

Peter Erskine.

The musicians' drummer and the drummers' musician.

Ask any serious working drummer 'who's influence has left an everlasting mark on their playing' and you're sure to be bombarded with the true 'greats' including Rich, Krupa, Bellson, Jo Jones and later Williams, DeJohnette, Gadd and up there always will be Peter Erskine.

From the Stan Kenton and Maynard Ferguson days of power house big band drumming through the rock and pop of Weather Report and Steely Dan, Peter Erskine comes almost full circle back to his jazz roots which is undoubtedly his first love. I say almost full circle because this somewhat musically restless soul will always find a musical tangent that he has not explored.

Not content with working with most of the 'jazz greats' the 20th century has produced Peter Erskine continues to thrill audiences on both sides of the Atlantic by working with the likes of Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Andrew Davis, Mark Anthony Turnage, Evelyn Glennie, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, CBSO, LSO, Ensemble Modern, ASKO etc etc. in all aspects of contemporary music.

Peter has appeared on countless albums throughout his 30 years in the business and has recorded around twelve solo albums including **You Never Know**, "Time Being", "As It Is" and "Juni on ECM and more recently on his own label 'Fuzzy Music'

Side Man, The London Concert (Don Grolnick Group), Live at Rocco, Lava Jazz, Behind Closed Doors, and History of the Drum.

As well as being the record label, Fuzzy Music is also the comprehensive web site run by Peter and his wife Mutsy at www.fuzzymusic.com and well worth a visit.

Thankfully all Fuzzy Music releases are available in Britain through 'Jazz West' in Bristol - contact Graham Tanner at gtannerjazzwest@hotmail.com.

It was from here that a clutch of CDs arrived on my door mat itching to make their way to my CD player.



Live at Rocco PEPCD007 is a double CD pack of trio music with Erskine, Alan Pasqua on piano and David Carpenter on bass recorded over a two night stint at Rocco, Bel Air, California in October 1999. The intimacy and mood here immediately brought back memories of the live sessions the Bill Evans trio made at the Village Vanguard complete with the odd chinking glass and ambient club atmosphere. Indeed, Alan Pasquas' piano can be as subtle and delicate as Evans on tracks like To Love Again, How About You? and at the same time produce a full blooded latin type horn section on Taiowa and Bulgaria.



By contrast, **Lava Jazz PEPCD004** features 'The Lounge Art Ensemble' which consists of Bob Sheppard (Saxophones), Dave Carpenter (electric and acoustic basses) and Peter playing the Yamaha "Club Jordon" cocktail drum kit which comprises a deep floor tom tom with a pedal mechanism striking the lower drum head, a small snare drum and tom attached to the side, a couple of cymbals and hihat. All twelve tracks are original compositions by the trio and the style somewhat more boppy with slants on established standards such as It Already Happened (It Could Happen Too You) and You Stepped In (You Stepped Out of a Dream) with at times some stunning interplay and 'off the wall' playing between the three instrumentalists. A true gem amongst these Fuzzy Music releases has to be 'The London Concert' PEPCD008 a live recording given by the Don Grolnick Group and I believe Grolnick's last recorded document. We have the BBC to thank that this concert was recorded at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1995 during what turned out to be Don's last tour. He lost his fight against cancer in June 1996



I have always felt that Don Grolnick was one of the most under played and under broadcast of all pianists. Perhaps due to his prolific recorded output as a session musician for other names during the 70s & 80s. Like so many other astonishing players on the American studio scene at that time often players' true musical personalities were never heard. That is remedied here with Grolnick being supported by Michael Brecker sax, Randy Brecker trumpet and flugelhorn, Marty Ehrlich, alto sax & bass clarinet, Robin Eubanks trombone, Peter Washington bass, Peter Erskine drums and guesting on the final track Don Alias on percussion.

The album reflects Grolnick in his true musical light as an extremely thoughtful and accomplished composer and improviser in a style that can only be Grolnick with hard hitting solos from all members this set is memorable not only for the sheer intuitive chamber music approach but as a lasting record of Grolnick as he should have always been heard.



