

**Peter Schärli
Trio featuring
Ithamara Koorax
*O Grande Amor***

TCB 03172
★★★★½

So often, singers function as featured entities, supported by but separate from the instrumental ensemble. This pairing of Brazilian singer Ithamara Koorax and the trio of Swiss trumpeter Peter Schärli is a rare instance of a voice working as another instrument. Koorax is singing songs here, to be sure, but her work is always within the instrumental context. As a result, this a quiet, unassuming gem of a recording.

Koorax and Schärli share simplicity of expression. That's not to say what they do is naive or rudimentary in any way. Her ethereal voice—singing in Portuguese throughout—packs much emotional implication in it. Likewise, his open trumpet—sounding fat enough to be taken for a cornet—always finds the shortest route to musical and emotional communication. With a voice scarcely larger (though an octave lower) than Blossom Dearie, Koorax authoritatively conjures compact majesty on the melodically beguiling “Setembro” and sings the rhythmic romp “Zum Zum” with no discernible fuss. Then she floats the title ballad with lighter-than-air musical pillow talk. This woman has manifold ability.

Schärli has a medium-dynamic attack and



palpable body to his tone. He might not be as rhythmically ornamental as Koorax, but the contrast of his minimalism is a nice counter-voice to hers.

Pianist Hans-Peter Pfammatter is another minimal dynamo. Hammering one- and two-finger percussiveness on “Sandalia Dela” deftly hints at the Bahia carnival without having to replicate it. He never overplays and instinctively leaves holes for Schärli to fill. This ensemble, and its collection of songs, is an inviting combination.

—Kirk Silsbee

O Grande Amor: Fotografia; Sandalia Dela; Setembro; Wedileto; O Grande Amor; Deixa; Para Machucar Meu Coração; Zum Zum. (46:00)
Personnel: Peter Schärli, trumpet; Hans-Peter Pfammatter, piano; Thomas Dürst, bass; Ithamara Koorax, vocals.
Ordering info: tcbrecords.com



**Chris Dahlgren
*Mystic Maze & Lexicon***

JAZZWERKSTATT 088
★★★★½

Chris Dahlgren's *Mystic Maze & Lexicon* can be heard as a throwback to the times when jazz and poetry had their biggest splash. That 1950s and early '60s era has stood the test of time. In Dahlgren's case, it may not have anything to do with recreating an era. Instead, the vibe or attitude seems more contemporarily dissonant even as it carries with it a certain, occasional swing. “A Mystic Maze,” which starts the program, finds the leader reading about Bela Bartok, his back-in-the-mix voice surrounded by an equally laid-back, medium tempo amidst a somewhat busy arrangement.

Easing into the program, Dahlgren (who doubles on bass) and group veer leftward for “Repetition Unit 1” and “Painless Dentistry No. 1.” The angular lines, the loose, jumbled rhythms and squished juxtaposition of notes provide a curious mix of spontaneity and avant-garde classicism. The forms are mostly sections, also suggesting a pretext for organization, but the soloists can get weird and wooly, as reedist Gebhard Ullmann and drummer Eric Schaeffer do throughout the (first) “Dentistry.”

To recall poetry and jazz here is to minimize Dahlgren's overall approach, which seems to be more about group ensemble and passion. “Great Desires Of The Modernists” rivets specifically because it takes the technology involved in using voices and almost turns the material into a forced march. On “Reminiscences On The Fourth Quartet Of Bela Bartok,” the famed composer is referred to literally, with Dahlgren's eerie voice and the spare, probing musical accompaniment suddenly miles away from anything jazz-related, the music more about ideas and conceptions and less about the body.

—John Ephland

Mystic Maze: A Mystic Maze; Repetition Unit 1; “Painless Dentistry” No. 1; Great Desires Of The Modernists; Reminiscences On The Fourth Quartet Of Bela Bartok; It Was As If Two People Were Improvising Against Each Other; Mesto; “Painless Dentistry” No. 2; The Composer Promenading The Keyboard In His Boots; Bitter Champagne; Repetition Unit 2; “Painless Dentistry” No. 3. (55:13)
Personnel: Antonis Anissegos, piano; Wurflitzer, sampler, voice; Chris Dahlgren, bass, voice narration; Eric Schaeffer, drums, percussion, voice, glockenspiel sampler; Gebhard Ullmann, tenor and soprano saxophones, bass clarinet; Christian Weidner, alto saxophone.
Ordering info: records-cd.com

**The O’Farrill Brothers
*Giant Peach***

ZOHO 201101
★★★★

Courting the dynamic feel of a much larger, much more experienced lineup, the O’Farrill Brothers’ music echoes their father Arturo’s tendency to swing hard while keeping the vibe light, airy and warm. That said, this is hardly a case of coattail riding. Adam O’Farrill, 16, and his 19-year-old brother, Zack, imbue their debut album together with a mix of highly structured, catchy originals (most of which are penned by Adam), plus a lukewarm arrangement of Benny Golson’s “Stablemates” that opts for a fade-out rather than the reverberating wind-down on the original recording.

A Latin rhythm sneaks into the etude “The Composing Process” as the piano—and occasionally, the trumpet—sounds out the struggle of creating new work. Zack’s drum chops and the clever interplay between horns and the rhythm section take centerstage on bassist Michael Sacks’ “Side Street,” which transitions from snappy to funky to sultry with ease.

But the title track displays the most creative flexibility. After drummer Zack sets the tone with a tense, brush-heavy pattern, the somewhat macabre Roald Dahl story is referenced by an appropriately sinister piano ostinato, which is



joined by unison horns before the melody opens up and then out into a confident trumpet solo. Eventually, a string-bending bass accents the oddball, shuffling rhythm.

The high level of playing and composing displayed here would be commendable for artists of any age; that the leaders are still in their teens suggests something truly great lies ahead.

—Jennifer Odell

Giant Peach: Stablemates; Face It!; Giant Peach; Side Street; The Composing Process; Happy Hours; Crazy Chicken; Afterwalk. (55:42)
Personnel: Adam O’Farrill, trumpet; Zack O’Farrill, drums; Livio Almeida, tenor saxophone; Zaccari Curtis, piano; Michael Sacks, bass.
Ordering info: zohomusic.com