

On one occasion Fraser's sketches come as a pair, maximizing contrast in a single piece: in its initial segment, *Sketch #20/22* includes a playful pointillist dialogue between cello and drums; the concluding phase presents the tenor saxophone as high-speed drill, Malaby finding a level of intensity few can reach. The concluding *Sketch #21* provides a tranquil contrast with Malaby on soprano, exploring not only its usual piquant flavour and subtle multiphonics, but initially pressing the instrument towards a flute-like sonority.

**Stuart Broomer**

**Concert Note:** Nick Fraser is appearing at the Rex on May 4 and 5 to launch two CDs by two bands: *Starer* with his quartet, as well as *Too Many Continents* (Clean Feed) with Tony Malaby and pianist Kris Davis.

**Gestes**  
**GGRIL**  
**Tour de Bras TDB CD 90015**  
**(tourdebras.com)**

▶ GGRIL is an acronym for the Grand Groupe Régional d'Improvisation Libérée, a 12-member ensemble led by bassist Eric Normand that's devoted to collective improvisation and conduction, or conducted improvisation. Based in the unlikely hamlet of Rimouski, Quebec, the group has nonetheless managed to collaborate with international soloists and recently completed a European tour. *Gestes* marks their continuing development, a program of five improvisations and a piece by percussionist Danielle P. Roger.



Perhaps it's the relative isolation from musicians of similarly radical orientation, but GGRIL has developed a very high level of sustained interaction, evident here in continuously controlled work in which both individual and group invention are in sharp focus. The group's odd mix of instruments – brass, reeds, accordion and a collection of guitars, strings and percussion – creates striking contrasts, while the musicians' heterodox backgrounds have them drawing simultaneously on elements of classical, jazz, folk, and industrial music. *Les gestes permettent...* moves through distinct texture and moods, first featuring the warmly plaintive trombone of Gabriel Rochette, then shifting to a passage of Webern-esque spikiness from violinist Raphaël Arseneault that's set against the sustained tones of low-pitched reeds. That passing invocation of high modernism gives way to random snare rattles and feedback guitars.

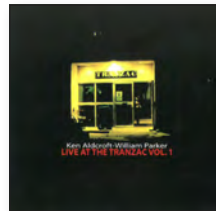
Other dimensions of the group's resources are evident in the verbi-vocal explosions of *De nombreux humain...*, the dissonant brass blasts of *Les signes...* and the sustained machine rhythms of *Mais au delà de*

*montrer...* as GGRIL continues to find ways to challenge themselves and audiences alike to take that next step.

**Stuart Broomer**

**Live at the Tranzac Vol.1**  
**Ken Aldcroft; William Parker**  
**Trio Records TRP-D504-023**  
**kenaldcroft.com/triorecords.asp**

▶ It is always curious to hear about musicians moving to Toronto where the establishments supporting creative music are few and far between, especially if these musicians relocate from Vancouver or Montreal. But who's complaining? I am at great risk of losing an arm and a leg for suggesting better the Vancouver-born Ken Aldcroft than a hockey player from the U.S. for the Maple Leafs. However, when you hear his 2016 recording with bassist William Parker it all becomes eminently clear. Both men have reputations for being key 21st-century innovators. Parker and Aldcroft worship at the altar of creativity and if you needed more reasons to appreciate those facts, they are all on this remarkable album, *Live at the Tranzac Vol.1*.



There is never a dull moment on this long piece, simply entitled *Set 1*. Ideas abound and the music virtually bustles with energetic rhythm and vigorous figurations with no hint of ever coming to an end. The music weaves in and out of melodic phrases and features ever arresting improvisation that challenges even the instrument's timbral colour. This is a dazzling performance – with Parker also featured on the Japanese shakuhachi and the West African donso ngoni – and when imbued with the intensity and imagination of Aldcroft and Parker the music emerges with a constant stream of new colours, emotions and effects. Moreover, both musicians are supreme masters of musical invention, as this recording triumphantly demonstrates.

