



MATTHEW BOURNE

Montauk Variations

Matthew Bourne (piano, cello)

The Leaf Label Bay 77CDP 56:32 mins

BBC Music Direct £10.99

If there's only room for one musician in the halfway house between the composer Michael Tippett and jazzier Keith Tippett (who gets a dedicated piano-innards track on this collection of 17 miniatures) – then Matthew Bourne's got the freehold. It's too easy to listen to this intimate music just for the pleasant noise it makes, but Bourne's discovery of understated 'avant-pastoralism' is really a framework within which he can examine the innermost qualities of the piano and what it actually means to play it. And this is expressed via explorations of how chordal overtones interact – a duet with a lawnmower he had overheard (in D), an excursion on his second instrument, the cello and a kaleidoscope of other approaches, all delivered with subtle finesse. The lucid but warm recording sounds as if varied microphone positions were used according to the style of each track, which is brilliantly done if true and serendipitous if not. Fascinating, heart-warming stuff. *Roger Thomas*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

BBC Music Magazine

April 2012

Roger Thomas

Matthew Bourne



Montauk Variations

THE LEAF LABEL



Referencing such faded British Romantics as Finzi, Bridge and

Gurney, the dynamic pianist here strips out all the show and flourish with a series of delicate improvisations that explore the chill, romantic edgelands of British pastoral composition. *AM*

Mojo

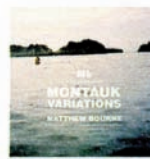
April 2012

Andrew Male

MATTHEW BOURNE

Montauk Variations

Leaf BAY77CDP



Matthew Bourne is found in typically excitable mode on the newly released *Everybody Else but Me*, alongside the saxophonist Tony Bevan. With Bourne alone at the piano, however, this album's meditative improvisations use cautiously melodic figures to trace penumbral shadows of memory and regret. Bourne's obstreperous other self surfaces on *Within* and *Abrade*, stroking the keyboard and the instrument's innards simultaneously, but *Smile*, written by Charlie Chaplin for *Modern Times*, closes a deceptively devastating collection, stripped of its cinematic sentiment into a haunting, skeletal solo. **SL**

The Sunday Times

5 February 2012

Stewart Lee

Matthew Bourne

Montauk Variations

Leaf CD

Any pianist who cites Dave Brubeck, Michael Finnis and Cecil Taylor as creative catalysts is OK with me – but in *Montauk Variations* Matthew Bourne is responding to a "previously undeclared" love for English composers of a certain era, we're told. In fact Bourne has discussed his fascination with 'cowpat' English pastoral composers like Howells, Finzi and Bridge before, and a key intrigue is how his work manages to square Cecil Taylor with Ralph Vaughan Williams. The opening tracks, a slightly ill-at-ease mix of Keith Jarrett and Olivier Messiaen, beautifully played as they are, are a conceptual false start. Only when obvious stylistic reference points fall away and Bourne starts juxtaposing the piledriver clusters of "Etude Psychotique" against a less obviously framed lyricism does the album find its compositional feet. Bourne plays along to the drone of a lawnmower on "The Greenkeeper", and ends with a prodigiously smart re-harmonisation of Charlie Chaplin's "Smile".

The Wire

February 2012

Philip Clark



CD
ARTIST
LABEL
AVAILABLE

Montauk Variations
Matthew Bourne
The Leaf Label
6 February



Montauk Variations is Matthew Bourne's first studio album – and while it may have taken some time to emerge in his long-flourishing career as a contemporary jazz musician and composer, he's certainly making up for the delay by announcing that it'll be the first in a series of collaborations with The Leaf Label, to include an audio-visual project recorded on analogue synth and an album with vocalist Seaming To, which will be released either this year or next under the name Billy Moon.

Consciously influenced by the soft, refined pastoral of Finzi, Bridge and Cyril Scott, and obviously affected by the Devon surroundings in which it was recorded, *Montauk Variations* is a collection of spare, meditative solo piano pieces that abound with the scrabbles, scrapings and itchiness of the countryside. Each work is intricate yet somehow uncomplicated, the feeling being that each detail is there for a reason rather than ornamentation. Though most pieces possess a knotty, branch-like spindliness – most notably *Étude Psychotique*, a suitably erratic tangle and smash of octaves that lasts just 49 seconds – some are happy to simply explore the nature of slow, deliberate progression. Take *Infinitude*, which acknowledges its title by lingering over gradual interval changes as though inhaling and absorbing the properties of each one before tasting the next.

Sparse – almost bare – yet somehow warm (especially with the addition of an interpretation of Charlie Chaplin's *Smile* at the end), *Montauk Variations* is a record to accompany beach walks at dawn.

Lauren Strain

Muso
February 2012
Lauren Strain

Matthew Bourne *Montauk Variations*

Leaf BAY 77CD | ★★★

Matthew Bourne (p, cello) Rec. May-June 2011

The 17 short improvisations that make up Matthew Bourne's first solo studio album, capture the maverick pianist at his most serious and tender yet. In his sleeve notes, Bourne claims that, with these pieces, "fragility and romanticism seem to have outdistanced the clutter and quirkiness characteristic of previous work" and there is, indeed, a maturity and restraint here that he doesn't always get the chance to demonstrate in other contexts. Recorded in the Great Hall at Dartington College in south Devon, the date sounds every bit like a conscious effort to evoke the peace and beauty of the English countryside on a drowsy late-Spring afternoon: 'The Greenkeeper' incorporates the drone of a distant lawnmower, while on tracks such as 'Juliet', Bourne provides elegiac cello. But within all the placid, pastoral delicacy, Bourne's inquisitive nature can't help wriggling through. So, 'Abrade' finds him reaching into the guts of the piano to scratch and scrape the strings, while 'Etude Psychotique' is a manic burst of scrabbling energy. This is the sound of a sincerely searching mind in action. **Daniel Spicer**

Jazzwise
February 2012
Daniel Spicer

MATTHEW BOURNE *Montauk Variations* LEAF LABEL

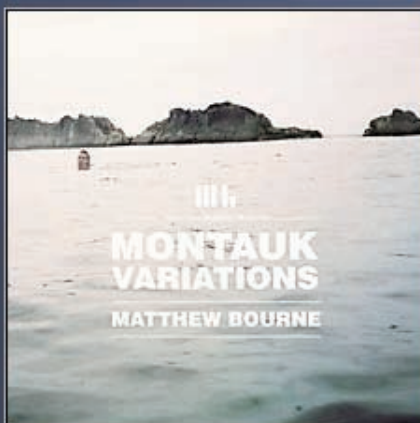
★★★

Elegiac pianist: not to be confused with choreographer of same name

This Matthew Bourne is an award-winning young British pianist whose recorded output has lurched between free improv, tricky electric fusion and collaborations with the likes of Spring Heel Jack and Nostalgia 77. This is the first recorded example of him in his most engaging format, playing meditative improvisations for solo piano. These 16 originals (and one delicious deconstruction of Charlie Chaplin's "Smile") can get annoying when they stray into wilful atonality, but really hit the spot when he lingers on simple themes, as with the hypnotic "Infinitude" and "Juliet", and the Satie-esque "Phantasie".

John Lewis

Uncut
March 2012
John Lewis



Tracks

- 1 Air
- 2 The Mystic
- 3 Phantasie
- 4 Infinitude
- 5 Etude Psychotique
- 6 Within
- 7 One for You, Keith
- 8 Juliet
- 9 Senectitude
- 10 The Greenkeeper
- 11 Abrade
- 12 Here
- 13 Gone
- 14 Knell
- 15 Cuppa Tea
- 16 Unsung
- 17 Smile

BBC Review

An expectations-confounding listen of solo piano experimentation.

Martin Longley 2012-01-23

Usually, the Wiltshire keyboardist Matthew Bourne is heard in a combo context, habitually making music of a more violently improvisatory nature, hunkered down with elements ripped out of dance music, rock and abstract electronica. That's just the kind of sound that might be identified with The Leaf Label, but with his debut recording for them, Bourne has confounded expectations.

Montauk Variations is primarily a collection of completely solo acoustic piano pieces, sometimes augmented by strings. Bourne is known in jazz circles, but this project also emits an aura of modern classical composition. Often a dense sprayer of notes, the pianist is found here in a sparse, spacious state, lyrical and romantic. It's all inward, to the max. Several pieces are personal dedications, and the mood is mainly solemn. Bourne's manic side is kept in check. There are 16 Variations, many of them quite brief, and Charlie Chaplin's Smile arrives right at the close.

This is not to say that there isn't any tension. Even if the listener might be drifting in a meditational cloud, the transition into a new Variation can sometimes produce a startling jump into another sonic realm. Calm might give way to trebly shards, then stillness will pervade once again. These shifts in nature are just as crucial as the actual musical contents of each piece. The album demands to be heard in a single sitting, in a contradiction of the digitally shuffling age. Faint caresses become jarring jolts; the listener is repeatedly yanked out of any hazy reverie.

Etude Psychotique is dedicated to John Zorn: a single minute of high-speed rippling, after Cecil Taylor. Hands dampen the bass strings on Within, a close-miked exploration of piano innards; Bourne is also slapping the exterior frame. Next, he's plinking at the high end, but still rubbing away inside, with a block of wood, or a strip of metal. Near the disc's end, a string section thickens the atmosphere, and the mood becomes more composed. The best tune on the album is Knell: a halting, bluesy kind of creation. The entire experience acts as a portfolio for Bourne's talent and technique, but it's still a sequence that coheres with a true oneness of spirit.

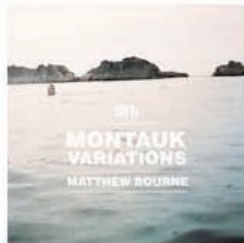


This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Licence. If you choose to use this review on your site please link back to this page.

BBC Music

23 January 2012

Martin Longley



Matthew Bourne *Montauk Variations*

Type: Album Release date: 06/02/2012

Artists: [Matthew Bourne](#)

Label: [Leaf](#)

Your Rating:

[Review this release](#)

[Add to a list...](#)



by [Jon Falcone](#)

[0 comments](#) 08:59 February 7th, 2012

Matthew Bourne has won spires of jazz awards and flits between a suitably dizzying number of improvisational jazz to proto metal outfits. Matthew has also recently successfully applied to become one of four UK musicians supported to perform and write in China as part of a PRS for Music Foundation and British Council-funded residency plan. Matthew's existence within music is a seemingly grown-up take on the record, release perform dichotomy.

Bourne can compose though, as this collection of predominantly solo piano pieces highlights. He can compose uniquely. Sure, parts of this are the thumb smashing piano strikes that you may expect from a performer most widely known for their collaborative improvisations. Piano trills huff and roll in sporadic ascensions, melodies lie coddled within, occasionally peaking out of the swaddled mesh of furiously rapid notes.

This album is far more interesting when it's overtly, garishly, pensive. 'IV. Infinitude' starts with all the lounge-soul of a Burt Bacharach refrain and then softly dallies around that same refrain, slowly moving the timing, adding slight variations that push and pull majestically. It's warm to the point of whimsy; a sentimental snapshot bundled into two simple piano phases and a completely addictive loop of a listen. When a song seemingly loops and yet always changes, creating a new reaction to each pluck of each new note, it's spellbinding.

'VII. Juliet', builds and develops, breaking the solo piano precedent. Although piano starts in isolation, with lone bass notes rotating under piano chords to create sombre, dramatic shifts, it quickly introduces strings that yearn like the arrangements of Max Richter, before segwaying into 'VIII. Senectitude'. 'VIII. Senectitude' rolls as a short series of string repetitions that feel plucked from the alt-country of Howie Beck, a lament on loneliness through harmony.

Whilst the album may be far from simple, it's certainly the feeling of simplicity that makes this endearing, if not inspiring. Movements feel as though, given a piano, a quiet room and a day, these correlations could be devised by anyone through a trial and error process. Find a nice two handed or two-finger combination on a piano, let them resonate majestically, and continue the process, stopping when it doesn't work and start again' retrace the good bits try and find a new combination at the fluff up. Thirty seconds actually trying this establishes that for all the blurring between performer and consumer that technology allows, it will be some piece of kit that can inject an instant programme of musical ability. Surely the realm of biotechnology before an iImprovisationalComposer app.

Montauk Variations is an album that charges gracefully through piano and string compositions, using rotations to bring out an endless series of variances to seemingly unmoving patterns and occasionally flitting to overt virtuoso performance. It's predominantly a reflection, a look at things moving slowly and a stirring listen.

