

John Surman, Howard Moody

Rain on the Window

John Surman: baritone and soprano saxophones, bass clarinet; **Howard Moody:** organ

ECM 1986

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In the last year John Surman has been heard playing his own compositions on “The Spaces In Between” with bassist Chris Laurence and the Trans4mation String Quartet and improvising on 12th century chants and renaissance love songs inside John Potter’s Dowland Project on “Romaria”. He’s worked the European festival circuit playing music rooted in Arab modes with Anouar Brahem and Dave Holland in the recently reactivated “Thimar” trio, and recorded a new album in New York with John Abercrombie and Jack DeJohnette, for future release on ECM. Few other ‘jazz’ players work as wide a range of options, and “Rain in the Window”, an intimate duo recording, opens yet another new chapter in John Surman’s musical history, even as it harks back to one of the earliest chapters.

As the CD booklet for “Rain on the Window” reminds us, John Surman made his first-ever recording in a duo with organ accompaniment, as a boy soprano, before he ever took up the saxophone. With spirituals part of the programme on the present disc, and a church as the recording location, the past is informing the present here.

John Surman met Howard Moody in 1996, when Moody conducted the premiere of the oratorio “Proverbs & Songs” in Salisbury cathedral (see ECM 1639). “John Taylor was the organist in that original performance but, on several subsequent performances, when John was not available, Howard took over the role of organist in the piece. I really enjoyed Howard’s approach to the improvised sections and we decided that we would try and do some more playing together in the future. I continued working with him when he invited me to compose some pieces for the Sarum Orchestra. Eventually, after some exciting ‘workshopping’ sessions in Penshurst church in Kent, we were ready to record together.” The project was realized in the responsive acoustic environment of Ullern church in Oslo. (Surman himself now lives near Oslo).

The music on the recording embraces original compositions, improvisations and traditional folk songs. Melody and lyricism –hallmarks of all Surman’s work - are celebrated in each of the featured pieces. “A Spring Wedding” was written to celebrate the wedding of John’s son Ben Surman and Minya DeJohnette, daughter of Jack DeJohnette, in March 2004. “Dancing in the Loft” and “Dark Reeds” are free improvisations. “O Waly Waly” is a folk song collected by Cecil Sharp in Somerset, England; its melody was adopted for the traditional ‘The Water Is Wide’. The song “I’m Troubled in Mind” meanwhile first appeared in a collection of spirituals in 1872.

Howard Moody has had a versatile career as composer and conductor as well as keyboard player. Currently principal conductor and artistic director of the Sarum Orchestra he has conducted many other orchestras and choirs, from the BBC Symphony Orchestra to the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, from the Monteverdi Choir to the Schola Cantorum. His many compositions include a Requiem with flamenco guitarist Paco Peña, and an oratorio, “Songs of the Forest” commissioned by the Lichfield Festival. Adept on keyboard instruments from harpsichord to synthesizer, he has performed in international festivals, and as pianist has given many recitals with tenor Nigel Robson, soprano Lynne Dawson and

cellist David Watkin amongst others. He also has been a member of Sir John Eliot Gardiner's English Baroque Soloists. Improvising musicians with whom he has collaborated include Abdullah Ibrahim and Barry Guy, but above all John Surman. In addition to the "Proverbs and Songs" and "Rain on the Window" albums, Moody gave the premiere of "Ultimate Voyage", Surman's concerto for saxophone and piano as conductor and pianist in 2004. In 1998 he transcribed and orchestrated Surman's multi-tracked solo album "Road to St Ives" which was then performed live by the Bournemouth Sinfonietta. Performances with the Sarum Chamber Orchestra followed in 2002.

Already by the mid-1960s John Surman (born in Devon in 1944) was one of the most widely celebrated of European jazz musicians. His incredibly agile baritone playing with the Mike Westbrook Orchestra, John McLaughlin, and Chris McGregor stunned musicians, critics and listeners alike, and he swept the jazz polls, touring Japan with a Down Beat poll-winners group in 1970. With his own groups he continued to make waves – particularly with The Trio, with Barre Phillips and Stu Martin, a band that set new standards for intense small group interaction. It was with these musicians that Surman would make his debut ECM appearance, on Phillips's innovative "Mountainscapes" in 1976. It was soon followed by the solo album "Upon Reflection" and thereafter by a sequence of remarkable recordings in many instrumental configurations and formats. These have included duos with Jack DeJohnette, the large ensemble the Brass Project, a Nordic Quartet with Karin Krog and Terje Rypdal, collaborations with Paul Bley and much more.

Still passionately engaged in the entire jazz tradition, John Surman has also made sense of his background as a European musician who grew up listening to choral music, and folk music from Britain and elsewhere. His explorations of roots, also influencing a generation of players, has been a natural development in his work, as he explained to writer Tom Erdmann: "I hadn't become aware of jazz until I was 15, so there was a lot of music inside me that didn't actually come from Chicago or New Orleans. There was this other music in me that was trying to come out. I had some melodic ideas inside that were trying to be expressed. I needed to find a way to play in other ways. Without making a conscious decision I just let it happen, but the association with ECM records made this decision more straight-forward, in the sense that the way in which I was heading was in line with [the artistic directions of] Manfred Eicher and his company. He was enjoying the music I was proposing on my solo recordings...." The music continues to develop organically, as "Rain on the Window" clearly shows in its reflective and exultant sounds.

John Surman and Howard Moody play a launch concert for "Rain on the Window" at the Turner Sims Concert Hall in Southampton on April 24. The duo also plays in Coventry Cathedral on May 24, and is at Italy's Bergamo Festival on May 25. Other dates are in preparation.