

Malamute
Jim Black (Intakt)
by Ken Waxman

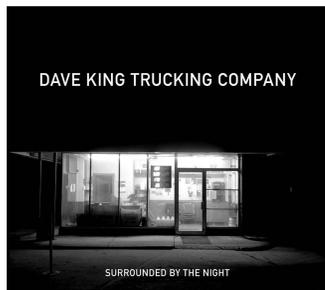
Malamute, the new album from drummer Jim Black named for a large breed of Alaskan dog, is a listening experience akin to approaching a large, tied-up canine you're not certain is friendly or ferocious. Most of the players in this group—keyboard player Elias Stemeseder, electric bassist Chris Tordini and especially the leader—have been involved with some of NYC's most exploratory musical situations while Icelandic tenor saxophonist Óskar Guðjónsson is more of a songster, with a Nordic style midway between melody and melancholy.

Not one of the CD's 13 tracks is longer than six minutes, with most in the three-minute range. Although crossbreeding can produce as attractive a dog as a labradoodle and artists as disparate as Duke Ellington and The Ramones have dealt memorably with miniature forms, this particular litter of tunes suffers from the lack of energy you would expect from an older pooch rather than a puppy. Since nearly all the tunes have titles related to canine life, from "Chase Rabbit" and "Stray" to "Pugged" and "No Leash", it's tempting to treat *Malamute* as the result of obedience training overboard.

The first tracks meander among sampler echoes, downbeat drumming and slurred sax tones until "Into the Pool"'s sudden keyboard splashes, drum ratamacues and staccato tongue stretches, propelled with the enthusiasm of a dog shaking himself after a long nap. Later tracks such as "Just Turned Two" and "Full Dish" are even better: the fomer attains a rock-like groove via Black's backbeat, Morse-code-like pumps from Stemeseder and wide vibrations from Guðjónsson while the latter puts vitamins in the kibble since the cool contrast of the saxophonist's straight-line theme-elaboration with the drummer's jagged pumps sets up a contrapuntal challenge that imbues this track with more emotional heft.

It's this overall lack of passion which makes *Malamute* a poor candidate for adoption. Perhaps next time out, the old dogs here will learn new (and livelier) tricks. The pedigree is certainly obvious.

For more information, visit intaktrec.ch. Black is at Roulette May 6th with John Zorn. See Calendar.



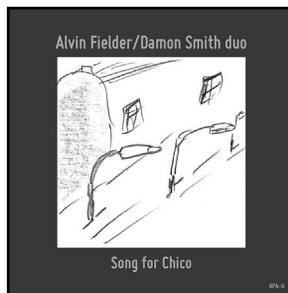
Surrounded by the Night
Dave King Trucking Company (Sunnyside)
by George Kanzler

Drummer Dave King, best known for his work in The Bad Plus, reveals a more exuberant, even frolicsome, side with his Trucking Company, a quintet exhibiting a wide range of inspirations and sensibilities, from '80s English pop-rock and arena rock to Lennie Tristano, postbop and early Ornette Coleman. Tristano's influence echoes in this quintet's use of

unison and close harmony lines from two saxophones, in this case the tenors of Chris Speed and Brandon Wozniak. Their choral playing dominates the opener, "Delta Kremer", a through-composed tune with an extended, Tristano-like long-line melody, King's brushed rhythm section suggesting Lennie meets California rock. There's also a Tristano meets Ornette vibe to "That Isn't Even Worth Selling", a swinger despite a gnarly theme featuring a strong bass (pizzicato) solo from Chris Morrissey and incisive contributions from the two tenors. Guitarist Erik Fratzke's "You Should Be Watching (Art) Films" begins as a neo-bop tune then adds stop-starts, acceleration-deceleration and EFX guitar, all with a wit suggestive of Raymond Scott's not-so-art film cartoon music.

King proves to be an imaginative composer. "Parallel Sister Track" juggles time planes—faster rhythm, slower theme—over a continuing ostinato long-riff carried by Morrissey as both tenors solo, in turn, over a thrashing, kinetic King. His most idiosyncratic piece is "Blue Candy", referring to the speed/amphetamine pills truckers are rumored to use; heartbeat-like ticking and ascending guitar chords alternate with faster passages featuring solos from the saxophones and Fratzke. Chiming guitar and a pop-rock backbeat power "Glamour Shot", Speed's clarinet blending with Wozniak's tenor in the melody, the latter turning up the heat with a driving solo. A rocking two-beat feel fuels "Don't Be Suspect Of A Gift", a short riff theme broken up by saxophone and guitar obbligati before Speed's tenor cascades through arpeggios over King's tumult, which continues as Fratzke revs up the rock feel with pedal-to-the-metal guitar soloing. It all ends whimsically, with a short a cappella saxophone coda and final hearty laugh, probably King's.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com. King is at Jazz Standard May 9th-14th with The Bad Plus. See Calendar.



Song for Chico
Alvin Fielder/Damon Smith (Balance Point Acoustics)
by Anders Griffen

Prospective listeners may be circumspect approaching a set consisting entirely of duets between an upright bass and drum set but, in these capable hands, any such misgivings quickly dissolve as the first improvisation unfolds. Each musician has an array of vocabulary from which to draw: drummer Alvin Fielder is articulate and has a lot of traditional sounds to mix into the adventurous stew while bassist Damon Smith is both consistently 'out' and inviting.

Fielder takes a solo during "Improvisation 1" in which one may hear hints of melodies like "Salt Peanuts" or "Rhythm-A-Ning"; more likely the drummer happened to play so many ideas that certain cells are reminiscent of familiar tunes, like seeing images in clouds. "Improvisation 2" embarks with an active, almost frantic, bow accompanied by round drum tones. Smith then switches between pizzicato, arco and percussive sounds as the musicians keep moving, changing from one theme to the next. Smith moves in and out of the proceedings, sometimes sneakily, other times more abruptly. The percussion on the title track, the shortest piece, and "Improvisation 3" is especially beautiful. One may sometimes wonder where the sound is coming from or how it is produced with metal, wood and mallets. With scratched tones (generally not a compliment to arco performance as it

is here) Smith conjures worlds and gets an evocative sound like a distorted whistle. "Roots (Johnny Dyani)" is all bass at first: lovely bending arco melodies over a drone and some pretty single-note lines, then a four-note ostinato. Fielder plays melodies galore before his solo midway through, referencing the bassline. The bass does not return.

The track listing itself tells you something about what they were up to: three improvisations, one set of variations and two titled tunes. Without playing a groove per se, the musicians get into one with a mutual feeling of forward motion.

For more information, visit balancepointacoustics.com

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