Matthew Bourne

8 / 10

Drowned In Sound

7 February 2012

Jon Falcone

MATTHEW BOURNE: Montauk Variations (The Leaf Label)



MATTHEW BOURNE
Montauk Variations
BAY77
The Leaf Label 2012
17 Tracks. 56mins32secs

Matthew Bourne has spent the last ten years working on many different projects and touching on quite a wide array of genres, but he has, until now, never released any solo record. Inaugurating what is announced as an on-going collaboration with The Leaf Label, with additional projects announced for the next eighteen months, this is exactly what he is doing with *Montauk Variations*, an album which began its gestation during a short visit to Montauk, NY a couple of years ago, and a subsequent realisation that all he needed to do was strip his music back down to its bare essential: him and a piano.

The album was recorded during three two-day sessions between May and June of last year in Dartington in Devon, Manchester and Wharfedale in North Yorkshire, and features sixteen piano improvisations, for the most part fragile romantic pieces, sometimes so scarce that they at times seem like in suspension. This is the case with opening piece *Air*, for which Bourne even does away with chords entirely for almost half of the piece, and even when he finally adds a layer of accompaniment, he does so with extreme thriftiness. He adopts a similar parsimonious approach on *Phantasia*, *Gone* or *Knell* later, only granting enough notes to give his pieces defined contours, but preserving their intensely minimal aspect.

By contrast, Bourne's taste for more experimental work comes through over a series of pieces, starting with the rather hectic and vivid *Etude Psychotique*, on which he appears to frantically scale the keyboard of his piano up and down simultaneously, then with *Within*, on which he uses his instrument as a percussive tool, and *One For You*, *Keith* or *Abrade*, where he tampers with the strings inside the body of his piano to create odd little atmospheric moments out of textural noises.

On *Juliet*, *Senecture* or *Here*, Bourne adds delicate phrases on the cello, progressively bringing the instrument in toward the end of the former, or placing it at the forefront on the latter two, hence bringing in further sonic diversity to a record which could have, in less expert hands, sounded somewhat too austere.

While Bourne undoubtedly seeks, for the most part, to retain the purity of his music through his recordings, he willingly lets slip slight creakings of the wood or occasional environmental noises, as is the case on *The Groonkeeper*, where the dull hum of a distant lawn mower can be heard in the background. It appears that, whilst recording at Dartington Hall, he could hear men working on the grounds, and, having identified the key of the drone made by the lawn mower's engine, he began to improvise around it.

The album concludes with Bourne's version of Charlie Chaplin's *Smile*, originally from Modern Times. Keeping in line with the rest of the album, his interpretation is introspective yet complex, placing delicate flourishes around the main theme whilst leaving enough space for silences and inviting reflection.

For all its sparse and delicate aspect, *Montauk Variations* is a record which requires the greatest level of attention to reveal its hidden layers. It would be all too easy to miss some aspects of this record altogether by only focussing on its introspective nature for instance. Whilst it is a consequent part of the project, Bourne works from so many different angles throughout that only repeat listens and dedicated immersion can do this record justice.

4.2/5

The Milk Factory
2 March 2012
Bruno Lasnier

Not to be confused with a dance choreographer of the same name, Matthew Bourne is a pianist and composer whose work straddles the worlds of jazz and contemporary classical music.

Winner, 11 years ago, of a Perrier Jazz Award, he swiftly went on to perform on the international stage as a soloist and as co-leader of ensembles such as The Electric Dr M, Distortion Trio and Bourne/Davis/Kane.

Over the past decade, he and musical partner Dan Berridge have also written two albums and scored three films – *Indians*, *Here is Always Somewhere Else* and *Flikan (The Girl)*.



GIG PREVIEW

Matthew Bourne

The Venue, Leeds College of Music

Bourne recently spent six weeks in China, on a British Council and PRS Foundation-sponsored residency programme in Xiamen.

Now he returns to Leeds College of Music, from where he graduated in 2001.

The concert coincides with the release of his new album *Montauk Variations*.

Thu, The Venue, Leeds College of Music, 8pm, £12. Tel: 0113 2223434. www.lcm.ac.uk/events/matthew-bourne-montauk-variations

Metro

22 May 2012

Duncan Seaman

Matthew Bourne – Montauk Variations



ALBUM REVIEW BY CHRIS BUCKLE.
PUBLISHED 30 JANUARY 2012

There's much to admire about Matthew Bourne – the good grace with which he takes being regularly confused with the ballet choreographer of the same name, for instance, or his maverick inter-genre curiosity (in addition to these solo piano/cello pieces, Bourne's "Scott Walker + Meshuggah" outfit Bilbao Syndrome promise a full-length in 2012). Then there's his sharp sense of humour, demonstrated by sleeve notes which follow a paragraph of self-analysis pondering the inspirational qualities of "personal unquietness, solitude and heartbreak" with the summation that "this idea was bullshit."

But the bulk of praise should be levelled at his boundless talent, both technical and compositional; his improvisational skills are already renowned in jazz circles, and these pieces sound precise and consummate without exception. Whether mellow and romantic (*Juliet*) or tumultuously erratic (*Étude Psychotique*), Bourne's work is ceaselessly inventive and always absorbing, with a wistful cover of Chaplin's *Smile* at the close to seal the deal.

The Skinny

30 January 2012

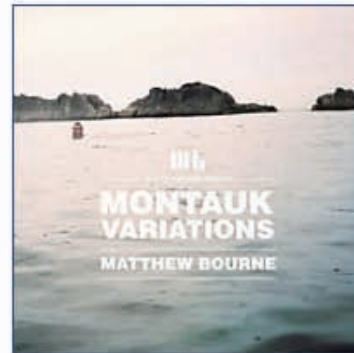
Chris Buckle

Matthew Bourne: Montauk Variations (2012)

By [JOHN KELMAN](#), Published: April 2, 2012

Still on the shy side of 40, British pianist Matthew Bourne has accomplished more, in a relatively short time, than many do in a lifetime. Bourne has leaned farther to the left for most of his career, experimenting in both acoustic and electric environs with a free-thinking approach informed, to some extent, by [Annette Peacock](#), that unclassifiable singer/writer responsible for some of pianist [Paul Bley](#)'s most compelling composition-based music, and who was the subject of a two-disc tribute by pianist [Marilyn Crispell](#), *Nothing Ever Matters, Anyway* (ECM, 1997).

Like Peacock, Bourne may lean towards the abstruse, the rarefied and the recondite, but he's no stranger to beauty and simplicity. *Montauk Variations* is a largely solo outing and on it, this multiple award-winning pianist largely examines a space of calm quietude, though that doesn't mean his generally soft surfaces don't have the occasional harder edge or angular twist.



Inspired by a brief four-hour stay in Montauk, a beach resort on the tip of Long Island, New York, Bourne has described the album as "two years of thinking and three days of recording," but if that suggests, perhaps, that the pianist has engaged in too much preconception, nothing could be further from the truth. Despite *Montauk Variations*'s clear suggestion of form, it also feels entirely spontaneous, a combination of daytime (well, really nighttime as he often recorded in the early hours of the morning, when things were at their most tranquil) studio sessions and nighttime concerts in Devon, England's Dartington Hall. The album was mainly recorded in Dartington, with the exception of a handful of tunes recorded in Manchester a couple weeks later, including the sparsely majestic "Infinitude," based on two simple but compelling chords, and the more propulsive "Juliet," which feels a little like [Brad Mehldau](#)'s solo excursions, though less virtuosic in intent.

"Juliet" is one of *Montauk*'s pieces for which Bourne overdubbed some cello parts, lending a stronger sense of form as it slowly unfolds. The brief "Senectitude" also features the cellos in a more dominant role. "Here" is actually written for strings, the first of a three-part dedication to a departed friend, Philip Butler-Francis, and it's a somber requiem that moves to darker piano musings on "Gone" before the more hovering stasis of "Knell."

Aspects of *Montauk* feel very much like [Harold Budd](#), the ambient composer/pianist responsible for albums including his early collaborative classic with fellow ambient explorer Brian Eno, *The Plateaux of Mirror* (Astralworks, 1980). But if "The Greenkeeper"—with its heavily reverbed piano and predilection for the decay of notes as much as the notes themselves—is somewhat of a kind, the oblique triptych of the frenetically free "Étude Psychotique," low register exploration "Within" and even more outré prepared piano of "One for You, Keith"—where Bourne spends as much time inside the box as on the keys—speak otherwise.

For the most part, however, *Montauk Variations* is about economy and lyricism. Bourne's use of sharper edges only serves to highlight the sheer beauty of their surrounding soft surfaces, making *Montauk Variations* an absolutely beautiful album of respite, restoration and renewal.

All About Jazz

April 2012

John Kelman

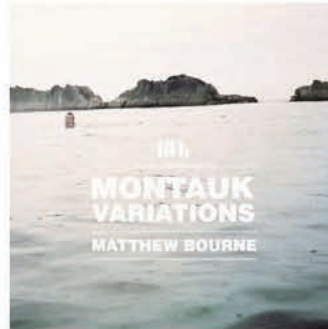
Matthew Bourne - Montauk Variations

(The Leaf Label) UK release date: 6 February 2012

★★★★

by Daniel Paton

Not to be confused with the celebrated choreographer of the same name, Matthew Bourne is an improvising pianist so far mostly renowned for exploring quirky and radical ensemble settings. This is his first album for The Leaf Label, one of the excellent independents already expanding its remit into jazz and improvisation through their signing of Seb Rochford's **Polar Bear**. Bourne, however, has taken a somewhat surprising direction here, recording an album of mostly solo acoustic piano pieces at Dartington that explores his love of pastoral classical music (**Gerald Finzi** and **Cyril Scott** being two composers Bourne has cited) as much as his connections with improvisation and the jazz tradition.



Montauk Variations is a deeply considered and meditative affair, with a number of the selections arriving with personal dedications to other musicians (including to guitarist **Jonathan Flockton**, the legendary and forward thinking **John Zorn** and to **Keith Tippett**, who also recorded solo piano music at Dartington). This music demands considerable focus and attention from its audience but rewards such investment with an assured but quiet intensity. The particular payoff at the album's conclusion is a touching and deeply individual interpretation of Charlie Chaplin's Smile.

Initially, the music on Montauk Variations unfolds with the grace, patience and attention to detail of a **Bela Tarr** film. The opening Air (For Jonathan Flockton) begins with a gradual exposition of a single line. Next, The Mystic focuses more on harmonic development, but both pieces share a preoccupation with space and silence as intrinsic elements of the music. Infinitude has a luminous, striking calm - like a still light guiding a ship home. Bourne's touch here is light and deft and he is completely uninterested in displays of virtuosity.

There are, however, moments that puncture the mood. Etude Psychotique, dedicated to John Zorn, is appropriately manic - the one reminder of Bourne's characteristically restless style. Juliet and Senectitude are augmented by strings, with genuine success. The blend of sounds here is very carefully realised. Although the contrast between the rapid flurry of notes in the Etude and the romanticism of these pieces is pretty extreme - somehow Bourne still manages to accommodate all this within a coherent whole.

One of the album's most exquisite works, amazingly, appears to have been inspired by the drone of a lawnmower - something Bourne decided to try and accompany rather than battle against. The results are a surprisingly soothing and comforting piece that demonstrate Bourne's supreme confidence in his musical choices. Similarly, Cuppa Tea seems to find a wealth of charm and inspiration in the ordinary qualities of everyday life.

Perhaps the only example of a forced idea comes with the various prepared piano devices on Within (muted strings, percussive use of the body of the instrument), which no longer seem particularly novel or radical. Nevertheless, Bourne's deployment of them here does provide a welcome variation in texture and mood.

There are obvious points of comparison here with other improvising musicians who have explored the still expanding hinterland between the jazz tradition and a more 'contemporary classical' compositional framework, not least the pioneering work of **Keith Jarrett**. But Bourne has little overtly in common with Jarrett - Bourne's melodies are more elusive and there's little of the spiritual vibrance of Jarrett's more rhythmic moments. Perhaps Montauk Variations has something in common with **Craig Taborn's** superb solo piano album from last year, Avenging Angel, although this is too recent a release to have been a direct influence on Bourne's work. Still, the two pianists share a penchant for timing, space and reflection that results in refreshingly honest and original work.

musicOMH

6 February 2012

Daniel Paton

Matthew Bourne: Montauk, Billy Moon and the Lost Pianos



"I've accepted that I'm not a traditional composer who sits and scores things out, plays them, learns them. I just have a rough sense of something and go out and do it. It often ends up being completely different," says pianist, improviser and composer Matthew Bourne. It's a characteristically honest appraisal, but it fails to do justice to Bourne's talent as a writer or player. This approach makes him one of the most fascinating of Britain's contemporary performers; it also makes him a hard man to second-guess. Based on his previous activity, few if any commentators would have been likely to predict the appearance of his beautiful solo piano album *Montauk Variations* (Leaf Label, 2012).

