

MINUS ZERO

BY GEORGE GRELLA

One word—or more—response game: think “record label” and what comes to mind? The classic era of Blue Note, which defined the sound of hardbop and postbop and became one of the great names in graphic design? ECM and the pristine clarity of its production? Tzadik and its reflection of John Zorn’s curiosity? The common factor among those three is an aesthetic organizing principle. As a listener, it’s that which has you digging into their new releases. But what about a label that’s not organized around music, but a cause?

That’s the story of digital imprint Minus Zero. The catalogue numbers 30 releases, which range from Andrea Wolper singing standards and originals; a 20-minute improvisation by punk guitarist Joe Baiza; avant garde electro-acoustic music; and a good representation of contemporary musicians working at the edge of that idiom we call jazz. It’s not the musical content that brings this all together, it’s the cause: Minus Zero donates all proceeds to Planned Parenthood.

Drummer Vijay Anderson, one of the principals (along with clarinetist Ben Goldberg and string player/vocalist Dina Maccabee), described how Minus Zero came about: “Ben and I played a benefit shortly after Trump’s inauguration and we wondered if there was anything else we could do. We were inspired by the Woman’s March and we wanted to support Planned Parenthood.” Though not a de jure non-profit, the label goes even further by passing on all the proceeds (not just

profits) and are supported by Bandcamp, which doesn’t charge them any fees (it still takes a percentage of sales).

The name Minus Zero came from Bob Dylan’s song “Love Minus Zero” and was suggested by Maccabee. And, unlike Blue Note, there’s no specific, expected sound to be found. Even with the range already available Anderson sees more ahead: “I want to have diverse genres and styles, I want to make it more musically diverse” than it is currently, adding more musicians who come out of popular genres. That’s an impressive aesthetic ambition, considering that the one commonality of the label’s cause has brought together an already disparate set of musicians. It’s the style of their politics, not what they play, that matters, though as Anderson points out the label “is not political music, it’s music from people who care about politics.”

The practicality of collecting donated work means that the label has a grab bag of music that comes out of recordings musicians have stashed away while looking for a label, live sets not originally meant for issue and rereleases of older material. Anderson collects this “through word of mouth, I just started talking to musicians to see if they wanted to donate anything.”

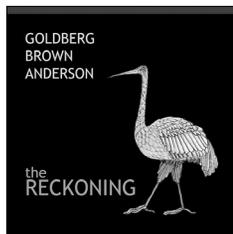
Bassist Max Johnson leads an improvising trio with pianist Diane Moser and clarinetist Perry Robinson on *The Small Hours*, a recording he says “we had just sitting around for some years and some labels wanted it, but then never got back to us, so I thought about self-releasing. But then Vijay asked me about Minus Zero and I thought it’s probably not going to make us any real money and if I could donate the record to help people, why not?” Moser, who also plays on *For My Mother*, a live date with Anderson, tenor saxophonist Hafez Modirzadeh and bassist Mark Dresser, says, “I’m

very excited about Minus Zero. They have provided a home for creative music and they are donating...to one of my favorite organizations. It’s wonderful to be a part of this community of like-minded folks and to be doing good in the world through music.”

The quality of those recordings means the label may seem second-hand, in a way, but there’s nothing second-rate about the material: there’s an EP from pianist Mara Rosenbloom’s trio recorded live at IBeam Brooklyn in 2014; Wolper’s *The Small Hours*, a scintillating 2005 recording originally on VarisOne. Jazz; Virg Dzurinko’s lovely solo piano album *Fun City*, originally recorded in the late ‘90s and released on New Artists Records; and the remix album of Maccabee’s unclassifiable solo recording, *The World is in the Work*.

Maccabee shares Anderson’s eye towards expanding the range: “I look forward to broadening the styles of music Minus Zero offers and including as diverse a range of musical voices as possible. In this way, the drive to help others by improving access to health care in our communities will also help create a virtual, and sometimes physical—as with our recent first live festival—meeting place for artistic communities that might not otherwise cross paths.”

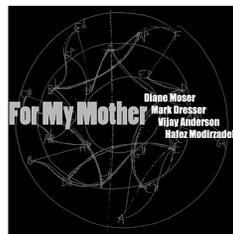
For more information, visit minuszero.bandcamp.com. Artists performing this month include Mark Dresser at Brooklyn Conservatory of Music Apr. 14th; Ben Goldberg at The Owl Music Parlor Apr. 26th; Max Johnson at Bar Lunático Apr. 17th; Ava Mendoza at Roulette Apr. 5th with William Hooker; Mara Rosenbloom at Roulette Apr. 5th with William Hooker, *Happy Lucky no.1* Apr. 11th and IBeam Brooklyn Apr. 12th; and Andrea Wolper at Cornelia Street Underground Apr. 25th.



