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Water pushes sand (Clocked Out Duo)

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Water Pushes Sand

Clocked Out Duo

Clocked Out Productions COPCD003

Available at www.clockedoutproductions.com

Reviewed by Michael Hannan

Based on an “obsession with Chinese percussion music, street sounds, prepared piano and toy instruments,” *Water Pushes Sand* is a most unusual collaboration of pianist Erik Griswold and percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson. Sound collage elements collide with improvisation, both free and groove-based and also with textures and structures that are obviously carefully planned (if not entirely pre-determined).

The title track uses rhythms derived from Chinese opera and is informed by instruction received in Sichuan from a master percussionist. There is a series of ostinato-based textures based on prepared piano patterns and embellished by more flamboyant percussion improvisations. The track centres on a rhythmic texture that is reminiscent of Hollywood-based musical Chinoiserie through its use of woodblocks and open intervals.

“Bicycle Groove” is an appealing collage of sounds from street scenes including the sounds of bicycle horns and bells. These blend into the ‘groove’ based on prepared piano and kitchen percussion.

“Dear Judy” is a duet of rubber balloon sounds and atonal gestures heard firstly high in the piano register and later in the low register. The experimental use of balloons to create expressive timbres and rhythmic effects is a feature of this CD (although the sounds are sometimes in the same territory as finger nails scraped on a backboard). The same makeshift instrument is used on three other tracks. In “Motorcycling through the City of Churches” there is a clever simulation of the sounds of a motorbike combined with gong-like prepared piano effects presumably meant to represent church bells. In “Waltz” the balloon sounds imitate the oom-pah-pah and countermelodic lines accompanying the piano tune. “Felamimikuti” employs a vast array of toy instruments to create humorous rhythmic textures and quirky melodic lines.

Repetitive (unprepared) piano riffs and ostinati feature on “We move by intuition” where percussion effects are used more subtly. The track backgrounds some ethereal sustained sounds (possibly wine glasses being bowed).

In “The Theme 1” the quick octave-based lines of the piano are cleverly doubled by a variety of pitched and semi-pitched percussion instruments. As the short piece develops the intervals vary but the textural concept is maintained. The companion piece (“The Theme 2”) begins the same way but the instruments diverge to create a groove concept. These are both very inventive works.

“Delicious Ironies (Sichuan)” by Lindsay Vickery is the only piece on the CD that hasn’t been composed by the members of the Duo. It is rather an unfortunate irony that it

represents the least effective piece of the collection: its aimless chaotic and incessant textures seems quite out of place with all the other thoughtfully conceived pieces.

Griswold and Tomlinson possess genuine chops as improvising performers, and genuine craft and wit as composers. Much of what they are doing would be regarded as experimental but it is also quite entertaining and aurally appealing. Highly recommended.