Born in Avebury in the southwest of England in 1977, Bourne began to teach himself piano after seeing Frank Sinatra on television in 1993, graduated from Leeds College of Music in 2001 and won a BBC Jazz Award for Innovation in 2002. He earns his living as a sideman in France with musicians such as saxophonist Laurent Dehors, and he has been involved as a band member or collaborator with artists and ensembles including World Sanguine Report, Collider, The Electric Dr M, John Zorn, Franck Vigroux, Dave Stapleton and Bourne/Davis/Kane (with drummer Steven Davis and bassist Dave Kane).

There is another Matthew Bourne on the U.K. music scene—a choreographer responsible for some marvelously original interpretations of classic ballets. Bourne the pianist's press information points out that Bourne the choreographer is much older [about 17 years older, in fact] and stresses that the two men are not to be confused. But they do have some things in common. Both are innovative, with reputations for radical approaches to their chosen arts. They consistently produce work that captures the imagination, taking inspiration from what might be referred to as traditional sources as well as from more contemporary sources. Neither man is easily categorized or pigeonholed.

So how would Bourne the pianist describe himself in terms of his musical background in, say, ten seconds? His immediate response is a long and loud burst of laughter. "In ten seconds! I don't know. I think I'm defined by what I'm into as a listener. So I guess it also depends on what project I'm involved with. On my own, I've sampled lots of things from television and films, set them to music and combined them with my approach to the piano. I spent ten years doing that, and it's run its course."

Read full interview here: <http://bit.ly/LN1us3>

All About Jazz

6 March 2012

Bruce Lindsay

East meets West equals life-changing experience

An encounter with an enlightened zither player is the highlight of a six-week residency in China

Firstly, I am not who you think I am. If you are reading this blog in expectation of details of my forthcoming works for ballet, then I must point out that I am not the choreographer of the same name; so rather than tell you to stop reading, I welcome you to start reading, instead...

It is a privilege to have been chosen to take part in a six-week musician-in-residence scheme, based in Xiamen, China, made possible by the PRS for Music Foundation and the British Council. I'm now in the final phase of my residency, half in a state of reflection and half in anticipation of events still to come. In fact, what's been so rewarding about this experience so far is that most days I have no idea what's going to happen, who I'm going to meet and what surprises are around the corner. The people of this laid-back, gently anarchic and wonderful city have been so kind, coming out of the woodwork to introduce me to people who they think may be able to help and/or provide inspiration.

A very recent example of this happened just the other week when I was approached by a student studying the guqin (a seven-stringed zither) who invited me to meet with him and his teacher, Yong Lin, at his home near Xiamen University. This meeting a few days later proved to be a life-changing experience. The way Yong Lin spoke about music was beautiful, inspiring and more akin to meditation technique than anything else (indeed, the history of instrument itself numbers a few thousand years and is closely related to nature and the practices of Taoism/Lao Tzu/Confucius/Buddhism): playing the guqin is not about acquisition, ego, or even 'technique' as we would define it; if one is to master this instrument, aspects of the breath, inner stillness and calm are fundamental. This is the technique. And, after further meetings, it became clear that adhering to any other method as the means by which to 'acquire' mastery is utterly futile!

Consisting of one bedroom, a guqin/meditation room and a small kitchen, Yong Lin's home was simple, uncluttered and itself had an air of calm. It is difficult for me to describe the impact or influence the sound of this instrument had on its immediate environment – it was as if the air in the room and around the guqin became still, frozen, and that I was suddenly even more aware of my breath, bodily movements, sensations and thoughts. Sonically, the guqin is very quiet, very beautiful and I felt it was impossible to turn my attention to anything else, even if I'd wanted to. Each time I have visited I have not wanted to leave!

Through our conversations, we talked about the factors that are important to guqin performance, most importantly surrendering oneself – ie allowing factors such as the immediate environment, temperature, situation, one's own mood/temperament to dictate and shape the interpretation of the music, embracing impermanence rather than seeking to control or 'perfect' the musical outcome. These are the very tenets that I have tried to adopt in my own approach to performance and I cannot describe the feeling of sharing a common border with such an ancient musical discipline, and only just 6000 miles or so away from home.



Matthew Bourne

English pianist and composer Matthew Bourne first came to national attention as one of the winners of the Perrier Jazz Awards in London, 2001. He has released two solo albums in 2007 and 2012 as well as several collaborative works. For more information, visit <http://matthewbourne.com>

Gramophone
3 April 2012
Matthew Bourne

Matthew Bourne

Finding the Bourne Identity

Improviser; jazzier; metalist – Matthew Bourne is a man of many hats and has worked with many folk, but now he is going it alone, musically and (possibly) geographically. Steve Walsh coaxes some choice words out of him before he gets his motor running and heads out on the highway...

Photos by Chris Ensell



Pianist and composer Matthew Bourne has a lot on his plate just now. His debut solo album, 'Montauk Variations', is released on Leeds-based label Leaf on 7th February, with an album launch gig to prepare for in London on 15th February; in March he takes up a six-week residency in the Chinese city of Xiamen as part of a British Council organised cultural exchange for innovative British musicians; the previous day he travelled to London and back to play a gig at London's famous Vortex jazz club, getting back to Leeds at 3:00am. And to top it all, today he has a stinking cold and conjunctivitis, and he thought the interview was tomorrow.

Vibrations

February 2012

Steve Walsh

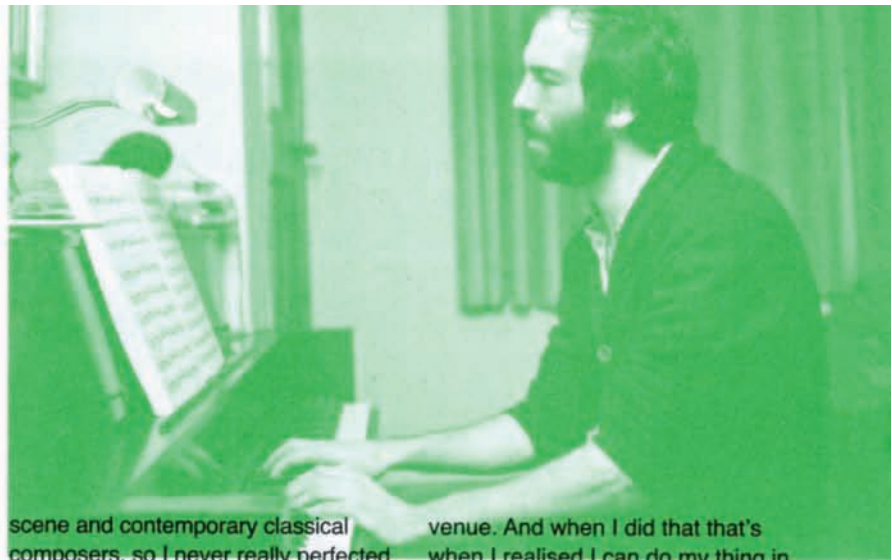
Bourne is a serial collaborator so the new album represents quite a departure. How did it come about? "I'd broke up from a long term relationship in 2008 and spent that year being pretty lost, and I had a gig in New York with this guy, Franck Vigroux, who I've since worked with quite a lot. So I had some time there and wondered what I could do with my time and I was looking on a map and I saw that Montauk was the last point on Long Island. I'm always drawn to places that are a bit off the beaten track, a bit isolated. I find isolation quite addictive. So it took three hours to get there, and there's nothing there! I ended up on this pebbly beach and I just sat for four, five hours in the same spot and, I dunno, something

happened, and I got back to this place I was staying in Brooklyn and got on the computer and I wrote it all out. I wrote 'Montauk Variations', I wrote how many tracks I wanted, what the vibe was, I knew I was going to do a cover of a Charlie Chaplin tune, I knew roughly how long I wanted it to be. But after that I had ideas about using samples and text and speech and I had these grand designs that is was going to embody the 'pain' and 'solitude' and 'heartbreak' and all the things I'd been through. But when it came to the recording it had nothing to do with these abstract concepts...that just seemed like bullshit. It had come to be more to do with Englishness, with teachers that had influenced me, people that had influenced me".

So the album turned out to be how you originally wrote it out? "Bizarrely, yes! I couldn't have imagined the exact music that's on there now but certainly a sensibility, an atmosphere was what I wanted. And after all the ideas about text and speech, I think I'd worked out what I didn't want and to end up with me just playing the piano was kind of what it was all about."

Originally from Avebury in Wiltshire, Bourne graduated from Leeds College of Music (LCM) in 2001 but stuck around to do some teaching there himself, eventually completing a PHD at Leeds University. Since then, he's developed a wide range of stylistically diverse projects and bands that reflect his own mercurial and restless character. Many of these draw on the equally singular talents of other graduates of the LCM jazz course, including the fairly straight improvising jazz trio Bourne, Davis, Kane and the must-be-seen-and-heard-to-be-believed pile-driving metal of The Bilbao Syndrome. Further afield, Bourne has developed strong links in the French jazz and improvised music scene, playing in an experimental electronics/ noise duo with Franck Vigroux and various projects with saxophonist and composer Laurent Dehors.

Would you describe yourself as a classical, jazz or rock musician? "Well, I'm certainly not classically trained. My teacher, George Sidebottom, was really patient and could see that I was really hungry and had an appetite for it and he would just help me but he never made me do piano practice. He was more of a mentor and I certainly got a massive love of classical music from him. As far as jazz goes, when I went to college I loved Keith Jarrett, and Bill Evans and I thought 'Yeah, I'm going to be a jazz pianist'. But then I got side tracked by Joni Mitchell, the British free improv



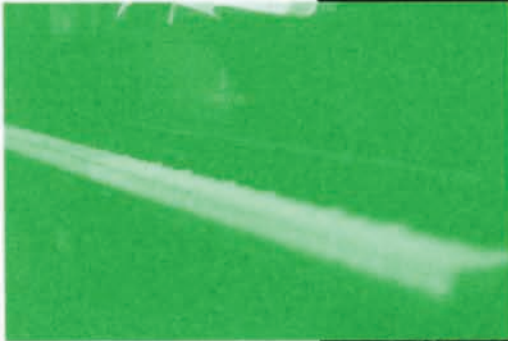
scene and contemporary classical composers, so I never really perfected any of those traditional jazz skills. I think to an extent I could bluff it...". So where does The Bilbao Syndrome fit in? "I got into bands like Dillinger Escape Plan and Meshuggah, or math rock stuff, Battles too. And I thought 'I can do this!' I love the energy and the precision. It was all about creating something with an edge to it. I believed that the energy we all had that we put into improv could be channelled into that kind of thing as well."

Do you think people are generally becoming more open to listening to different styles of music? "Yeah. Having inhabited a lot of situations in the jazz scene, there's always this problem of identity and genre. Most of the people I know, no-one's concerned with the style of music they're making or playing. They just care about making music. I did a gig at Café Oto (in London) two years ago and I was really scared because it was a gig that a lot of DIY bands were playing at, bands like Kayo Dot and Defibrillator, I was supposed to play the memory moog, it was broken, so I did this solo gig using the sampler and they [the audience] really responded to it. And I got them all singing along to John Malkovich singing 'What the fuck' from Burn After Reading. And I just came to the conclusion that I'd been playing to the wrong audience for years! I went there with preconceptions, I just thought they were going to hate this jizzer with his funny samples and stuff. It turned out to be amazing. And I think I had fallen into the trap of viewing what I did as only being able to be presented within the context of a jazz festival or a jazz

venue. And when I did that that's when I realised I can do my thing in other situations, but I just needed to find a way to do that. And working with Leaf is one of the ways I can, not change my music, but the way it's presented, you know, by putting it into the focus of another audience who might not know my work because they don't go to jazz clubs."

The Bourne/Leaf link up is due to last for some time as the pianist plans a series of releases that document his development as a musician and composer. "The opportunity to work with Leaf turned out to be very important. The other year I thought 'These guys over the hill, why aren't I taking advantage of this?' So, I had a few meetings with Tony (Morley, Leaf label founder) and discussed what I wanted to do. I just want to put a bit more thought into things. I've been doing so much work in France, I've been making a living, but I haven't been doing anything of my own and I don't want to look back in ten years time and think, 'What have I been doing?'"

Bourne has used a number of keyboard instruments extensively in the past (a Fender Rhodes, synthesizers, samplers) which have certainly helped to shape his music, but not in ways that some critics have found attractive. "Whenever I caught myself being a bit romantic or a bit melodic I'd destroy it immediately with a sample or say 'No, no, I can't do that!' basically because I thought other people could do that so much better than me. I think I'd always used samples and hidden behind that and used it as a bit of a crutch."



