

KAMIKAZE GROUND CREW
Madam Marie's Temple of Knowledge

New World Records 80438

While the artists of every generation must invent their own means for self-expression, that responsibility is complicated by the necessity to sift through the precedents and legacies of previous generations. That challenge can be especially taxing for musicians who have come of age in the so-called postmodern era, when history and world culture seem to be contracting into an undifferentiated blur under the influence of instantaneous mass communication. How do you come up with something new under the sun, not only in the shadow of everyone from J.S. Bach to John Cage, from Louis Armstrong to John Coltrane, and from Robert Johnson to Frank Zappa, but also when virtually all ethnic traditions around the globe--Bulgarian choirs, Balinese gamelan, North Indian improvisation, South African pop, Tibetan chants--are at your fingertips?

In *Madam Marie's Temple of Knowledge*, the members of the Kamikaze Ground Crew have succeeded in forging a musical language that is at the same time rife with familiar references and bristling with novel ideas and innovative constructions. In the ten years since they first came together as the horns-and-percussion pit band for the Flying Karamazov Brothers, they have expanded dramatically that original nouveau vaudeville vision of musical and theatrical collaboration. What has emerged is an extraordinarily eclectic ensemble that draws from a diverse array of sources for a variety of special projects, including concert performances, theater productions (such as a 1993 joint venture with the Flying Karamazovs in a version of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*), and recordings, including this, their fourth as the Kamikaze Ground Crew.

To find the origins of the band's multifarious musical lexicon, one need look no further than the backgrounds of its two principal composers, Gina Leishman and Doug Wieselmann. Born and raised in England, with a British father and an American mother, and living in the United States since 1977, Leishman grew up on a variegated musical diet derived from her dad's penchant for jazz, a thorough exposure to opera and the classics, and a pop cultural setting shaped by the Beatles.

Wieselmann, a Los Angeles native, found his classical clarinet training juxtaposed with a family record collection of folk dance music from around the world, a brief childhood residence in Israel (where he could hear Arabic music on the radio), and, eventually, added to an appetite for jazz of every type, and a guitar-playing passion for Sixties rock and roll. He has performed on recordings and in concerts with new music composer, singer-songwriter Robin Holcomb, keyboardist Wayne Horvitz's The President, the New York Composers Orchestra, guitarist Bill Frisell, accordionist Guy Klucevsek, and others. Both Leishman and Wieselmann write extensively for theater and dance companies.

So it comes as no surprise that much of the Kamikaze's music--whether it is Leishman's *Chorales for America* on the 1990 New World recording *The Scenic Route* or her "Cowboys" and Wieselmann's "Too Much Time in Brooklyn" on *Madam Marie's Temple of Knowledge*--has a lot to do with what it means to be an American in an increasingly multicultural society on a rapidly shrinking globe.

In this musical context, which entails both the vertical integration of historical antecedents through time and the horizontal integration of cultural influences across geographical borders, Leishman and Wieselmann are joined by empathetic Crew members who share the common ground of eclecticism. Steve Bernstein's virtuosity was evident while he was still a student at Berkeley High School in

California, where he played alongside multi-instrumentalist and former Kamikaze cohort Peter Apfelbaum. Now a New Yorker, Bernstein's diverse credits include work with the Lounge Lizards, Carla Bley, and rap artists Dignified Planets. Danny Frankel, in addition to anchoring the rhythm section of the pop band Urban Verbs, has generated beats for Brian Eno and Jon Hassell, and has contributed to Robin Holcomb's recordings and concerts. Ralph Carney, the most recent addition to the Ground Crew, is probably best known for his work with Tom Waits (whose restlessness puts incredible demands on his accompanists) as well as for his contributions to producer Hal Willner's many tribute- and concept-recording projects. Jeff Cressman, a most valuable player on the San Francisco Bay Area music scene, is a frontline performer with the Hieroglyphics Ensemble, plays in Jon Jang's Pan-Asian Arkestra, and serves as the music director of Pete Escovedo's Latin Jazz Orchestra. And Bob Lipton, who teaches school full-time south of San Francisco, came to the Kamikazes along a convoluted path that weaves in and out of symphonic and operatic work as well as the Clubfoot Orchestra.

