



**ALEXANDER HAWKINS ENSEMBLE:**  
**NO NOW IS SO..**  
(FMRCD270-0209)

Alexander Hawkins (piano), Orphy Robinson (steel pan), Otto Fischer (electric guitar), Hannah Marshall ('cello), Dominic Lash (double bass), Javier Carmona (drums, percussion)

So now, here is a recording of musicians of almost ludicrously diverse backgrounds, but all of them circling around the ultra-creative UK free improvisation scene. Maybe that's the first thing to say: most ensembles trying to mix pre-composed and free-improvised material generally fall on their arses at one or the other. If that were true of this recording, someone else would be writing the sleeve-notes. (You know who you are).

Apart from the strong and enthusiastic leadership of Hawkins, the group is very much defined by what it lacks instrumentally; the absence of blown instruments means that the hit, plucked and bowed timbres leak into each other (think of those recordings of Dylan with The Band or folk groups of similar instrumental families) and create the subtlest tone colours. Some of these things pass by even a well-eared listener surrounded by devoted experts in an environment like The Vortex. All the more reason to listen to this.

The eruption of that unison/octave theme statement of Leo Smith's beautifully simple tune (track 4) really lifted me and recalled something from Messiaen's book of statuesque tropes. (Still awaiting that resurrection, Olivier). I love the ritualistic reappearances of the melody, too.

Other things that propel me upwards include the runaway train feel of that first track. I wonder where Orphy's total fearlessness comes from.

'Cowley Road Strut' is dedicated to Pat Thomas, a mutual friend and colleague who directed me, Roger Turner and The Shakin' Ray Levis to some of the best fish and chips ever, one drizzly night on, of course, Cowley Road in Oxford. Pat's theories of the origin of jazz are as interesting as his devotion to Oxford and its cultures. The "wonky march" feel of this in no way reflects on his gait, I'm sure.

Track 8 is probably post-titled, being another instant composition and a piano solo. Hawkins says, "Pat is convinced there is an 'Oxford' sound, so being Oxford born and bred, I suppose I should have it?" You may very well think that, but this Shropshire lad could not, of course, possibly comment. Instead I drifted into a fugal state whilst listening, imagining Anton Webern having a glass of wine with Duke Ellington, thereby avoiding the sniper's bullet.

"I'm such a fan of Otto's.... meandering-but-logical thing, I just wanted to create a vehicle for him to blow over", Hawkins writes, also suggesting plausible convergences between Otto and Warne Marsh. So, in the trad of Duke Ellington's miniature concerti, here is '120-4', which includes no piano whatsoever but lots of Fischer, inside three >>

**TRACKLISTINGS**

1. **Prelude**  
(Unidentified Spanish Bebop Selection #1) (5'56")
2. **Sarah Teaches Kirsty To Read** (5'27")
3. **Baobabs** (7'01")
4. **Nuru Light:**  
The Prince of Peace (6'24")
5. **Whirligig** (2'20")
6. **120:4** (3'58")
7. **toc/tic/kiss** (2'09")
8. **Old Time Folk Music from Oxford** (5'08")
9. **Love in Outer Space**  
(aka 'Unknown Kohoutek') (6'09")
10. **Greenford Breakdown** (1'54")
11. **Cowley Road Strut: Message from the East (for Pat Thomas)** (3'53")



>> choruses of 120 crotchets each.

'Sarah Teaches Kirsty To Read', in contrast, inspired a fantasy of a coffee break including Bill Frisell, Conlon Nancarrow and Brian Ferneyhough and includes a glorious example of Hannah Marshall's 'cello playing, instantly explaining why everyone wants to play with her.

In common with Paul Bley, Hawkins is a big admirer of Sun Ra's piano playing and 'Love In Outer Space' is a Ra tune given a treatment mildly reminiscent of Miles Davis's way of playing Wayne Shorter's 'Nefertiti'. In other words, the tune is played a lot, with different stuff going on each time. Dominic Lash's bass and Javier Carmona's drums perform delightfully conventional roles here; elsewhere, their improvising personae are happily upsetting apple-carts and expectations. Which, come to think of it, is true of all of these people.

Steve Beresford  
Feb. 24 2009

Tracks 2, 3, 6, 8, 11 composed Alexander Hawkins  
Tracks 1, 5, 7, 10 composed Carmona/Fischer/Hawkins/Lash/Marshall/Robinson  
Track 4 composed Wadada Leo Smith  
Track 9 composed Sun Ra

Orphy Robinson uses Vic Firth sticks and plays Sabian cymbals  
Recorded 19/5/8 by Dick Hammett at Red Gables Studios, London  
All cover photography by Edu Hawkins  
With thanks to Steve Beresford and Michael Chilcott  
Recorded with the generous assistance of The Exuberant Trust  
Produced for FMR by Trevor Taylor  
Additional layout/design by Ewan Rigg