The epiphany that lead Bourne to address this tendency happened on a European tour. "There was a gig I did in Czech Republic where I'd reached the end of the line, like I was wheeling this thing [the sampler] out for the sake of it. I'd only played for forty minutes and my internal clock is usually very good, I can tell when I've done 50 minutes or an hour. For the first time I was lost and I really didn't enjoy it at all. For me I felt like I was going through the motions and it was time to stop using the sampler. As I was saying before about when I play something melodic or a nice chord and then I just smash it up with something violent or something funny with the sampler or whatever. And I think it was, I didn't want to show that side of my playing because of my insecurity, because I didn't feel I was a good enough player to be doing any of that kind of stuff that's on there [Montauk Variations]. If I caught myself doing it I would have to stop. Because I would think that's not who I am. I've got to be this weird, avant garde thing. So out of insecurity I've stayed away from doing purely solo piano simply for the reason that I thought I wasn't good enough." It is

a bit of an exposed position. "Yeah, Yeah. But now I just don't give a shit! I'm just going to go and do it..." As a product of LCM, what impact does Bourne think the college has had on music in the city? "It's certainly produced loads of great players over the years, and people have been attracted to Leeds because of the teachers who were there. It's where I met all of the people I now work with and play with, and it's been a real melting pot for loads of people to get together and put on their own gigs. And we did the whole LIMA (Leeds Improvised Music Association) thing where we were putting on our own gigs and we thought 'let's pool it together and get some money and funding together'. We're all now doing other things so far apart, but the LIMA banner is still floating about out there. And the younger guys there now are still doing that, putting on their own gigs. I just think that over the last ten years a lot of innovative music has come out of it, so I think in that respect it's been very important."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? Is that a question you can answer? "I don't think I can! I've

still got ideas about doing a few projects and see how things go, and fucking off around the world on a motorbike! Honestly, that's a very real possibility for me. My teacher George (Sidebottom) said a very profound thing, in the last lesson I had with him. He said that he 'got satisfaction that I've helped....whatever number of people to learn an instrument, but it's more than that. Whatever the reason is that people come to me to study music, even if they give it all up and never play again, even if I can't teach them to be great players, I can teach them to be expert listeners, and they will have that in their lives, for all of their lives'. He said that was the most important thing that he did. And that is such a beautiful thing."

Steve Walsh

Keep track of Matthew and his album's progress on <http://matthewbourne.com>, www.theleafflabel.com and www.lcm.ac.uk... Might be a bit trickier if he gets that bike...

Vibrations

February 2012

Steve Walsh

Piano discovered at a Wesleyan methodist chapel, Nidderdale, Yorkshire



Matthew Bourne

Lost and abandoned pianos



Matthew Bourne

Jazz pianist Matthew Bourne has hunted down some of Yorkshire's most ancient and dilapidated pianos for a series of performances called *Songs From A Lost Piano*. The project, commissioned by Sound And Music, celebrates the role the piano has played in British social life over the centuries – as a feature of living rooms and pubs across the country around which people would gather and sing, and as the cornerstone of the music hall. "This project harks back to the days when the quality of a man's baritone could win the pride and admiration of his family and community," says Bourne, "an era where Britain's living rooms echoed with the strains of songs from the *Daily Express Community Songbook* – and if you were very lucky, pieces by Arnold Bax, Frank Bridge, York Bowen and Cyril Scott." *Songs From A Lost Piano* has a dual purpose: to rehabilitate the abandoned pianos, restoring to them their lost status as mediums for entertainment, and to explore the new sonorities created by the imperfections of their decayed state. For Bourne, the damage done to them has only improved their sound. His intention, he states, is "to explore these instruments and their sonic qualities for what they are, letting the out of tune notes, quirks and imperfections speak for themselves rather than imposing conventional piano technique on them".

Bourne is the latest in a line of musicians to explore the resonances, both sonic and sociological, of the battered piano. Australian Ross Bolleter, who staged his *Ruined Piano Concert* at Wambyn Olive Farm, York, Australia (see *The Wire* 298), is another. Yet the two artists' interpretations of what the piano represents are very different. For Bolleter the piano, as an important part of the colonialist's household, has sinister symbolic connotations specific to Australia's history. "Ruined pianos sing the chaos at the heart of the colonial enterprise," he writes in his book *The Well Weathered Piano*, and in the music he makes he hears the suffering of a suppressed indigenous people.

But it is striking that both musicians treat the piano as a vehicle to comment on Britishness. Bourne

uses it evocatively, in homage to a mode of communal music-making that has all but disappeared from British society. For Bolleter, the piano is a weapon in a ritualistic act of vengeance, to strike at the dark heart of Britain's colonial past. But whereas Bolleter's pianos have been neglected to the point of ruination, several of Bourne's instruments have been worn down by a surfeit of affection. The much loved piano belonging to Elsie Smith, for example, was bought brand new in the early 1900s and has been passed down through the Smith family from generation to generation, providing a focal point for the village life of Sappote, Leicester, for decades.

Bolleter and Bourne both recognise the piano's ability to conjure ghosts from the past, and the individual stories behind each instrument are important to their work. But neither musician allows the past to dominate musically. Bolleter's work synthesises both old school jazz modes and contemporary improvisational and compositional stylings. *Songs From A Lost Piano* similarly acknowledges the piano's past, "with a nod to the bygone era of living room music" as Bourne puts it, but this will be incorporated into a largely improvisational exploration of the instruments themselves, with the unusual timbres produced by the crumbling instruments dictating the flavour of the improvisation. Bourne will also be joined by two singers renowned for putting a contemporary spin on vintage modes: the quixotic operatic soprano Seaming To and snuff-jazz vocalist Andrew Plummer. As for the keyboards, says Bourne, "for some it's a chance for them to breathe some fresh air before they make their way back to the corners where they were hiding and for others it will be their last breath before being destroyed. Coaxing music from these instruments is a very special task," he concludes. "It is an honour and a privilege to have been given the chance to do so." □ *Songs From A Lost Piano* is on tour this month – see *Out There*. matthewbourne.com

Nick Richardson

The Wire

February 2009

Nick Richardson



MATTHEW BOURNE

Musical free-spirit

'I hear things, fill the sampler, and then just play them. The accidents that result are usually really good'

Matthew Bourne is a firm believer in spontaneity. Before he became an experimental pianist, sample obsessive, devotee of the classical avant-garde and member of various strange bands with wonderful names such as the Electric Dr M and Distortion Trio, Bourne was

planning to be a farmer. 'I was going to go to agricultural college. But then I realised I didn't have a choice. I had to do music. There was no way around it.'

Bourne played trombone and 'cello as a boy but when, aged 16, he saw a Frank Sinatra concert on TV, he was captivated and switched to piano. He taught himself and later, at Leeds College of Music, developed an affinity with avant-garde composers such as Kaija Saariaho, Louis Andriessen and John Cage. Then, by accident, he discovered the sampler. 'I found it was a really good way of putting all the film dialogue I had stored up in my head to use.' Now, aged 28, Bourne is giving live performances, combining 'my own individual piano language' with 'a lot of film and television samples, bits of classical music, comedy records, you name it' to create 'a very strange sound world - I throw everything into this melting pot and it comes out in a Daliesque sort of way.'

The rape scene from *Deliverance* and 'Give a Little Whistle' from *Pinocchio* - or dialogue from *Spaceballs* mixed with Ligeti's opera *Le Grand Macabre* - are combinations not untypical of Bourne. 'Some of it tends to be very dark,' he says, 'some of it funny.' He never rehearses, never plans what he's

going to do in advance. 'I hear things, fill the sampler, and then just play them. What works in one setting may not work in another and the accidents that result are usually really good. I am committed to the method of chance.'

What differentiates him as a sampler is his improvisational approach. Similarly, he isn't considering a future direction for his music: 'I don't know where it's going to take me, but it's taking me somewhere. I had a stab at composition recently for the Fuse Festival and that was a nightmare. It took me so far away from the piano and all the things I really want to do.'

The support system for experimental music in Britain is a concern for Bourne. 'It's a tough country. There seems to be so much sponsorship in mainland Europe but things are very scaled down here. If promoters in galleries got on to the fact that music is being created with the same sensibility as visual art there would be a lot more cross-collaboration going on. Why can't people who create innovative music play in art galleries?'

KILLIAN FOX

Matthew Bourne plays at the Vortex Jazz Club, London N1, tomorrow. www.matthewbourne.com

The Observer

11 November 2006

Killian Fox

Fun Boy Free

Pianist Matthew Bourne last year released a remarkable live album recorded in the Norwegian city of Molde. It provided a fascinating glimpse into the world view of the Leeds improv and jazz scene kingpin. The *Molde* album was the latest milestone in a career trajectory that saw an early peak five years ago with the prodigious flow of his debut record *The Electric Dr M* for the Sound label. It's year zero, however, for Bourne as he now unveils the debut of his trio Bourne/Davis/Kane. Daniel Spicer talks to the band on the eve of the release of its debut album on 31 March. Raw, hostile, ineffably warped with an underlying menace that somehow resolves itself within its own sonic psycho-drama, their debut could mark a new phase for UK improv.

If good things come to those who wait, then fans of anarchic, homegrown free jazz can probably now stop waiting, with the long-overdue release of *Lost Something*, the debut CD from UK trio Bourne/Davis/Kane. It has been quite a wait. The trio – comprising Premier Award-winning pianist Matthew Bourne, fellow bastion of the Leeds Improvised Music Association, bassist Dave Kane and Belfast-born drummer Steve Davis – first convened some six years ago. The album was recorded way back in early 2005 and has been gathering dust ever since, narrowly avoiding release a couple of times, until now being picked up by Babel and given the exposure it deserves.

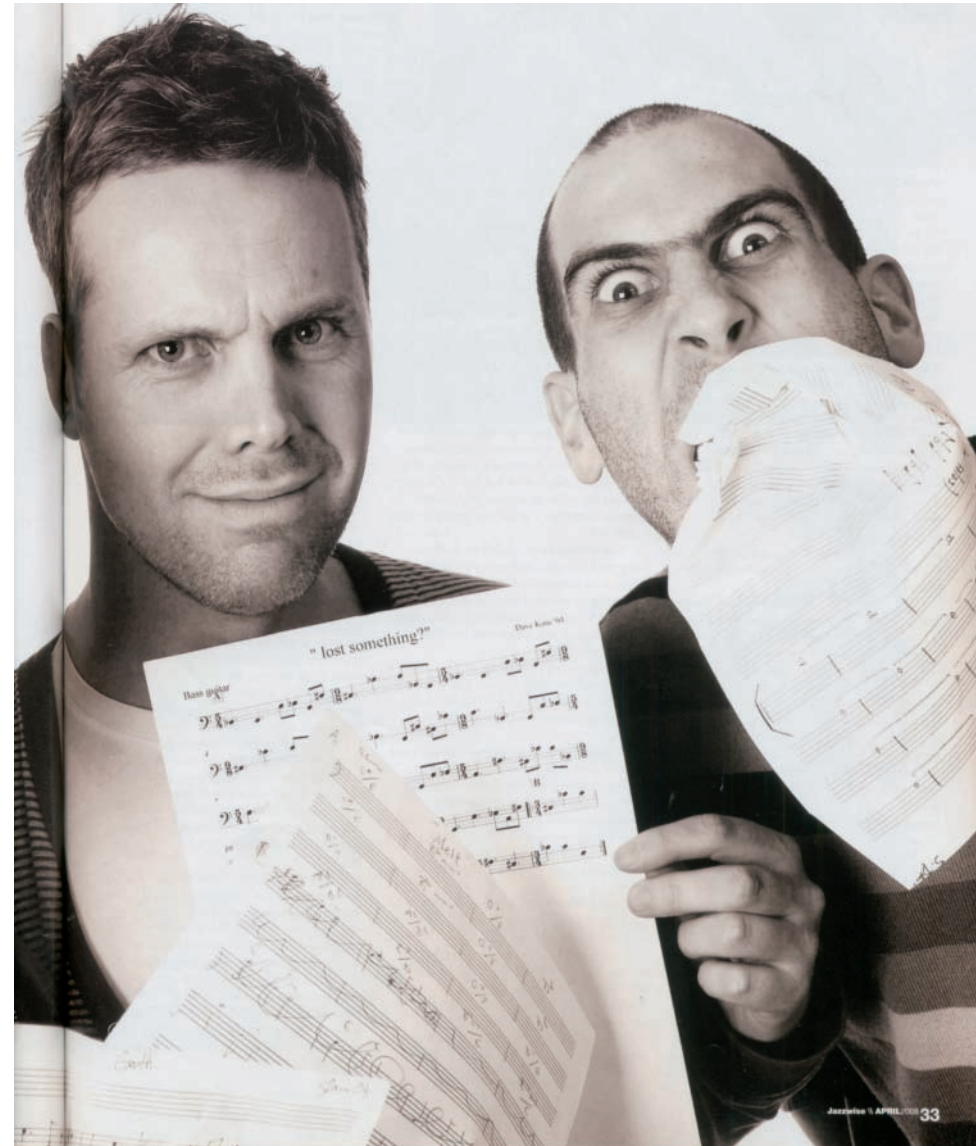
Happily, it's been worth the wait. Both serious and playful, steeped in free jazz tradition yet modern and progressive, the new album is a mixture of spiky originals and mischievous reinterpretations of tunes by Annette Peacock, Carla Bley, John Surman and Thelonious Monk. It also practically steams with energy, capturing the excitement of one furious afternoon in the studio laying down these rollicking first-takes.

