Wadada Leo Smith & Günter Baby Sommer – Wisdom In Time (2007)

1 A Sonic Voice Inclosed In The Wind 5:43 2 Tarantella Rusticana 6:58 3 Pure Stillness 5:39 4 Gassire's Lute 8:55 5 Woodland Trail To The Giants 8:08 6 Bass-Star Hemispheres (Dedicated To P.K.) 11:52 7 Rain Cycles 5:10 8 Old Times Roll – New Times Goal 5:27 9 A Silent Letter To Someone 7:28 Drums, Percussion – Günter Baby Sommer Trumpet, Flugelhorn, Electronics – Wadada Leo Smith

This program of duo performances by trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith and drummer Gunter Baby Sommer is both the renewal on record of a long-standing musical relationship and at the same time a kind of homage to their fallen comrade, the bassist Peter Kowald, whose death robbed the improvised music scene of one of its stalwarts. Amongst other things, the three men had recorded as a trio (Touch the Earth, FMP Records, 1979) and their shared history lends this music a deep poignancy.

However, the results on Wisdom in Time are a whole lot more than just music minus one. Both players have an unerring grasp of dynamics and an appreciation for each other's musical personalities. Thus, on something like "Tarantella Rusticana," their interplay is both deft and subtle, even as Sommer assumes the role of a low-key, perpetual-motion machine. The impression is amplified in no small part by the sonic clarity, so that even when he's at his most frenetic, Smith's paradoxically unassuming lyricism is also faithfully captured.

This is only too apparent on "Woodland Trail to the Giants," where Smith's use of electronics supplements the natural range of his horn. The resulting music has a meditative air; and in that respect, at least it has a lot in common with "A Silent Letter to Someone," where the prosaic title is more than justified and the innate value of underplaying made only too apparent. Sommer expands the music's sonic range through his deft use of gongs and the like, and again Smith's singular use of electronics makes for music of extraordinary color, given the effective paucity of

the resources deployed.

There's also an indefinable quality in this music that's the result of the longevity of the duo's working relationship. On "Gassire's Lute," it's manifested in their acute alertness to each other, and it results in music that, for all of its essentially quiet heart, is still informed by the very things that make for compelling improvisation. The listener's attention is in effect drawn in by the sound of simultaneous invention and the rewards it offers. In this case, those are abundant.

It all comes down to the fact that this is one of those infrequent occasions when it sounds as if the music had to be made, as a consequence of some existential necessity. It is thus deeply human, and as such the very stuff of life, or at least what life could be. The results of human creativity don't come any better. ---Nic Jones, allaboutjazz.com

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