**Raul da Gama**

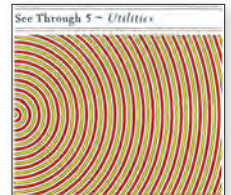
**Utilities**  
**See Through 5**  
**All-Set AS001**

**Transcombobulation**  
**Mike Smith; Jonathan Adjemian**  
**All-Set AS003**

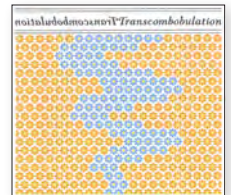
**Never Get Lost for Long**  
**Ali Berkok**  
**All-Set AS002 (all-set.org)**

▶ The experimental music scene in Toronto is bustling. It had all but been written off with the virtual retirement of Bill Smith, who, almost single-handedly, brought in musicians

such as trombonist George Lewis, the great Anthony Braxton, bassist Dave Holland and many others. Together with the late John Norris, Smith put a lot of the 60s avant-garde on the Sackville label. With Smith in hermitage and the death of John Norris, the centre of this daring music seemed to shift to Guelph, Ontario, where the annual festival seemed to be the only event that showcased the new music. But the Greater Toronto Area appears to have awoken again and the latest manifestation of this is a new imprint called All-Set! (all-set.org). This enterprise founded by bassist Mike Smith has exploded out of the blocks with three discs featuring bold new music where conventional instruments have been leavened with electronica.



Some people's reaction on hearing the synths and loops of *See Through 5* on *Utilities* might be "this is not a jazz album." But Mike Smith, pianist Tania Gill, bassist Pete Johnston, reeds and woodwinds specialist Karen Ng and percussion colourist Jake Oelrichs may confound yet please critics. But then the virtuoso musicians seem to have cut the improvised to the bone and turned it into tracks with tunes or at least music with irresistible hooks. To complement the crisp clarity of the electronics, *See Through 5* have sown carefully constructed pieces with sections of Ng's magisterial saxophone and clarinet improvisations. As a studio production it works beautifully.



Once you get past the almost unpronounceable title of this recording, *Transcombobulation* by Mike Smith and Jonathan Adjemian, you truly enjoy its exploratory music. This is a six-part musical adventure that abounds in variety, depth and invention. Smith is among the foremost of the talented Toronto musicians who has developed an individualistic, difficult-to-classify personal genre. On this riveting disc, Smith and Adjemian imaginatively and (by-and-large) subtly mix in elements of electronic music, rock and contemporary composition with an occasional nod to noise music. Although the pieces develop from beguiling, elegant melodies, what makes them special are Smith and Adjemian's arresting textures and colours.



Ali Berkok's *Never Get Lost For Long* is one of the most adventurous recordings by a Canadian in a considerable length of time. Angular, with a proverbial doffing of the

hat towards minimalism, Berkok's playing is exhilarating, extroverted and virtuosic. Simple as it seems it actually presents rather formidable technical challenges, all of which are surmounted almost with nonchalance. Berkok has a particularly rewarding sense of rhythm, high-sprung, light and incisive, and entirely secure. John Coltrane's *Giant Steps* is particularly brilliant, also played with no-holds-barred intuition.

**Raul da Gama**

**Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground  
Noah Preminger  
Independent (noahpremier.com)**

▶ Last year New York tenor saxophonist Noah Preminger released *Pivot: Live at the 55 Bar*, leading his quartet in two half-hour improvisations based on themes from the 1930s blues master Booker "Bukka" White. Now there's a studio follow-up deep in the same vein, with concentrated instrumental treatments of nine songs by White, Blind Willie Johnson, Charley Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson and other country blues and gospel singers who recorded in the late 20s and early 30s. Preminger's group conception is rooted in the early 60s work of Ornette Coleman and Sonny Rollins (particularly their bands with Don Cherry), employing that highly conversational, free jazz style and its raw, vocalic emphasis as a conduit to the emotional well-springs of early blues.



White's *I Am the Heavenly Way* has the band in celebratory flight, from the bouncing theme statement and sprung rhythms generated by bassist Kim Cass and expatriate Vancouver drummer Ian Froman to Preminger's charging solo and trumpeter Jason Palmer's rapid-fire, splintering lines. Jefferson's *Black Snake Moan* has elements of a New Orleans parade band, while Robert Johnson's mournful *Love in Vain* is reduced to an ever-resolving melodic fragment, at once litany and cry.

It's music filled with a subtle light as Preminger and company seek the emotional and spiritual heart of jazz through the grain of its primal melodic figures, journeying into the past to achieve a rare presence.

**Stuart Broomer**

**Turning Towards the Light  
Adam Rudolph Go Organic Guitar  
Orchestra  
Cuneiform Records RUNE 406  
(cuneiformrecords.com)**

▶ New York guitarist Adam Rudolph's conducted Toronto players in a fascinating group improvisation earlier this year at the Music Gallery. But it was also like reading one well-crafted chapter in a serialized novel.