The opening track sets the pace – a frenetic run through Annette Peacock's stop-start classic, 'Kid Dynamite' that has the band members almost falling over themselves in a frantic race for the last note. It's become something of a signature tune for Bourne – a constant favourite and regular encore in solo performances – and, more recently, the tune has taken on an extra significance for the young pianist. On a recent trip to meet Peacock in the States, to discuss working together on a future album for ECM, Bourne started digging for clues to the tune's background, and received a startling endorsement from the source itself.

"I asked Annette is 'Kid Dynamite' about anyone or anything?" he explains. "She said that Paul Bley had asked her 'why do you always write slow tunes?'"



Jazzwise
April 2008
Daniel Spicer





Dave Kane (left), Steve Davis and Matthew Bourne

Why don't you write something faster?' So, it was just bam! Pow! Wow! Kid Dynamite! Then she said to me 'I really love your version. In fact, do you know what? You are Kid Dynamite.' I just thought oh shit! I got very freaked out – in a good way. It's kind of weird when you're faced with one of your idols and they say something like that. She said 'you really understand the nature of these tunes and now I can talk to you about subtleties in the music.' Her music just seems obvious to me – not that it's easy – but there's things in it that just make so much sense to me and I can't understand how anyone else can not understand."

If Bourne has successfully tapped right into the authentic spirit of 'Kid Dynamite' there are other tracks on the album that come from a much more irreverent angle – most obviously an almost unrecognisable take on Monk's 'Round Midnight' that never actually progresses past the first few chords. The track is also notable for being the only one to feature another of Bourne's trademarks: sampled snatches of film dialogue and soundtrack – in this instance some haunted, unintelligible shouting and a baby's forlorn wail. "They're mostly from Kurosawa's *Red Beard*, and the crying baby is from *Rosemary's Baby*" he explains.

"When we went into the studio my sampler had a fault and they were just samples left over from a solo gig I'd done. Because it was fucking up, that was the only track that I used it on. That's why it's the only track with samples on – it's all just a random thing."

As striking as the use of samples is, don't expect to see it playing much of a role in future Bourne/Davis/Kane performances.

"At the start of this trio it was always with samples," he says. "But we've sort of developed into acoustic. I'm not convinced by it to be honest. It's an extension of what I do solo and I didn't want it to be like 'the Matthew Bourne Show'. I thought that people knew I did that solo and I didn't want it to be like my thing. It wouldn't be fair or democratic."

It's an important point, this idea of democracy. Catch a live Bourne/Davis/Kane show and you'll see just how close these three musicians are, how much they share. Sure, each has a distinct personality up there on stage – Bourne hyperactive and caffeinated, Kane solid and unflappable, Davis sensitive and intent – but all three are very intricately bound in a web of shared responsibility and collective creativity. But what makes Bourne/Davis/Kane slightly different to most other improvising trios is the way this closeness comes out as irrepressible humour – flashes of onstage banter, barely suppressed chuckles and quick, amused glances. It seeps out into the performance, too – not

'I hate that invisible barrier of "you're on a pedestal and we're just the audience and we can only show our appreciation by clapping"'
– Matthew Bourne

least at a recent London show that saw the trio break into hearty mooing like three lost cows calling each other home, each silently daring the others to be the first to break out laughing.

"We've all got a similar sense of humour and we're all into similar things outside of music," says Kane. "It kind of all becomes a part of it and works at the live thing. We've done wicked things that have never been rehearsed. It might almost go into comedy but it's not proscribed, we just end up doing something weird and having a laugh on stage. We hope the people out there enjoy it as well. The majority of times, they're into it."

At other times, the music itself offers up unintentional absurdities that catch the trio by surprise. "When we start entering into moments of almost conventional trio playing purely by accident, something very swing or modal, we instantly know what territory we're in and we all look at each other and start laughing," says Bourne.

"We actually find it quite ironic and funny because we don't aim to sound like that. And then we tire of it very quickly and move on to something else. Some people in the audience might think 'what are they laughing at?'"

If this all sounds a little slapdash, it actually belies a serious intent. More than anything, this Dadaist approach to improvisation signals the band's desire to communicate with the audience more easily and honestly – as Davis points out. "One of the things we hate is that kind of academic improvisation, where it's very highbrow and we're excluding the audience. I think when we improvise it's very much 'jump on board with us'."

Bourne agrees. "I hate that invisible barrier of 'you're on a pedestal and we're just the audience and we can only show our appreciation by clapping.' If you remove that and start to bring them in and get them laughing and involve them in the intricacies of deciding what the next tune is or stuff like that, then it kind of draws them closer so that you're not above them. It's a bit metaphysical, really."

With this attempt to leave behind some of the more po-faced stylings that improv can fall into, it's

perhaps easy to see Bourne/Davis/Kane as part of a new wave of British avant-garde music, one that is both cerebral yet appealing to a younger, less academic audience. It's certainly something that Kane has seen happening among his contemporaries: "There's a kind of youthful tinge on it that stems from a crossover of a straighter feel and improvised music. So it's having influences of funk and groove – like some of Tim Berne's music, Fraud and various things. You're giving audiences things where they're thinking 'oh, yeah, that's quite funky' and then you can actually go really out on it because there's a pulse and they're still thinking it's funky but you're really taking it out and improvising. I think there's a lot of music that's coming from that, like the Outhouse guys are doing that sort of thing and Fraud. They're doing something that is avant-garde and improvised but it's more accessible than some of the earlier British free jazz."

Whatever the thinking behind it may be, the rise of this avant-garde by stealth is enabling Bourne/Davis/Kane to take their music to much wider audiences than they might have thought possible a few years ago. There are plans to record a new album later this year and, in the mean time, they're proving a favourite at some of the more left-field festivals in Europe. Just last month, the trio played at the 12 Points festival in Dublin alongside a swath of young improvisers from as far afield as Finland and Germany – and they also appeared at Belfast's Black Box festival on the same bill as Fraud and veteran Dutch Improv percussionist, Han Bennink. This month they're set to play probably their biggest show yet at the Banlieues Blues festival – in a double bill with US jam band Medeski, Martin and Wood. Whatever the French festival planners were trying to achieve with this strangely mismatched piece of programming, it's surely an indication of bigger things to come for Bourne/Davis/Kane, and it has to be said, the mention of it also sends the three of them into howls of laughter. You almost get the feeling they can't quite believe they've managed to hoodwink people into letting them turn up and muck about on stage.

"It's very strange," says Bourne. "We're only known by a small amount of people yet we're able to get gigs like this. It's quite interesting because we don't rehearse regularly. The only time we ever get together to play tunes is before a gig but it does mean we're never stuck in any kind of rut." Davis agrees. "It means things are edgy," he says. "You've got to keep on it but the links are always there. Me and Dave know each other like brothers, and me and Matt are getting like that now as well. So it's instantly there." This is probably the bottom line. Regardless of Dadaist tactics, intellectual agendas or musical missions, Bourne Davis and Kane simply like to get together and play – in both senses of the word. What makes them so appealing is that they're not just playing their instruments supremely well, they've retained enough childlike joie de vivre to be able to just have fun and play.

"We just have a good time, really," agrees Bourne. "Because we don't have any problems musically, we just enjoy playing with each other, so each time we meet that's what happens. The more we try and get bogged down with new material or trying to rehearse it destroys the pleasure of getting together and having communion with your mates. We commune with our instruments when we play by ourselves. So when we get together it's a social thing rather than 'we're going to pursue a career as a professional jazz trio.' We're just mates who like playing together, on the simplest level." ■

A pull on the old piano strings

Six neglected instruments will have their last hurrah next week, reports *Ben Machell*

From the 1940s to the 1960s, my family ran the Lloyds Arms in Leeds. I never saw the place, but well-worn stories always provided a good sense of the pub's tone, even allowing for affectionate exaggeration. There was the sprung-handled brass-weighted cash my Nan kept behind the bar; there were the lunchtime factory workers and their Herculean capacity for mild; there were, naturally, the fights; and there was the upright piano. It's always the piano that draws my grandparents' biggest smiles with accompanying memories of hoary regulars, draining their drinks, sitting down and playing beautifully. The room would either fall silent or erupt with song, depending on the player's mood.

The pub was demolished, but relics remain in beer trays, a framed Tetley Bitter mirror and my Nan's cosh. The piano, though, is lost. But today, a mile from where the pub once stood, it would find a loving owner should it ever surface. In a draughty

lock-up in Holbeck, six old pianos are displayed in varying states of decomposition. A man with a beard and brown duffle coat walks among them and plucks a fat, rusty string in the guts of a skeletal, legless grand. It makes the kind of deep, reverberating tone that would herald someone's doom nicely. He grins.

"This piano might have seen a very happy life," he says. "But the imagery I get from that sound is of plague and dark times... isolation and loneliness. I might use that."

Matthew Bourne is both artist-in-residence and a lecturer at Leeds College of Music. He's also an accomplished pianist and composer of an experimental bent (he has his own death metal side-project).

Last year he spent three months searching the crannies of Yorkshire for pianos that were discarded, neglected or which had otherwise drifted into an unplayed purgatory to ship back to his Holbeck lock-up for, he says, one last hurrah. Next week, with two singers, he will perform concerts using all six instruments in an effort to



PIANO MAN 'I want to evoke ghosts of a bygone era', says artist Matthew Bourne

evoke "the ghosts of an era when there was a piano in every household and people would get around it to sing".

The songs will be original, though shot with "filtered, subliminal" references to music hall, church and domestic music. In parts, it will draw on Bourne's copy of the 1927 *Daily Express Community Song Book*, full of singalong standards such as *John Brown's Body* and *Auld Lang Syne*.

"I like the idea," he says, "that there was once this time when a man would get up in front of his mates or family and play, and that his pride was the quality of his baritone voice as opposed to the size of his flatscreen TV. A piano is something that could breathe life into a room; the idea of extracting some of the last music that might be made on these is special."

"Extract" is the right word. Time has meant octaves have slipped, wood has warped and dampeners have eroded, giving each instrument a unique sound. The only one that sounds normal is probably the most played. It's an early 1900s upright, donated by 92-year-old Elsie Smith of Harrogate. She remembers when her mother gave it to her on her 21st birthday, how her neighbour would stand up every time she played *God Save the Queen* as her practice piece — and how it would be wheeled out for village celebrations and holidays.

At the other end of the spectrum, there's the legless grand with its jammed keys and snapped strings, found on its side in a dilapidated Methodist chapel in the Yorkshire Dales. Another piano, bought for £100 in Oldham, couldn't sound more discordant when Bourne bashes out a C major chord, but after spending a few moments

exploring, he produces an odd sound reminiscent of a gamelan.

"Composing songs on these is about letting the pianos talk to you. You can't impose any sort of conventional technique on them," he says. "For a lot of people, the idea that I'm playing pianos that don't work is a massive hurdle. But I want to explore the idea that even the most neglected of instruments is still capable of producing beautiful, ugly or very delicate music that is valid in its own right."

Some of the pianos' histories are mysterious; others are known, but not remarkable. The sixth is different: it's a compact, light-coloured instrument found in the art department of a Halifax college. It belonged to Champion Jack Dupree, a black, New Orleans-born musician (and former boxer) who lived on a council estate in Halifax in the 1970s. After reading about Bourne's project in the local press, Georgie Dupree, Jack's daughter, contacted him to tell him where she thought her father's piano was.

"She has a child who wants to learn the piano," Bourne says. "So we thought, well, when we're done with the project, she can have Champion Jack's piano. But, to be honest, it's not that great," he says, moving towards Elsie Smith's sturdy old upright. "So Elsie's family said Georgie's child could have this. It's still a really nice piano that's been in a family for 100 years and is now going to get passed on."