Behind Closed Doors PEPCD005 is a selection of takes recorded between 1991 and 1996 and features predominantly the sparkling WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) Big Band from Cologne. This band is rapidly becoming one of the foremost European big bands that are developing outside of the radio studios. Our own BBC big band being the Anglo equivalent. In his sleeve notes, Peter Erskine describes the music as a 'kind of around the world in seventy minutes' citing influences from as far afield as Bulgaria and Scotland to Latin America, Cuba and Madras. Certainly the personnel featured reads like a world music resource of ethnic musicians with names as diverse as Zakir Hussain and Alex Acuna cooking some spicy rhythmic sauces on 'A to Z' and the ever tasteful Alan Pasque and John Patitucci weaving almost middle eastern modal passages on

'Milagro'. Possibly my favourite track has to be 'Sweet Soul' with an ensemble comprising Joe Lovano, Bob Mintzer, Randy Brecker, Kenny Werner, Marc Johnson and John Scofield picking his way through a tempo that's so slow it's almost backwards but this ensemble are as tight as an orange skin around an orange and of course Erskine never shifts an inch but at the same time the track oozes enough 'feel' as to want you to set the CD player on track repeat and just lie back. Talking of tight ensembles the WDR big band that feature on this disc display fantastic colour, feel and a number of stunning solos by Heiner Wiberny (Bulgaria), Rolf Römer (If Only I Had Known), Henning Berg, Klaus Osterlob, John Marshall and Andy Haderer. It's Andy Haderers' trumpet that features on the last CD of the set that I received, **Side Man PEPCD010**.



Side Man is the title of a play written by Warren Leight where the music of Clifford Brown features as the subject matter and takes place in the 50s after Brown's death. The play was produced in New York first and used recorded music but when the play was to go on in Pasadena director Andy Robinson employed a jazz quintet playing music and arrangements by Peter Erskine. The line up on this recording apart from Andy Haderer is Erskine himself and musicians from the WDR big band as Erskine was working at the time on Behind Closed Doors. There are some interesting cameo tracks on Side Man not least various takes of I Remember Clifford, Artistry in Rhythm and Intermission Riff harking back to the Kenton days when Erskine himself was a side man so to speak. There's even a Klezmer tinged version of St James Infirmary (St. Jimmy's). The only slight down side of the album is that some tracks tail off somewhat incomplete. I can see the point of including them as the more of Andy Haderer's trumpet we hear now the better! Peter Erskine's skills and talents as a performer and composer will continue to develop exploring many more musical tangents and I for one am glad to see his relationship with the British musical establishment has blossomed through projects especially with Mark-Anthony Turnage and the BBCSO. Turnages' **'Blood on the Floor'** featured the playing and improvising skills of both Erskine and John Scofield which led to further projects by Turnage including **Momentum** which has an expanded improvised part for drum kit and integrates the drums within the orchestra. Turnage is one of the very few composers who has managed to successfully fuse the traditional symphony orchestra with so called jazz instruments (drum kit, sax and guitar) but I have to say that I felt that Peter Erskine looked a little ill at ease at the first performance of Fractured Lines - a double percussion concerto on a tune by Erskine. Peter was joined by Evelyn Glennie who of course takes these musical situations as part of a days' work but I just felt that Peters'

skills would have been better employed in the way Turnage used them in Momentum and Blood.

It was perhaps when Peter Erskine was recording with ECM that his compositional awareness began to expand and his writing credits are going from strength to strength. As well as the afore mentioned Side Man theatre project, he has already completed scores for productions of Shakespeare's King Richard 11, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet and his latest project again with a British connection is a BBC commission titled "**Music for Brass & Percussion.**" The piece is scored for 3 trumpets, 3 French horns, bass trombone, tuba, percussion, piano, bass, drums, and 1 woodwind; players included Kenny Wheeler, John Taylor, Mike Formanek and Marty Ehrlich as well as British musicians known as the **Creative Jazz Orchestra.**

It was an honour and a privilege to meet with a fellow percussionist and musician who is always willing and keen to pass his wealth of experience on to those willing to absorb and we all look forward to much more 'Fuzzy Music'!!

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