



TOM RAINEY OBLIGATO

Ralph Alessi Trumpet

Ingrid Laubrock Saxophone

Kris Davis Piano

Drew Gress Bass

Tom Rainey Drums

Recorded at Systems Two, Brooklyn, by Joe Marciano, February 28, 2013.
Mixed by Katherine Miller. Mastered by Andrew Tulloch, London, July 26, 2013.
Liner notes: Kevin Whitehead. Cover art: Christine Reifenberger.
Graphic design: Jonas Schoder. Produced by Tom Rainey and
Intakt Records, Patrik Landolt, P. O. Box 468, 8024 Zürich, Switzerland.
intakt@intaktrec.ch, www.intaktrec.ch

Intakt CD 227 / 2014

LINER NOTES BY KEVIN WHITEHEAD

After many open-ended settings Tom Rainey has played in – including bands with Tim Berne and Craig Taborn, and his own fine trio with Ingrid Laubrock and Mary Halvorson – a set of standards is a curve ball. Then you hear it: curve ball for real. It's free music. Tom Rainey: "I've done a lot of playing standards over the years, and wanted to find a context for doing that again – to find a reason to do it. I got so tired of the head/string of solos/head format, but I love playing on the forms, using them as a playground to improvise in. Everyone has their spots, but *Obligato* isn't a solo-oriented record."

The pieces are as standard as standards get, chosen with little forethought. "They're ten tunes we have in common and didn't mind playing. Nothing anybody had to read or think about, so you're free to get to your expression." Within those forms, it's all fluid: density, dynamics, the focus shifting from one player to another, without the others getting out of the way, exactly.

Those songs you'd usually know anywhere don't divulge their identities easily. Only "Secret Love" has anything like a melody statement at the top. (But hear the contrary drumming under it for the leader's instrumental virtues in microcosm; Rainey doesn't even settle down for the bridge, unlike other contrary drummers.) The other performances are slow reveals, that old familiar melody gradually emerging from a haze of distant paraphrase, or coalescing out of fragments. You might listen without peeking at the set list, to puzzle them out on your own. Your secret ally is Ingrid Laubrock, who like Lee Konitz, may show you a tiny corner of the card early, like the octave leaps that signal "If I Should Lose You." "When the tune is over, I want you to feel like you've really heard the song even though you didn't hear it all at once," Rainey says. "We don't want to play these songs just to obliterate them." The five also play an analogous game with the pulse. The collective internal clock is so strong, they play time even when no one formally keeps it. And they can kick off at a fever pitch. You might assume the opening "Just in Time" begins with an edit, joined in progress. But no: that's them out of the gate, at the top of the form.

The players are pretty scrupulous about minding those forms. Melodic variation is the heart of their method – they acknowledge the changes, but are very much playing the tune not just the frame, making five-way counterpoint coherent. Think of the collective improvisations as multiple obligatos, responses to a silent theme. "It's a constant group improvisation. Nobody's stuck in a role. So you have to stay involved even when you're not playing."

This disc will turn some heads in Kris Davis's direction. Listen to what she doesn't play: her silences are perfectly timed. The pianist knows how long to let a note ring, and how much weight the right note can carry. She almost never comps in a traditional way here, but there's no loss of harmonic clarity: you can hear the changes in her most elliptically atomized lines. Davis takes a melodic role but doesn't disrupt the horns' special interplay.

Most of this squad play in the all-improvising quartet Lark. Sitting in that band, Rainey heard this corollary. "The way Ingrid and Ralph play together – I imagined how that would sound on standards." Their phrases eddy around each other, in the

stream of the tune, attentive to its currents, and the other horn's articulation, beatplacement, intonation and phrasing. When they converge toward a written melody, the merged line has an eerie glow, an aura. This program is a perfect setting for Alessi, with his own attention to melody, formidable chops, and plasticity of sound from hard rubber to molten brass. Plus the way he'll play below tenor.

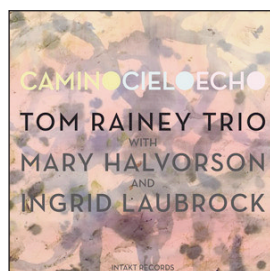
On "Prelude to a Kiss," Laubrock charcoal-sketches the Ellington saxophone section: Gonsalves' ballad tone, Hodges shimmying up a scale, Harry Carney gravitas. She is an improviser with a memory. On "You Don't Know What Love Is," trumpet enters a little over two minutes in, with a climbing figure Alessi repeats and develops; thirty-seven seconds later, Laubrock comes in with almost the exact same line, repeated and developed: a long-form canon, call and delayed response.

Tom Rainey and Drew Gress first played together in a Ben Monder trio in the late '80s, before Andy Laster and Fred Hersch and then umpteen others paired them. They still breathe together, and the interplay has only gotten headier and more subtle. Like a great Monk bassist Gress may pick melodies from the chords as they go by, let the logic of that trajectory signpost the form. Not that they won't play something approaching straight time. There's "Reflections," but even on that traditional piano showcase, the other member of the rhythm section takes her own way home. Every line has melodic integrity.

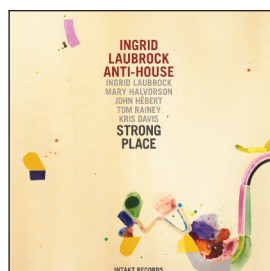
Precedents? Sure, going back to Sidney Bechet's "Shag" via the Plugged Nickel, and to centuries of musicians' humor before that. Tom Rainey: "It's not like it's a new idea. Collective improvisation on a tune – that's what dixieland's about. But then something got lost along the way, as jazz became more of a soloistic art: the obligato-ing."

Kevin Whitehead, Author of Why Jazz? A Concise Guide (Oxford)

TOM RAINEY ON INTAKT RECORDS WWW.INTAKTREC.CH



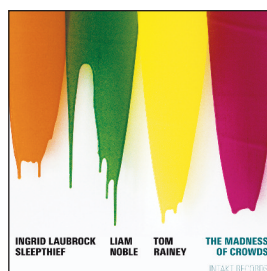
TOM RAINEY TRIO
CAMINO CIELO ECHO
Tom Rainey: Drums
Ingrid Laubrock: Saxophones
Mary Halvorson: Guitar
Intakt CD 199



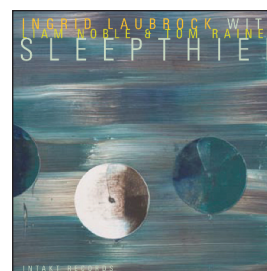
INGRID LAUBROCK ANTI-HOUSE
STRONG PLACE
Ingrid Laubrock: sax
Mary Halvorson: g
John Hébert: b
Tom Rainey: dr
Kris Davis: p
Intakt CD 208



INGRID LAUBROCK ANTI-HOUSE
THE MADNESS OF CROWDS
Ingrid Laubrock: sax
Mary Halvorson: g
John Hébert: b
Tom Rainey: dr
Kris Davis: p
Intakt CD 173



INGRID LAUBROCK SLEEPTHIEF
THE MADNESS OF CROWDS
Ingrid Laubrock: sax
Liam Noble: p
Tom Rainey: dr
Intakt CD 189



INGRID LAUBROCK WITH TOM RAINEY SLEEPTHIEF
SLEEPTHIEF
Ingrid Laubrock: sax
Liam Noble: p
Tom Rainey: dr
Intakt CD 146