Samuel Blaser - Early In The Mornin' (2018)

1. Early in the Mornin' 2. Creepy Crawler 3. Tom Sherman's Barroom 4. Murderer's Home 5. The House Carpenter 6. Levee Camp Moan Blues 7. Klaxon 8. Mal's Blues 9. Black Betty 10. Lonesome Road Blues Double Bass – Masa Kamaguchi Drums, Harmonica – Gerry Hemingway Piano, Keyboards, Clavinet, Synthesizer, Organ [Hammond B3] – Russ Lossing Trombone, Arranged By – Samuel Blaser

The first sound you hear on trombonist Samuel Blaser's witchy 2018 album, Early in the Mornin', is veteran saxophonist Oliver Lake seemingly invoking the rising sun with a guttural rubato solo. This is no dewy AM yoga stretch, but a muscle-stiff groan to the universe. It sets the tone for what is to come on an album that finds the Swiss-born Blaser balancing his love of rustic blues traditions with more heady, spectral delights. Here, the trombonist plays both his own evocative original compositions and deftly reimagined traditional pieces, including work songs, blues standards, and songs from the British folk heritage. He even brings the concept full circle, literally evoking the rounded, throaty vocals of Lead Belly with his trombone on "Black Betty." Along with Lake, who plays on two tracks, Blaser generously shares the spotlight throughout with his longtime bandmates pianist Russ Lossing, bassist Masa Kamaguchi, and drummer Gerry Hemingway. Also supplying his own brand of kinetic, serpentine magic on two tracks is guest trumpeter Wallace Roney. Many of the cuts here showcase Blaser's robust tone and wide-swinging improvisations framed by the burnt sparkle of Lossing's keyboard and the organic tumult of Kamaguchi and Hemingway's interlocking rhythms. It's an atmospheric blend that brings to mind the legendary '70s Detroit Tribe Records albums of trombonist Phil Ranelin. The sound is especially redolent on cuts like the fractured, organ-rich ballad "Tom Sherman's Barroom," the funky atonalist swamp boogie of "Creepy Crawler," and the deep space modalism of "Mal's Blues." Elsewhere, Roney brings a similarly '70s-esque dark energy, communing with Blaser and Lake on the rhythmically mutative, gospel menace of "Levee Camp Moan Blues," and then shifting from spare dusky tones to fiery group squalls on "The House Carpenter." These tracks all smolder with a lively, almost ancestral energy, conjuring a strange and unpredictable celebration of blues and other rural folk traditions. ---Matt Collar, AllMusic Review

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