"It's amazing," he says, surveying the five other old constructs of wood, ivory, iron and dust. "Because after the performance, like the rest of these, it was going to be burnt." *Songs from a Lost Piano*, Leeds College of Music (0113 222 3434), February 27

The Times

21 February 2009

Ben Machell

Matthew Bourne: Songs From a Lost Piano at Bush Hall - review

Matthew Bourne uses wrecked pianos in a humorous and sometimes touching show.



Matthew Bourne

By Ivan Hewitt

2:42PM GMT 02 Mar 2009

Comment

You see them in old junk shops – the sad wrecks of ancient pianos, usually missing several keys and now horribly out of tune. Most musicians will try a few notes, wince, and move quickly on. But not Matthew Bourne. For him, those clunky sounds are full of meaning, as if the strings and peeling wooden frames have mysteriously absorbed the love and care of generations of owners.

Bourne, a pianist who owes as much to the wildness of John Zorn as any mainstream jazz tradition, is not the first to make music from ruined pianos. But he certainly has a different take on the idea. Whereas a musician such as Ross Bolleter takes a meditative approach to his instruments, coaxing them gently to life, Bourne uses them as a vehicle for humour and satire and wild, Cecil Taylor-ish cascades of notes.

For this show he has rescued five "lost pianos" from all over his adopted county of Yorkshire. They stood crammed on the tiny stage of the Bush Hall, looking entirely at home in this converted dance-hall's stuccoed splendour. On the left there was the sagging upright that once belonged to Elsie, now aged 92; at the back a peeling white baby grand; on the right another upright that didn't look anything much but once belonged to Champion Jack Dupree, the famous blues singer who settled near Halifax.

The trio of musicians performing with these old nags seemed every bit as eccentric as the pianos themselves. There was Andrew Plummer, looking like a younger version of Damon Albarn, who among other things gave us throaty, Gothic versions of Sinatra's *My Way* and Schubert's *Earl King*. Joining him in surreal duets was Seaming To, a Chinese/English singer in a summer frock and an outsize flower in her hair. And there was Bourne himself, short, wiry, energised like a coiled spring, enthusing about his pianos like a proud parent.

Much of the show's humour came from the mismatch between the extravagant gestures of the pianist and the wonky sounds that emerged (or no sounds at all, where the strings were missing). The overall mood was a kind of surreal grotesquerie, which was amusing, but it could have been more varied. I kept hoping for a duet or two – the spirit of Elsie in communion with Champion Jack Dupree – but it never happened. This is an entertaining and sometimes touching show, but it could do with some refining.

Telegraph rating: ***

The Daily Telegraph

2 March 2009

Ivan Hewitt

Matthew Bourne's 'Songs for a Lost Piano'

Joannas with attitudes Bush Hall, Sunday

With the average nuclear family now choosing to bathe themselves in the phosphorescence of a 15-acre plasma nanny for fun, it seems almost laughable that the week's entertainment zenith used to be a good old sing-song around a piano. Yet for maverick piano genius Matthew Bourne (of 'The Electric Doctor M' repute) this virtually bygone era revealed hidden treasures when he unearthed generations of lost and abandoned pianos – totems to social rituals past. He was first inspired by a rusting, rained-on **walnut grand** he saw abandoned in the yard outside Besbrode Pianos in Leeds. Only six or seven keys worked, yet despite this he conjured a fragile tune from this rotting instrument. Thus began a three-month search of back rooms, bars and school halls across Yorkshire, which produced some truly wondrous instruments for which Bourne has now written music, exploring each piano's unique sonic properties.

Inverting experimental classical pianist John Cage's infamous 'prepared' pianos concept by using these organically distressed instruments, Bourne is adamant that these are far from useless pieces of junk. 'If they can't be tuned again, people just chuck them away or they get burned and destroyed,' says Bourne. 'But each of the ones here is individual and in that sense they are a bit more special than your average



piano, even though they are not worth anything.'

Bourne lets the instruments dictate what he plays: 'I think the important thing is it's all about respecting the instrument's history, so we've not tampered with them in any extra way to make them do things they can't. We've just had to sit with



Strung out and hammered Bourne and friends

them and play them and come up with things. We actually came up with loads of ideas that we are not going to use. Over the rehearsal period we've realised that something might be a good idea, but it's not really working on that specific instrument. You have to let the instruments tell you what's right and what isn't.'

The history of each of the six pianos is intriguing: blues legend **Champion Jack Dupree's upright** was found in the drama department at Calderdale College, Halifax, and plugs directly into the '60s and '70s blues lineage that

links everyone from Sonny Terry to Eric Clapton. While the **Glasshouses Wesleyan Methodist Chapel grand** is a legless, keyless carcass. Spewing piano wires, it has to be played like a harp, producing hellish, rumbling detonations drawn from a very dark place indeed. The **Failsforth Mill upright** also makes alien sounds like a giant polyphonic music box. As Bourne gleefully explains, 'There are very few notes that just play one note, you usually get two sounds out of each key, so that

one's quite special.' And the **white Besbrode grand** is so kitsch it induces instant seasickness as if on a cruise ship's cocktail lounge in a gale.

To add narrative clout, Bourne will be joined by raggedly brilliant singer Andrew Plummer and Homelife's haunting chanteuse Seaming To on a suitably wonky set of songs. These will include mutilated takes on Barry Manilow, Elton John and Frank Sinatra, interspersed with Bourne's own frenetic improvised flights as he draws new life from these hulks of our cultural history. *Mike Flynn*

Time Out

26 Feb-4 March 2009

Mike Flynn

● Matthew Bourne On tour

The British pianist/composer Matthew Bourne has something in common with the American iconoclast John Zorn, particularly in confronting listeners with the raw essence of musics. As a musician who rummages in a bag of influences gathered from all over the past century and beyond, for his latest



venture, *Songs For A Lost Piano*, Bourne takes a collection of Yorkshire's discarded pianos as its theme. Aided by singers, these performances are

inspired by the histories of six instruments, from a legless grand found behind a motorbike at a Methodist chapel, to a music-hall instrument, and expat American bluesman Champion Jack Dupree's Halifax upright.

JOHN FORDHAM
Bush Hall, W12, Sun;
De La Warr Pavilion,
Bexhill-on-Sea, Tue

The Guardian Guide

28 February 2009

John Fordham

MATTHEW BOURNE

Many travelled Rhodes. By Brian Morton



Matthew Bourne (second left) with the members of Dr M: Chris Sharkey, Dave Black, Sam Hobbs and Riaan Vosloo

The first thing Matthew Bourne wants to make clear is that his group Dr M – plugged in or otherwise – isn't one guy but three. "I know my name's the one that's been heightened," he sighs, "and that's because of the Perrier and BBC things, but this is very much a group effort." The group's debut album, the modestly titled *The Electric Dr M Parts I-VIII*, does indeed go out under Matthew Bourne's name but, as you'll hear, the circumstances of its recording suggest that his modesty isn't merely pro forma.

The keyboard man has been garnering attention for some time already. The BBC and Perrier "things" were an Innovator of the Year award in 2002 and a straight win in the musician category respectively. The buzz surrounding the new album pushes him into a whole new dimension. Ordinarily, that would please anyone, but Bourne is anxious to correct a few misconceptions.

There's no argument about the basic facts. He started off on trombone, switched to cello and then found himself doing piano duets with his cello teacher. Leeds College of Music opened up all sorts of possibilities, but it was the acquisition of a Fender Rhodes in 1996 that really changed the rules of the game. Over the last five years, Bourne has been giving solo concerts, playing in his own high energy trio with Dave Kane and Steve Davis, and with another three-handed outfit called The Distortion Trio, which pushes the envelope even further. When I call him, he's just about to set off for Poland for a couple of dates with them.

One of the unexpected sides of the trio gigs is that the guys are just as likely to start off singing as pitch into an onstage argument. That element of theatre – "though not contrived theatre", he insists – is very much part of the total Bourne package. The other

elements are equally unexpected. Ask him, as you find yourself doing on these occasions, what his influences are and the notes read back a little strangely: Dave Brubeck, Bill Evans, "these days a lot of John Zorn", Blossom Dearie, Sarah Vaughan, Debussy, Ligeti, Morton Feldman, Michael Finnissy and Salvatore Sciarrino. A spoken word/theatre connection suggests Cecil Taylor as an obvious source for a keyboard man, but apparently not. Barre Phillips, on the other hand... "Long past time ECM did something about reissuing *Call Me When You Get There*," he declares, "I think that might be my favourite record."

He's pleased with the reception *The Electric Dr M* has been getting but not entirely mollified. The music is a swirling collage of keyboards, guitar, bass and two drum kits, with assorted electronics and samplers thrown into the mix. For a start, he clarifies, it's not just a Matt Bourne project. "The band name, originally just Dr M, came from our initials, Dave [Black, one of the drummers], Riaan [Vosloo, bassist] and Matthew, and it's always been that way. This new album was recorded in an unusual way. I was sick when we were supposed to do some stuff, so Sam and Dave – not the soul duo, but drummers Sam Hobbs and Dave Black – went into the studio and laid down lots of stuff on tape. After that Riaan and [guitarist] Chris [Sharkey] came in and played live over the top of that, no preparation, just listening and playing. And it was only then that I came along and added my stuff. So I only really came in on the end of it."

It's pretty clear, though, that it's Bourne who stamps his eclectic musical personality all over the record. The reason he's not entirely happy even with the positive reviews is that he's being likened to things that aren't

part of his musical purview. "Yeah, they all mention Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock's *Mwandishi* period," he groans. "I happen to love *Sextant* and I think it's a really underrated record, but none of that stuff was in the forefront of my mind when we were doing *The Electric Dr M*. I have some of those records, but some of the other guys haven't even heard them, so that isn't what it's about. It would be more accurate to say that I've been influenced by the makers of Fender Rhodes pianos and Korg synthesizers."

You have to feel sympathy for anyone who jumped to those conclusions. The swirl of guitar, electric keyboard and double percussion inevitably calls up 70s fusion, and the tape collage method is bound to remind you of Miles Davis and Teo Macero. Listen a bit harder, though, and it's clear that Matthew Bourne and his colleagues are plugged into a more contemporary vocabulary, not to mention bigger and more ambitious structures. His fondness for Michael Finnissy makes sense of the album's almost covert and subliminal structure, which only becomes evident on subsequent hearings, but immediately clinches its curious power. Translate some of these sounds into more canonical instruments and it might well be the work of a dot-driven postmodernist. The beauty of Bourne's concept is that its originality is plugged into as many traditions as you care to throw back his way, anything from Debussy's impressionism to Miles's, rock energy to high abstraction. He departs for Poland in the morning, conscious that there aren't that many gigs in the diary for the next little while. He's not that bothered, and you can see why. There's enough going on in Matt Bourne's hand to keep him busy for a decade or more. □ *The Electric Dr M Parts I-VIII* is released on Sound Recordings

Born to run

He burst on to the jazz scene and won a couple of big prizes just like that. But who exactly was he, why did he make such an impact and what goes on musically inside the anarchic brain of pianist, composer and academic **Matthew Bourne**? His debut out now means a wider audience will be able to give his music a spin. INTERVIEW - STUART NICHOLSON



Despite the rave reviews for his solo concerts, his Perrier Young Jazz award and his success at 2002's BBC Jazz Awards, pianist Matthew Bourne has his feet planted firmly on terra firma. He's in jazz for the long haul, and he's determined to succeed on his own artistic terms, a no compromise route that has tended to be a path less followed in contemporary times. But he's been building his career, block by block, since graduating three years ago from Leeds College of Music with a Masters degree, and his patience is beginning to pay off. With the release of *The Electric Dr M*, the first album under his own name, audiences all over the country have an opportunity to check out an important new voice in British jazz.

Bourne's intensity is leavened with a large dollop of ironic humour. Articulate and with an easy charm, he is keen to point out that he sees the *The Electric Dr M* band as a co-operative of equal

voices. 'The reason why I am singled out is because of the Perrier and the BBC Jazz Awards,' he says with a smile. 'People recognise the name. It isn't my album, it's the band's album.' And it sounds that way too.

Acknowledging the artist's legitimating task is to divorce from the past and create in the present, the band use electronic grooves and subtly mutating rhythms that imply rather than insist. The unusual two drummer set up with Dave Black and Sam Hobbs plus Riaan Vosloo on bass, articulate often complex multi-rhythms and keep them clear, yet cohesive. Chris Sharkey's guitar shimmers in the background and adds tones and textures of angst and melancholy to the foreground. Bourne's keyboards, a Fender Rhodes and old analogue synth, weave in and out of the rhythms with cloudy washes of electronically generated sound, tightly organised motifs and jazzy freedom. The music is like a series of urban vignettes: sinuous and subtly

contagious, it communicates through a furtive glance here or an offhand remark there. It's one of the finest British jazz albums in a long while.

