of sonic improvement to the collection's best known track "Music for a Dancing Mind" and this is the sort of record that reminds us why we all get pulled back to jazz and improvised music despite the attractions of other genres—that lightness of touch, control of pace and melody that only the very best can achieve using an instrumental format where the possibilities might reasonably have been expected to have been exhausted decades ago. The "End of Dukkha" too is much improved, the piano sound being more natural and resonant, with "Samatha" also revealing clearer harp and drum brush contributions.

The new pieces are good companions to the original album, an enjoyable, thoughtful, coda rather than additions that surpass the original configuration that was, let's face it, great to start with. Of these probably the best is "Only You" that at times evokes the dreamlike piano and bass feel of say a "Blue in Green." "Singing Everyday" has a more traditional blues derived feel with some great trumpet by Halsall, while "Breathless" is a melancholy mid-paced trumpet-led shuffle that most evokes the feel of the Miles Davis soundtrack that inspired it. The packaging of the special edition has been shorn of all recording session information so it is not possible to plot the timing of the sessions that yielded the new tracks beyond the "around the same time" steer that Halsall gives in the press release. Much of that original album was recorded in 2010 -a productive year for Halsall that also yielded three pieces that later appeared on the transitional Fletcher Moss Park collection released in autumn 2012. If three further quality tracks such as these can be found for this reissue, who can say what other gems remain interred in the Gondwana vaults?

We can be certain though, that following this album Halsall sought to explore other musical influences from the more esoteric end of jazz—Alice Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders in particular, but also Art Ensemble of Chicago on 2015's "Into Forever." While this has undeniably made for great music—2014's *When the World Was One* remains my personal favourite of his many great records—"On the Go" is his most immediately accessible work for the curious jazz fan. The improvements to the sound here are significant and the added bonus of the three new tracks mean that this reissue can only be highly recommended. ---Phil Barnes, allaboutjazz.com

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