



**THE CONVERGENCE QUARTET:  
LIVE IN OXFORD  
(FMRC223-0307)**

featuring:  
Taylor Ho Bynum,  
Harris Eisenstadt,  
Alexander Hawkins,  
Dominic Lash

The Convergence Quartet, featuring an international line up of expert improvisers, present their first release for FMR. This live set was recorded at the prestigious Jacqueline Du Pré Music Building in Oxford.

**Sleeve Notes by Simon Fell**

Let's clarify a few things before I start. I don't know how these musicians met, why they decided to play together, and how long they did so before they recorded this performance. I don't know how any of this music was made in terms of prior determination, in-progress determination, and indetermination; like you, I can only go by what I hear, and the fact that each of the pieces here has a composition credit to one of the members of the group. I don't know why they decided to work the way they have worked, and what they hoped to achieve by it, or even why they have asked me to supply a text for this recording. I mention all of this so you understand that anything I subsequently state in connection with the said recording is either surmise, assumption, guesswork or informed opinion. There are no truths, implied, asserted or otherwise.

Of course, I could easily remedy this ignorance (and would that all my ignorance were so easily remedied), by simply asking the musicians. I can't claim not to know them, or at least half of them - I've played and recorded with Harris Eisenstadt (but this is not the place to plug my own albums), and I have the distinction of having been (for a very brief period - about 1 hour) one of Dom Lash's bass teachers. (After the hour was up I decided that there was probably just as much he could teach me; perhaps he came to the same conclusion...) Taylor Ho Bynum I don't know personally, but of course am aware of his work with the Master Composer (you don't really need to ask - of course I'm talking about AB); I believe I'm hearing Alexander Hawkins' playing for the first time as I listen to this disc. I hope to get to know both of them before too long. However, the point is it would be too easy to ask the musicians about these questions. Part of what I like about this album (when I do like it) is having to work things out for myself, as far as I can - answers would only serve to exclude interesting possibilities.

Perhaps I was asked to write this text because it seems an important part of what's happening here is the exploration of possible relationships between composition and free improvisation, and I have done a little work in that field myself. And what a tricky field it is, dear reader, full of potholes and boggy patches, and rarely with >



**TRACKLISTINGS:**

1. miscellaneous (Bynum) 11'03"
2. Goad (Lash) 8'42"
3. Convergence (Eisenstadt) 13'28"
4. goodbye, sir (Hawkins) 14'46"
5. mm(pf) (Bynum) 4'13"



> the pastoral poise of landscapes uncontaminated by the awkward moment. Perhaps this is part of the convergence of which the group's name speaks. Perhaps there's also a trans-Atlantic convergence between European and North American ways of approaching these questions, and between free improvisation-derived and jazz-derived approaches. I hear all these things being explored here.

Anyway, I'm not going to tell you how good this record is, as I don't pretend to know. I'm also not going to tell you what the music sounds like, since you should be just about to listen to it. And indeed I would recommend that you do so, because this is interesting music - and my vocabulary contains few higher compliments. It has been observed that in my own music I "won't make things easy for the listener" (and why on earth should I?), and personally I enjoy music that perplexes my sense of right and wrong, of appropriateness and inappropriateness. Music isn't simply an escape from the complexities, ambiguities and misunderstandings of human existence - although thankfully it can be sometimes. We also need music that provokes tough questions, such as: what is music supposed to 'do'? how do we determine whether a piece of music has 'succeeded' or 'failed', and should we even try? how is it that any truly honest assessment of 'quality' can never be unequivocal? and does this mean we should dismiss any ideals of 'quality' as elitist and simply wallow in a postmodern love-fest?

These are the kind of issues that listening to this record will (I hope) lead you to consider, since this record affords no easy assimilation. The several compositional strategies seem to range from the inscrutable to being perhaps too easily scrutable, and the resulting music includes moments of the sublime, the awkward and the deeply puzzling. At the end of the record, you may even be tempted to ask yourself 'what was that all about?'. Once again, I find it hard to imagine a higher accolade. Not least because hopefully this means that you'll be listening even more closely the second time around, rather than sticking the CD on your shelf with the comfortable expectations-fulfilled assertion 'yes, I really like that kind of music, and therefore I really liked that album'. After all, that would be too easy, and music can offer a much richer experience. Thank heavens the Convergence Quartet are prepared to stick their necks out on our behalf...

Simon H. Fell (2007)



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