That's because the peripatetic Rudolph has directed similar large groups for the past few years, melding non-western rhythms with Euro-American instrumental techniques.

*Turning Towards the Light* is the most recent recorded example, but rather than parcelling out parts among vocalist and instrumentalists as in Toronto, the CD showcases 13 instances of intermingling string strategies from six electric guitarists, one acoustic guitarist, a bass guitarist as well as three pickers who individually switch between electric bass and lap steel guitar, electric and national steel guitars and electric guitar and banjo.

Rather than resembling a free-for-all at a string-players convention, sonic strategies unite each performance. Like an architect combining many styles to design a distinctive building, Rudolph's musical configurations can be jarring as well as soothing. As opposed to some builders who attempt to shoe-horn period details onto a contemporary structure, complementary textures are instead sought out and used judiciously as microtones and for maximum effect. On *Lambent* for instance, the overlapping of thick surf music-like electric bass runs and the tang of steel-guitar licks creates a feeling of both freedom and formalism. *Specular* finds two guitarists hashing out hard blues licks over a rhythmic groove. Meanwhile the narrative of the title tune buffets ocean-liner-like on waves of so many buzzing flanges and doorstopper-like resonations that the interaction could reflect computer programming.

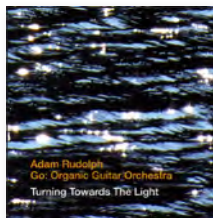
However the most indicative track is *Flame and Moth* which, unlike its title, transmogrifies caterpillar to butterfly within seven minutes. Initially sharply contrasting electric bass beats and meandering guitar locks, subsequent stacked string lines clang metronome-like to reach a crescendo of courtly gavotte-like passes, where all the pickers participate in sustained textural interchange.

Without stringing anyone along, Rudolph and his 11 associates demonstrate how, in the right hands and plectrums, improvising guitars can produce a riveting, transformative program.

**Ken Waxman**

**Derengés/Dawn  
Grencsó Open Collective  
SLAM CD 565/Hunnia Records HR CD 1508  
(slamproductions.net)**

▶ Arguably Hungary's most unique composer of the post-war era, pianist György Szabados (1939-2011) had difficulty performing his admixture of



free jazz-new music and folkloric sounds in communist times. Even after liberalization, during his sole Canadian appearance at 2006's Guelph Jazz Festival, his duo with percussionist Vladimir Tarasov was the equivalent of reading a *Reader's Digest* version of a novel – textures were lacking. Budapest-based reedist István Grenscó, who was a frequent member of the composer's ensembles from 1984 to 2007, rectifies the situation with this two-CD set of six Szabados compositions. Grenscó, who plays soprano and alto saxophones and bass clarinet here, creates the equivalent of a Technicolor film from the scores by adapting them to the varied tones produced by his own band – pianist Máté Pozsár, bassist Róbert Benkő and percussionist Szilveszter Miklós – plus, on three tracks, the viola of Szilárd Mezei, who may be Szabados' heir as a composer; trumpeter Ádám Meggtes on two; as well as two additional woodwind voices to give a breezy vaudeville-like strut to the concluding *Regölés/Minstrelsky*.

Meggtes' atonal blasts add the requisite free jazz tinctures to *Adyton*. But otherwise that tune, like *Azeskűvő/The Wedding* and *Fohsáz/Supplication* is chiefly animated by carefree currents of Roma-like dances via Mezei's fiddle, stacked up against the alternately dark ecclesiastical (deepened by bell-like resounds from the cymbals) or evocatively romantic, melody-making from Pozsár. Torquing the pace via nasal soprano bites or mocking the profundity of the slower faux-rustic tunes with sardonic alto saxophone cries, Grenscó still shepherds the ensemble back to the head at each composition's completion. *Halott-Táncoltatás/Dance of Reanimation* is the multiphonic masterpiece here. The original quartet members precisely figure out the exact percentage of light and dark tones and fast and slow rhythms needed to animate the composition, with the skill of medics gauging the proper amount of vaccine in a hypodermic needle. Pozsár uses pedal pressure to dig notes from the instrument's nether regions in tandem with thumping string bass slaps as a way to bolster the theme propelled on unruffled saxophone cries and then bass clarinet reverb. Meanwhile these instances of solo relation constantly trade places with successive theme motifs that encompass rustic dance-like cadences and a final military-like crescendo. The aura emanating from this CD demonstrates both the quality of Szabados' compositions and the pliant talents of his devoted interpreters.

**Ken Waxman**

