

Ulmer shifts the blame for the flood from nature to politics, singing "Oh, she's not to blame," over and over, until he breaks it down to chant his conclusion: "Talk to the President..."

People died in the flood only two blocks from where this record was made—the kind of Biblical reality that informs so much of the pre-electronic folk culture of the blues. This means that even the songs here that Ulmer didn't write resonate with the flood—as when he sings as if he's looking at his own flood-ruined house down the road in Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues": "I looked down at that old shack, that old shack where I used to live."

—John Swenson

jazz

KOMEDA PROJECT *Crazy Girl*

Russ Johnson, trumpet, flugelhorn; Krzysztof Medyna, soprano & tenor sax; Andrzej Winnicki, piano; Michael Bates, bass; David Anthony, drums
WM Records WMD 0-358852-1 (CD). 2006. Andrzej Winnicki, Krzysztof Medyna, prods.; Katherine Miller, eng. DDD. TT: 61:56
Performance ★★★★★
Sonic ★★★★★

Among music fans, jazz people typically possess an exaggerated need for new stimuli. To hear something that has not been heard before is their endless quest. They are hereby directed to *Crazy Girl* by the Komeda Project.

Not that this music is radical. But its basis in the compositions of Krzysztof Komeda, and its three soloists—a gifted but little-known American outcat and two even less known Polish heavyweights—make *Crazy Girl* notably fresh.

Krzysztof Komeda had a brief, remarkable life. He died in 1969 at 38 from injuries sustained in a fall while making a movie with Roman Polanski. By then he had become a physician (an ear, nose, and throat specialist), and the founding father of the modern jazz movement in Poland. He had also written music for over 40 films, including all of Polanski's output from *Knife in the Water* to *Rosemary's Baby*.

The Komeda Project is dedicated to "bringing Krzysztof Komeda's wondrous music back to life." Komeda's unique themes, with their dramatized Slavic lyricism, give this album its character. "Ballada" (from *Knife in the Water*) and "Kattorna" (from the film of that title by Danish director Henig Carlsson), like all great melodies heard for the first time, are both startling and familiar—and, in Komeda's case, disquieting.

But this is a jazz album, and what matters is how these players make Komeda's music their own. Russ Johnson's trumpet work is creative and diverse. He can embody Komeda's poignance ("Crazy Girl") or bump over the top of his forms ("Kattorna"), or define, then freely smear the outlines of Komeda songs ("Ballada"). Krzysztof Medyna is a powerful, hair-raising reed player. On "Crazy Girl" he is ejected straight up and flies. Pianist Andrzej Winnicki plays solos made of sudden shifts that all cohere, and is a blocky, confrontational accompanist.

For all of its liberated blowing, *Crazy Girl* is true to its cinematic premise. Even the boldest solos occur in narrative context, along an arc that moves through tension and release and continuously varied thematic allusion to culmination. The entire album makes an arc, because it ends with Komeda's most famous piece, "Sleep Safe and Warm," the main theme from *Rosemary's Baby*. But we are given only a

minute of its ominous lullaby, because it is only a tiny fraction of what Krzysztof Komeda was about. —Thomas Conrad

BENNIE WALLACE

Disorder at the Border: The Music of Coleman Hawkins

Bennie Wallace, tenor sax; Jesse Davis, Brad Leali, alto sax; Adam Schroeder, baritone sax; Terell Stafford, trumpet; Ray Anderson, trombone; Donald Vega, piano; Danton Boller, bass; Alvin Queen, drums
Enja/Justin Time JENJ 3327-2 (CD). 2006. Matthias Winkelmann, exec. prod.; eng. not identified. DDD. TT: 65:24
Performance ★★★★★
Sonic ★★★★★

Bennie Wallace has made some gorgeous audiophile recordings, produced by Joe Harley for the AudioQuest and Enja labels. This is not one of them. But Wallace was not wrong when, after hearing these live tapes made at JazzFest Berlin in November 2004, he decided to release them. He asked Harley and Anthony Wilson (the arranger here) to try to remix them into something "presentable." Harley and Wilson (with a contribution from the guru of mastering, Bernie Grundman) succeeded. *Disorder at the Border* documents a night of wildly creative high energy that needed preserving.

The project was a centenary tribute to Coleman Hawkins, born in November 1904, with arrangements for nonet by Wilson and a repertoire of compositions by or

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