'We're all into different types of music,' explains Bourne. 'Each person brings their thing. We don't have an aiming-point like, "This is going to be a drum 'n' bass groove," we don't even think about it, we just sit and play.'

It is this feeling of spontaneity that impressed Kerstan Mackness, director of Sound Recordings, the label behind *The Electric Dr M*. 'What struck me was how much the music appears to be naturally informed by developments in electronic dance and ambient music but it's not forced,' he says. 'I felt here was somebody genuinely developing an interesting take on jazz and that was the reason why I was so keen to put out *The Electric Dr M* - I felt it was an important record.'

Born in 1977, Bourne took up the trombone at the age of nine, the cello at 13 but took on the

piano fairly late, at the age of 16. Making rapid progress through Debussy, Ravel and Gershwin he began to 'tackle the language of jazz' at the age of 18. The following year he was accepted as a student at Leeds College of Music. There he discovered many students wanted to play jazz as it was 50 years ago: '... and were passionately against all things new – jazz music as it was 30 years ago,' he says. 'I began to develop a "fuck you" attitude to all this and developed a passion for British jazz, particularly from the 1970s.' By his own admission he began to conform less and less to a mainstream approach to jazz.

'I think there's a widely adopted position which assumes that jazz education stifles creativity and produces musicians very much in the same mould,' says Dr Tony Whyton, assistant head of higher education at Leeds College of Music.

'When I hear these types of comments, I always think of musicians like Matthew Bourne, who came through the ranks at Leeds College of Music both as an undergraduate and postgraduate. As a performer, Matthew thrives on his anarchic approach to concepts of institution, canon and industry although he excelled within the framework of the Leeds programmes, achieving a first class degree and a distinction at Masters' level. From an educator's perspective, it was critical to ensure that we were flexible enough to accommodate Matthew's creative ideas whilst providing a stimulating and challenging environment.'

At Leeds, Bourne explored contemporary composition and the avant-garde and was involved in the college's contemporary music ensemble playing Cage, Feldman and Andriessen. He was the soloist in Michael Daugherty's Piano concerto 'Tombeau de Liberace' and Cage's 'Concerto for Prepared Piano and Orchestra'. During his last year at college he received guidance from Jonty Stockdale, 'He managed to convince me that I wasn't crazy,' laughs Bourne. 'And that it was OK to scream and play the piano with my feet if I wanted to!' By pulling a variety of influences together, Bourne gradually found his own voice: 'At the end of my degree I was working in lots of areas of improvisation, lots of moods and styles all integrated into one piece,' he recalls.

'I was moving from Annette Peacock tunes to "Campdown Races," to a Peter Warlock folk tune to a tune by a friend of mine and then doing "Folks Who Live On The Hill". I was working to bring in as many facets of technique as I could, using the whole range of the piano and I carried that into the Masters.'

By the time he graduated, Dr. Tony Whyton could see Bourne had developed into a performer of enormous potential. 'I think Matthew's approach to performance is refreshing and contains an element of risk-taking that is often lacking on the concert platform,' he says. 'This is particularly true for young jazz performers who are keen to establish their reputation and find it difficult to escape the influence of jazz's 'elder statesmen'.

From an audience perspective, I think Matthew's playing encourages a more active form of reception; it is quite difficult simply to allow the music to wash over you in passive absorption. This makes it a much more interactive experience but one that's not always confrontational. Matthew

has the ability to produce nuance and lyricism, as well as humour and anarchy. This leads to performances which blend new takes on 'Giant Steps' through to political commentary on the Bush administration.'

Bourne looks back on his period as a student (he continues as a part-time lecturer at Leeds and is currently studying for his Ph.D. in performance) with great affection.

'Jazz education has its critics and its methods but at the end of the day it is down to the individual. I saw the college as my resource. You've got a library full of scores and recordings, yet some people I went to college with complained about things, and I'm thinking: "bollocks! Get yourself to the library, get yourself some scores out, listen to some music and be



'We're all into different types of music. Each person brings their thing. We don't have an aiming-point like "This is going to be a drum 'n' bass groove". We don't even think about it, we just sit and play'

- Matthew Bourne

adventurous – it's all free!' When you've got an institution full of information and you're constantly moaning then it's a case of Darwin-ism, survival of the fittest, the best adapter. If you can't adapt to the situation you might as well not be doing music at all.'

Gradually Bourne began to make a name for himself with his stunning solo concerts and in 2001 he decided to enter the Perrier Young Jazz Awards. 'When I entered the Perrier I did it solo,' he says. 'I wanted to play "Pure Imagination" from Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory and I started to transcribe that and thought some of this dialogue [from the film] is quite funny, so I decided to have some dialogue in the background when I was playing the tune. I thought that really works, so I continued [using samples] when I do solo work. I find combinations of dialogue, it's all intuitive it's not like I've gone about it scientifically, more often than not I just put the samples in if

they've got emotional resonance.' To ensure spontaneity, Bourne never uses the same samples twice.

Parallel to his solo career is his work with small ensembles ('The Trio', 'Metropolis', 'The Distortion Trio' and 'Bourne/Davis/Kane') which he stresses is a communal thing. 'For example, *The Electric Dr M* started with myself and Riaan and Dave, the bass player and drummer,' he says.

'Three years ago there were very few places where we could play live trio music. I had a Fender Rhodes, and Riaan had a sampler and so did Dave, so we decided to improvise grooves in small clubs. We did that without sacrificing any artistic integrity, we just improvised because we have a very natural chemistry. Then we added Chris Sharkey on guitar. We had a few residences here and there; it was interesting music, and we built up a way of playing together and then our friend Sam Hobbs came along and bought a little drum kit with him and as soon as he started joining in the whole thing just lifted, to the level we have now.'

Calling themselves *The Electric Dr M*, they decided to record some of their spontaneously conceived performances. While at an awards ceremony, Bourne was introduced to Kerstan Mackness.

'I was at a function and Matthew gave me some CDRs to listen to with some outrageous cover art and I actually listened to them and I was immediately struck by how he was a rather unique new voice, that he was making music that was completely unlike anything I'd heard before. His extraordinary use of samples, while playing solo, offsetting what is very intense, demanding music with passages of humour brings the audience to the music. At that point I made a mental note to follow his career. Then, I caught him at Coutances in France, where he was doing solo piano. I thought it was one of the most powerful, moving performances I'd seen – a kind of mixture of insane sonic skirmishes mixed with moments of real, delicate beauty, something I haven't really heard in anybody else.'

Mackness felt the time was right for Bourne to record. 'It's about a helping hand to a new artist,' he says. 'I felt that Matthew had been attracting rave reviews for his live concerts but needed to release a record in order to reach a wider constituency and *The Electric Dr M* was the record I felt most comfortable releasing.'

Bourne's dedication is at last beginning to pay off. 'It's a slow climb, but I'm not in a hurry,' he says with a smile. 'I work as a supply teacher going around extremely rough schools in north Yorkshire that pays my rent so I'm not quite earning the money from music I'd like to just yet. I've always had a part time job and played the music I wanted to play, regardless of whether it will bring me fame and fortune, because that's the only way I can do it. I don't know what I would do if I had to do other stuff. I'd rather do a job not related to music to earn money than having a music-related job and hating it, getting depressed but getting paid well. I'd rather just play the music I want to.'

Let's keep our fingers crossed that *The Electric Dr M* will enable this talented young musician to give up the day job. As Dr Tony Whyton of Leeds College says: 'If jazz had a Turner prize, Matthew would definitely be on the shortlist!' ■

Jazzwise

September 2003

Stuart Nicholson

TAKING OFF

FREAK OUT!

Matthew Bourne won the Perrier Young Musician Jazz Award this year with an extraordinary display of pyrotechnics. He's been booked for a solo spot at this year's London Jazz Festival and the future looks bright, says Tom Barlow

Just when you thought that 'surprised' was the last thing you'd be at a jazz awards, along came Matthew Bourne – a 23 year-old self-taught pianist who broke all the rules before picking up the silverware. When Bourne slammed his fists down on the Café de Paris' grand piano last April it sounded fresh, exciting, even a little dangerous. And who would have predicted that a few months down the road Jazz FM would be talking to him about record deals or that he'd be called in to support Esbjörn Svensson at the London Jazz Festival. Avant-garde piano... commercial success?

'I guess I'm not your conventional mainstream pianist,' says the Young Jazz Musician of the year, not forgetting to mention the respect he holds for the runner up, fellow pianist John Pickup. 'John was a stunning player, but more in the tradition. I like to choose material that stimulates interesting textures rather than producing licks over chord changes. Recently I've been looking for tunes that aren't played a lot. Things by Peggy Lee and Julie

London – songs that don't really see the light of day compared to "Stella By Starlight".'

Bourne's intense avant-classical improvisations not only knocked the socks off the judging panel but also the newspaper critics. One dazzled hack described his style as 'wayward and gripping. If it produces results like this, we'll be listening to him forgetting how to play for a long time to come.'

Impressive for such a young artist and even more so when you consider that his musical direction has only been crystallized for a year and a half: 'I realized I had a problem with standard jazz material,' he explains. 'At music college in Leeds I was taught by (pianist) Nikki Illes for a year. Her method of teaching was, "This is what people play over the changes. This is how it is." She wanted you to assimilate other people's styles before doing your own thing and I'm not knocking her because it works for some musicians – but for me it really messed up my playing.'

Instead Bourne chose to forget all the formulas

he'd been taught. There came a point where I had listen to what was in my head because it's not about rules for me. It was just having the courage to do what I felt rather than worry about what other people thought I should do.'

Throughout his musical education, the motivation has been exploration and self-discovery. Having played the piano for less than 10 years (he first took up the instrument in 1993) the Wiltshire native was initially a trombonist, then a cellist.

'When I started to get interested in the piano I cut a lot of corners, jumping straight into the deep end and trying to play lots of horrendously difficult music. I got into jazz after a year and that was it. At first I didn't have access to a lot of music, just a bit of Bill Evans, Brubeck and Jarrett's solo concerts – stuff like that.'

Slamming fists and feet onto a grand piano gets you labeled avant-garde faster than you can say 'Cecil Taylor' but Bourne's source of inspiration is, again, unusual. 'I never really checked out the

avant-garde players', he explains. 'When I got to college I started listening to Brit Jazz from the seventies. People like Westbrook, Mike Osborne, Norma Winstone, Kenny Wheeler, Harry Beckett. I spent a lot of money on very rare records, hunting down them because these were the only players who had what I was looking for. That decade of British jazz had an intensity that hasn't really been matched, even in the 80s when every thing was very clean cut. I like music that is raw and dangerous.'

The deep appreciation for 70s school of Brit artists, often considered horribly out-of-fashion by other young players, sets Bourne apart. In the same way as young US improvisers who seek out their heroes for first hand lessons and musical insights, Bourne tracked down many of these players himself.

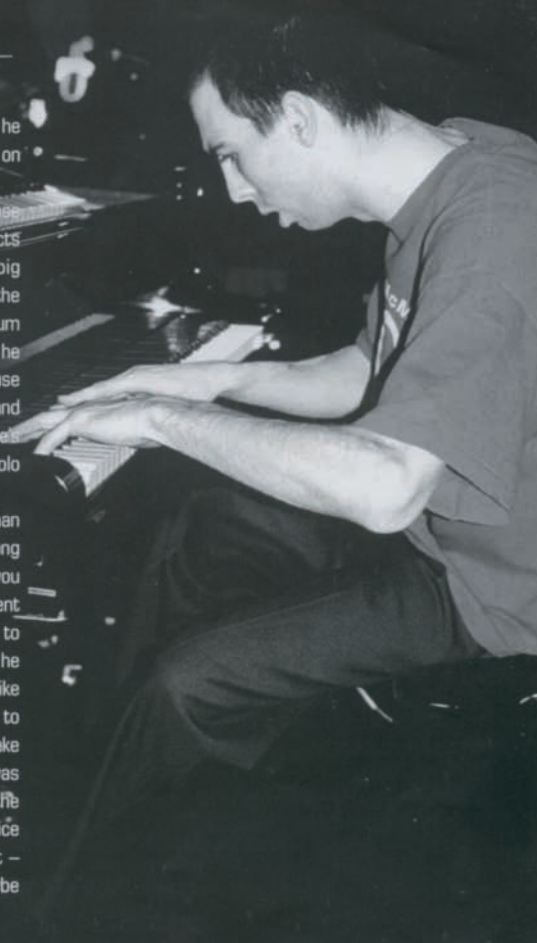
'I was quite influenced by Mike Osborne,' he explains. 'The way in which he managed to project all this energy and intensity from his saxophone. He's had a lot of problems recently, but I went and met him anyway. Nice guy.'