When these versatile musicians come together from their respectively variegated paths, the music they make is almost necessarily beyond definition. The compositions that Leishman, Wieselmann and Bernstein have brought to *Madam Marie's Temple of Knowledge* stretch the boundaries even more. For instance, "Tears & Tango" and "Homage au Soleil" come from the music Leishman has written for a bilingual opera, *The Dream Project*, based on a 17th-century Spanish play that is being developed by the San Diego Repertory Theater. Her "Blue Lake Dances," which opens with a field recording made at the Paro spring festival in Bhutan, evolved from her collaborations with the Dell'Arte Company in Blue Lake, California, while "Baby Doll Lounge" was conceived in the original workshops for *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Other pieces spring from equally wide-ranging inspirations as well: Wieselmann's "Poppa Dance" derived from a project with choreographer Jerome Robbins, and Bernstein's "A Man A Plan" and "Cloud" are both related to American military interventions in Panama and the Persian Gulf. Several compositions assume extended forms, allowing ample room for improvisation. The result is a series of panoramas in which you can shift your focus from deliberate cultural allusions and puns to the unique individual thematic interpretations of the solos to the cohesive sound and vision of the ensemble as a whole.

The most creative music, whether or not it can be categorized, recognizes no borders. The Kamikaze Ground Crew shares a sense of adventure and exploration with such composers and ensembles as Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Sun Ra, Carla Bley, the Willem Breuker Kollektief, and the Vienna Art Orchestra. But its music also springs from a generation whose experience has made eclecticism and multiculturalism organic components of its artistic understanding of the world. Although the name Kamikaze Ground Crew connotes an earthbound work force, performing mundane tasks in the service of hell-bent daredevils on one-way aerial missions, this group is tracing its own risky and dauntless patterns across the musical skies.

—Derk Richardson

Derk Richardson is a Bay Area freelance writer who reviews music for the San Francisco Bay Guardian, the Express, and other publications.

DISCOGRAPHY

Kamikaze Ground Crew. Busmeat BR 101.

Live At Dance Theater Workshop. (Cassette only) Busmeat BC 002.

The Scenic Route. New World Records/CounterCurrents 80400-2.

Kamikaze Ground Crew

Steven Bernstein: trumpet, slide trumpet, cornet, flugelhorn

Ralph Carney: alto and tenor sax, clarinet, harmonica, toy piano

Jeff Cressman: trombone

Danny Frankel: drums, percussion, whistle

Bob Lipton: tuba

Gina Leishman: alto sax, bass clarinet, piccolo, accordion, piano, toy piano, vocals

Doug Wieselman: soprano, tenor and baritone sax, clarinet, E flat clarinet, castanets

Special thanks:

Michael Ward, Flying Karamazov Brothers, Peter Apfelbaum, Jerome Robbins, New Old Time Chautauqua, Tommy's Joint, Paro Festival Bhutan, Dell'Arte Company, Sam Woodhouse, Chez When, and Igor.

Danny Frankel uses Paiste cymbals and Vic Firth sticks.

This album is dedicated to Elisha Dubin and Stewart Parker.

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1- Cowboys (9:10)

(Leishman)

solos:

Ralph Carney, harmonica

Doug Wieselman, tenor sax

2- Some Wild Water (3:53)

(Wieselman)

solos:

Ralph Carney, B flat clarinet

Doug Wieselman, E flat clarinet

3- Tears and Tango (2:02)

(Leishman)

4- A Man A Plan (6:47)

(Bernstein)

order of solos:

Steven Bernstein, Doug Wieselman, Jeff Cressman, Ralph Carney

5- Poppa Dance (2:05)

(Wieselman)

solo:

Doug Wieselman, clarinet

6- Blue Lake Dances (12:50)

(Leishman)

solos:

Steven Bernstein, trumpet

Jeff Cressman, trombone

Ralph Carney, clarinet

7- Cloud (3:24)

(Bernstein)

solo:

Doug Wieselman, clarinet

8- Baby Doll Lounge (4:29)

(Leishman/Patterson)

vocals:

Gina Leishman

9- Too Much Time In Brooklyn (10:34)

(Wieselman)

solos:

Doug Wieselman, tenor sax

Steven Bernstein, slide trumpet

Ralph Carney, alto sax

Homage Au Soleil:

10- Chorale (3:28)

(Leishman)

11- You Are My Sunshine (3:12)

(Davis and Mitchell, arr. Leishman)

All songs published by Busmeat Music/BMI except "A Man A Plan" and "Cloud" (Spanish Fly Music/ASCAP) and "You Are My Sunshine" (Peer International Corp./BMI).

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