

**RASP (trumpet in 19 divisions of the octave)
Stephen Altoft
Microtonal Projects MPR008
(microtonalprojects.com)**



▶ Stephen Altoft is an explorer who draws maps of musical terrain with his trumpet. The title track, his own composition *Rasp*, is a slow motion expansion from

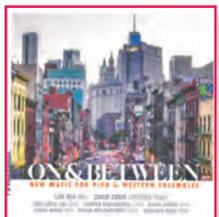
a breathy hiss to an intense broken buzz, like an angry housefly on a window pane. The logic of the progression is as stark as the material itself: a fearless opening statement and sensible at the same time, announcing to the listener “this is what I work with.”

The following tracks (especially the tenth, *Stodie* by Manfred Stahnke) demonstrate the microtonal potential of Altoft’s remarkable customized trumpet. An extra valve and tubing permit him to divide the scale into 19 pitches without the guesswork of constantly adjusting a tuning slide mid-phrase. The effect is both comforting and disconcerting: one hears unusual pitches securely nailed instead of groped for, and wonders if one is hearing the “normal” tuned notes or the “altered.” And that’s the point, I believe – to re-normalize the various tunings that equal temperament has hidden behind its bland reduction.

I’d love to better understand the effects produced on many of the tracks. Electronics play a significant role in some, including the MalletKat, a digital marimba. Despite a promise on the jacket, I could unearth no information on the site about the 11 different composers or their pieces. Nevertheless, the succession of short pieces (none more than eight minutes, most five or less) provides a fascinating trip through this new (or forgotten) country.

Max Christie

**On & Between – New Music for Pipa & Western Ensembles
Lin Ma; Zhen Chen; Various
Navona Records NM6146
(navonarecords.com)**



▶ In *On & Between*, composer and pianist Zhen Chen weaves the musical tale of a Chinese immigrant newly arrived in America. Employing conservative tonal language

and instrumentation (except for the pipa, the Chinese lute), the work deftly demonstrates Chen’s bicultural sensibility.

In a recent China Daily.com.cn interview, pipa soloist Lin Ma outlined the work’s

narrative. “The pipa is the main character [threading] through the whole album,” Ma explained. “It stands for a Chinese girl who just came to New York City. She wandered, struggled and went through phases of growth. After years, she finally gained a foothold in the new land.” It sounds quite cinematic, and the music would be effective at the movies.

Several times in the suite Chen quotes the well-known English horn melody from Dvořák’s *Symphony No.9 “From the New World”* (1893), composed while Dvořák worked in the USA. In 1922 it was adapted for the song *Goin’ Home* by Dvořák pupil William Arms Fisher. For Chen it represents the “respect and sense of promise the United States [has] in the hearts of new immigrants.”

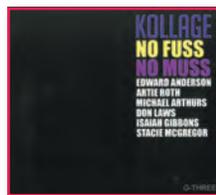
It’s interesting to note that Chen’s setting of the melody owes as much to neo-Romantic 20th-century Chinese patriotic compositions for Western orchestra such as the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, as much as it does to Fisher’s song with lyrics cast in dialect and Dvořák’s original setting.

Then there’s my favourite track, *Cocktails*. It features just Ma’s cantabile pipa playing and Chen’s grand piano, effectively evoking a sophisticated, languid hybrid pipa-spiked-lounge jazz-meets-Satie atmosphere.

Andrew Timar

JAZZ AND IMPROVISED

**No Fuss, No Muss
Kollage
G-THREE GT0012 (kollage.ca)**



▶ If Norman Marshall Villeneuve’s bands from the 1980s and 90s earned him the title of Canada’s (or at least Toronto’s) Art Blakey, then drummer Archie

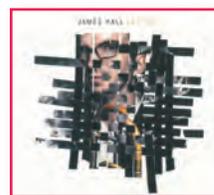
Alleynes (1923-2015) would certainly have been this city’s Philly Joe Jones. Dependably swinging and, or at least it seemed, often employed, Alleynes had catholic tastes and could be heard accompanying singers, hard-hitting ensembles, musical veterans or new faces alike at an unending series of clubs, pubs, Ethiopian restaurants and pizza joints. He was a major force in Toronto’s jazz community. Full disclosure, I knew and admired Archie, having worked alongside him on a number of projects. He was equally fun both on and off the bandstand and, similar to the musicians he most admired, had sly turns of phrase. If a musician had gained a few pounds since their last meeting, Archie would coyly tell them they were looking prosperous. And when he gave musical direction, not that it happened very often, it was “No Fuss, No Muss,” meaning, swinging, joyful music delivered in an authentic and non-pretentious manner

without unnecessary complications.

No Fuss, No Muss is about as close to a mission statement as a jazz musician could have, and congratulations to producer/label owner Greg Gooding and the assembled cast of very fine musicians whom Archie either worked with in Kollage or supported as a mentor for their work here. This recording both continues and punctuates the hard bop legacy of Kollage begun by neighbourhood friends Alleyne and Doug(ie) Richardson. By the sound of things, their musical legacy is in good hands for many years to come.

Andrew Scott

**Lattice
James Hall
Outside In Music Oim 1801
(jameshallmusic.com)**



▶ *Lattice*, the sophomore release from New York-based trombonist/bandleader James Hall, is, as the title implies, an album whose themes are rooted in the

productive promise of intersectionality. As a metaphor for improvised music, latticework – with its criss-cross construction, multiple points of intersection, and inherently open form – seems so apt that it is a wonder that the term has not seen wider use. Beyond Hall’s compositional skills (he wrote six of the album’s eight tracks) and trombone, the strands that constitute this particular *Lattice* are Jamie Baum (flute and alto flute), Deanna Witkowski (piano and Rhodes), Tom DiCarlo (bass) and Allan Mednard (drums), with the addition, on *Black Narcissus* and *Brittle Stitch*, of special guest Sharel Cassity (alto saxophone).

Shoy, the album’s first track, begins with a beautiful melody, played by Hall and Baum. The combination of trombone and flute is another unusual but apposite element of *Lattice*: the direct, lower-register trombone and the breathy, higher-register flute create an unexpectedly compelling texture. The propulsive, swinging *Brittle Stitch* showcases the talents of Witkowski and Cassity, both of whom take memorable, concise solos, with the assistance of DiCarlo and Mednard, who are excellent here and throughout the album. *Traveller*, another Hall original, builds intensity slowly but surely, and features brief marvels from Witkowski and Mednard. Beyond its strong compositions and performances, *Lattice* also scores points for its high production quality: special mention to engineer Aaron Nevezze, mixing/mastering engineer Katsuhiko Naito, and to Ryan Keberle (who co-produced with Hall).

Colin Story