The Reckoning
Goldberg/Brown/Anderson



The Small Hours
Andrea Wolper



For My Mother
Moser/Dresser/Anderson/Modirzadeh



Live At IBeam
Mara Rosenbloom



Top Of The Head
Moser/Johnson/Robinson

VOXNEWS

HOW TO WRITE SONGS

BY SUZANNE LORGE

Argentinian singer-songwriter **Sofía Rei** draws from a multitude of discrete musical sources to create her gripping, impassioned compositions. Free improv, flamenco, South American folk tunes, Klezmer, modern jazz—anything that is rhythmic and stirring and meaningful. This month, Rei will present representative selections from her manifold projects at The Stone at The New School, with a different set each evening (Apr. 24th-28th). Rei opens her run with an homage to Chilean singer-songwriter Violeta Parra, whose work she commemorated with the 2017 album *El Gavilán* (Cascabelera Records). On this duo album with electric guitarist Marc Ribot, Rei rearranged Parra’s much-beloved Latin American folk songs using looped vocals and electronic effects alongside acoustic instruments such as the *caja vidalera*, an Argentinian drum, and the *charango*, a Bolivian guitar. Where Parra’s original work is gut-wrenching in its message and impact, Rei’s interpretation of the same is healing and redemptive. It’s a masterful piece of musical alchemy.

She also devotes two of the evenings to her work with composer John Zorn, whose writing for singers tends toward the soaring: On Apr. 27th Rei will reprise

songs from the repertoire of the a cappella group Mycale, which Zorn assembled in 2010 to perform parts of his *The Book of Angels*. (In 2015 Israeli singer **Ayelet Rose Gottlieb**, Moroccan singer **Malika Zarra** and American singer **Basya Schecter** joined Rei to record Zorn’s many-layered vocal compositions, *Gomoray: The Book of Angels, Vol. 25*, for his label Tzadik Records. Gottlieb, Zarra and **Sara Serpa** will perform with Rei at The Stone.) Then on Apr. 28th Rei will sing from Zorn’s *Masada Book 3: Book Beriah*, a series of compositions based on Jewish musical traditions and to which Rei contributed original lyrics.

The title track of singer-songwriter **Kat Edmonson**’s new album *Old Fashioned Girl* (Spinnerette) first gained traction earlier this year when NPR profiled the original on its show *Songs We Love*. Musically the tune evokes a Songbook standard, tinkling piano accompaniment and all, but lyrically it is set solidly in a technology-saturated 2018. This track is only one of many ruefully humorous numbers on the recording: from “Sparkle And Shine”, a slow swing track orchestrated like a dance number in an MGM film, to “Not My Time”, a ukulele-and-voice melody about near-brushes with destiny. This is Edmonson’s signature, to keep it light—her voice, the lyrics, the approach to the melody—even when she’s singing about loss. On “Goodbye Bruce”, for instance, she warbles a short, lullaby-like vocalese against a simple piano melody, closing the tune with a 13-word final

adieu to a friend—heartbreaking, given the levity against which the lyrics play. Edmonson doesn’t return to New York until May 4th with a gig at Le Poisson Rouge, but the album releases officially on Apr. 27th.

Like Edmonson, drummer-cum-singer-songwriter **Dave Tull** approaches songwriting with humor and technology with wariness. Also like Edmonson, his music recalls an earlier time, when big band horn players blazed through syncopated arrangements and singers scatted with impeccable timing (a big general thank you to drummers who scat). On his latest release, *Texting and Driving* (s/r), Tull shows off his agility with a witty lyric and a breakneck tempo; as a crooner he exudes bonhomie so appealing that the listener might not notice the sophistication of his chops. On this release two notable singing phenoms put in appearances: Manhattan Transfer’s **Cheryl Bentyne** on “The Date”, a languid, laugh-out-loud duet offering a much-needed antidote to the lyrics in “Baby, It’s Cold Outside”, and **Inga Swearingen** on “The Moment”, which features close harmonies, soft strings and a peek into the endearing musings of a man on the brink of romance.

Rising star gigs this month: **Paul Jost** makes his Dizzy’s Club debut as a guest of vibraphonist Joe Locke (Apr. 27th-28th); on the heels of her regular gig at 55Bar on Apr. 13th **Tessa Souter** is at Mezzrow (Apr. 17th); and trumpeter-singer **Bria Skonberg** starts the month at Greenwich House Music School’s NY Hot Jazz Camp (Apr. 2nd-8th) and finishes it at Joe’s Pub (Apr. 25th). ❖