The only US player whom he mentions as an influence is also wild man John Zorn – but for his classical piano writing. Add to this a love of drum and bass icons such as Roni Size and it's anybody's guess as to what lies ahead for Bourne. 'I'd love to do a duo gig with Zorn. But I

also wouldn't mind working with Roni Size,' he says. 'I played for him at a gig once – I was on Rhodes and he was really complementary.'

Bourne's playing is also marked by a sense of humour, introducing bizarre sound effects into his live performances without – big compliment – sounding contrived. 'At the moment I'm working on getting some vacuum cleaners with foot pedals attached to them,' he says. 'Don't ask me why I feel the need to use those things. I just visualize something and carry it out. Maybe I like to challenge people's expectations of what to expect from a solo piano player in a jazz concert.'

Bourne emphasizes 'challenge' rather than 'shock' ('I'm not a saboteur,' he says) but as long as the music's provocative, new and honest you can expect him to feel at home. At the moment the only fear is that he might be expected to make concessions. 'I'm in a real dilemma,' he says. 'At my gigs I can't play the way I really like to. There's going to be a point when I have to draw the line and say "No. This is how I make music and if you don't like it, tough." There was stuff in my Perrier performance that the audience could easily identify with – like nice melodies – but also some stuff they couldn't – like playing with my feet. Then again maybe that's why they liked me.'



Unearthing the history that's lost in music

FOUND in a Methodist chapel in Nidderdale with two motorbikes propped up against it, the once splendid grand piano no longer has any legs, a lid or keys that work.

It's a far cry from the days when the instrument stood in the ballroom of 17th century Cockmill Hall near Whitby.

But the gloomy piano, along with five dilapidated others found across Yorkshire, will be played once again for an innovative music tour, which starts this month at Leeds College of Music.

Songs From a Lost Piano aims to remember and celebrate their pasts by uncovering the stories behind each instrument.

But it also hopes to appreciate how they have changed over the years to become new – and in most cases less tuneful – objects.

The pianos will be played by musician and composer Matthew Bourne, whose avant-garde approach saw him named Perrier Young Jazz Musician of the Year in 2001 and pick up the Innovation Award at the BBC Radio Jazz Awards in 2002. Bourne, a lecturer at Leeds College of Music, took part in a three-month search for the pianos, which each tell a unique story.

"There is a certain respect that you have for instruments with an established history," he says.

"I wanted old instruments that had started to become new instruments because they had become weathered or abandoned or neglected," Bourne adds.

The collection includes uprights found in an Otley junk shop and a Fallsworth mill as well as a white grand

INTERVIEW

Young Jazz Musician of the Year Matthew Bourne has been round Yorkshire finding pianos with a story. Hannah Baker talked to Bourne about *Songs from a Lost Piano*.



TUNING UP: Matthew Bourne is performing *Songs from a Lost Piano* on forgotten instruments. Picture: Benjamin McMahon.

unearthed at Besbrode's Pianos in Leeds, which was once used to adorn a cocktail lounge.

Perhaps the most exciting discovery was a piano played by New Orleans-born blues pianist and singer Champion Jack Dupree when he lived in Halifax during the 1960s and '70s.

"To be making music on

“You have to play them for what they are. It is a matter of sitting down and getting to know them.”

search, a display of which will accompany the tour.

The piano spent most of its life in the Leicester village of Sepcote where it was used for many occasions central to village life including weddings, funerals, birthdays and carol services.

Bourne has used a community song book typical of this era to inspire his composition for the *Lost Piano* tour.

He says: "I opened it up and thought 'wow look at all those songs'. These are all the songs your grandma could sing from memory."

"This is the kind of book most families would have had on their piano and I think this project harks back to that."

But while Bourne is clearly fascinated by the stories behind each piano, he also strives to understand them for what they have become.

"They are different instruments now. You have got to play them for what they are. It is a matter of sitting down and really getting to know them," he says.

The six pianos are out of tune with one another, and most have missing keys or dud notes but this does not deter Bourne, who says he has had the idea for this project for years.

"When the piano is bad it's such hard work for the pianist. But I thought about seeing how I could work with that," he explains.

But he admits working with six instruments loaded with history has taken its toll.

"The nature of these instruments tends to suck the life out of me. There is something quite ghostly and other-worldly about them," he says.

Bourne was encouraged to develop his inventive style of

his old piano is quite humbling," says Bourne, who was an admirer of the musician in his youth.

Another of the pianos belonged to 92-year-old Elsie Smith of Harrogate.

The instrument, which was bought new in the early 1900s, was given to her by her mother on her 21st birthday. Her mother had also received it as a gift on her 21st birthday.

Bourne has recorded an interview with her about the history of the piano which he hopes to use during the concerts.

A photo of Elsie with the instrument is one of several images taken by Yorkshire photographer Ben McMahon of the people and pianos discovered on the



music by Jonty Stockdale, now principal at the Royal Northern College of Music, while he was studying at Leeds College of Music.

"He was able to embrace what I did and also say 'what about this?'," says Bourne.

And he has continued to improvise with different sounds and styles of music for the *Lost Piano* tour.

"We are discovering the idea of these pianos through trial and error. If you try and pre-contrive stuff too far, you deny yourself the possibility of any other magic."

"Every time I sit down, there's always something new that comes out of it," he explains.

But the *Lost Piano* tour, which has been commissioned by contemporary music organisation Sound and Music, will also see Bourne play some more familiar tunes.

A rendition of Elton John's *Crocodile Rock* will be played on the white grand, and Elsie's piano will be used for a touching version of Barry Manilow's *Mandy*.

Schubert's *The Earl King* is also likely to feature. Bourne will be accompanied by a trio of singers including London-based vocalist Andrew Plummer.

While for most of the instruments the tour will mark their last gasp of music before they are consigned to the scrap heap, Elsie's piano is to be given to Champion Jack's grandchildren.

"It will continue to go on which is a really nice conclusion," says Bourne.

■ *Songs from a Lost Piano* is at Leeds College of Music on Feb 27. Tickets on 0113 222 3434.

Matthew Bourne The Electric Dr M Review

Album. Released 6 October 2003.



BBC Review

First album from piano prodigy Matt Bourne goes for the jugular with a fine slab of...

Peter Marsh 2003-10-10

While Scandinavia continues to dominate the so called Nu-Jazz scene, it's easy to forget that there are other less exotic locations where equally vital music is being made. Like the UK for instance. Iain Ballamy put it quite poetically when he suggested that while the press were fawning over the Norwegian scene, at home 'the sparrows were dying on the doorstep'. If that's the case, then at least the Sound label is putting out some food for them by releasing records like this.

Matthew Bourne is the best known member of this outfit. Still in his 20s, he's picked up a number of awards for his eclectic solo piano performances, which can draw on anything from Annette Peacock tunes to Beatles medleys to "Giant Steps", all sewn together by cohesive yet quirky improvisational skills. With a background that includes playing contemporary pieces by Cage and Feldman, Bourne has both enviable technique and a kaleidoscopic range of influences to draw from.

With this lot he sticks to Fender Rhodes and analogue synths and teams up with a pair of drummers, double bass and guitar. If there is a blueprint, it's Mwandishi era Herbie Hancock and the humid avant fusion collisions of records like Sextant. Bourne's use of electronics mirrors the deep space blips of Patrick Gleeson, while filtered loops and samples give a 21st century edginess. The twin drummer/bass axis cook up powerful yet controlled slices of funk, shot through with slabs of pushy drum n' bass.

Chris Sharkey's guitar snakes through a variety of pitchshifters and delays and provides a constant abstract stream of drones and dentist drill outbursts, with nary a fusion lick or 11th chord to be found. Bourne's agile, economic electric piano sounds gorgeous; fed through delays, he freezes chords or tiny licks and pushes them into dubspace, sometimes digging in for Zawinul-esque vamps or lush chordal ripples.

Despite their American influences, Bourne and co have something different about them; it's the kind of openness and humour you'd find in UK jazz of 30 years ago, where freeform meanderings rubbed shoulders with rock vamps and modal blowing. In an ideal world, when the Mercury Prize judges are hunting around for next year's token jazz nomination they'd start here...



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Licence. If you choose to use this review on your site please link back to this page.

The Guardian
10 October 2003
Peter Marsh

Matthew Bourne

The Molde Concert

★★★★★

(Foghorn) £13.99

He is less strategic in designing a show and more tempted by humour, but the British pianist/composer Matthew Bourne has a lot in common with John Zorn. Bourne confronts listeners with the rawness of his music, rather than manipulating them with familiar licks. He improvises with a cyclonic energy and virtuosity, and rummages in a bag of influences gathered from all over the past century's music. This is a solo live show from the 2005 Molde Jazz festival. Bourne typically rejects any repolishing of the rawness of the event – including various ramblingly self-deprecating and sometimes off-mic announcements. There are sampled voices from movies, TV, poetry readings and *The Simpsons*, which scream obscenities, fight, joke, gently reminisce or trill through Disney's *Pinocchio* while Bourne's accompanying, interrogating piano thunders like an avalanche, drifts into Gershwin-esque chords, flutters in soft, circling high ostinatos or hurtles through free-jazzy runs. He plays an improvised sequence of almost-orthodox music at the end, including a probing account of *The Folks Who Live On the Hill*. It's a sometimes uncomfortable disc that will divide the lovers and the loathers, but that's just the way he'd want it.

John Fordham

Matthew Bourne



Bourne/Davis/Kane

Guinness Spot, Belfast Festival at Queen's

In the great and glorious 40-year history of the Belfast Festival audiences have witnessed Zoot Sims falling asleep on stage; Jimmy Smith insulting the audience and walking off stage; Ornette Coleman backing a group of Irish traditional folk musicians; and John Scofield spontaneously naming a new and subsequently-recorded tune in honour of the Festival's Guinness Spot venue.

But they had never witnessed a typewriter solo – until this year, when avant-garde wunderkind Matthew Bourne began flamboyantly and frenetically flailing away at the keys of a defenceless, miked up typewriter.

The audience had been alerted to Bourne's unconventionality from the very opening of the set, when he had spent minutes rhythmically beating the strings of his grand piano with the palms of his hands.

Mindless provocation? Contrived novelty? Strangely, no and no again, for the sounds produced all made musical sense and served to prove, I suppose, that music can be found anywhere, that music emerges from the soul of its creator, rather than from a specific object, conventionally designated as a 'musical instrument'.

Bourne's actual piano playing had a wild, unschooled quality and at times he attacked the keyboard with such ferocity that he was lifted off his stool with the colossal phys-



ical effort expended, his whole body a hyper-kinetic blur. But at other times his playing surprised with its lyricism and sense of beauty.

Accompanied imaginatively throughout by Northern Irish emigrés Dave Kane (bass) and Steve Davis (drums), Bourne even tackled 'Autumn Leaves', but, frankly, only to give the much-loved standard a damn good kicking.

'You're out of your mind,' repeatedly intoned a voice on one of the samples utilised by Bourne. But, if the comment was aimed at Bourne himself, then the 150 captivated punters begged to differ. Trevor Hodgett

Jazzwise

March 2003

Trevor Hodgett

Bourne/Davis/Kane

Lost Something

Babel | ★★★★★

Dave Kane (b), Steve Davis (d, perc) and Matthew Bourne (p, sampler) Rec. 12 March 2005

It's the brash reinterpretations that first grab the attention: the harebrained, hyperactive rush of Annette Peacock's 'Kid Dynamite'; the way Carla Bley's 'Donkey' unravels out of a buoyant swing into manic intensity; the eerie, haunted meditation on Monk's 'Round Midnight', made strange with wraith-like movie samples; and the restrained groove of John Surman's 'In Between' cascading into freedom. But it would be wrong to let these overshadow the powerful originals on offer. Davis' 'Melt' is a gently rolling ballad, hung on Kane's gorgeously wide tone and Bourne's tangential chords; and his 'De Selby's Earth' rides a truculent, growling groove with Bourne's constantly unfolding solo going in all directions at once. Kane's compositions take things furthest out, though: the title track is a limpid, rippling piece of free-from beauty while 'Paul' starts from a barbed groove-hook and tumbles forward into maddening free-jazz with irresistible forward momentum. Put simply, it's some of the most fearless avant-jazz being made in the UK today.

Daniel Spicer

Jazzwise

April 2008

Daniel Spicer

Matthew Bourne

The Molde Concert

Foghorn Records FOGCD007 | ★★★★★

Matthew Bourne (p, sampler), Rec. 2005

From the wonderfully eccentric introduction using a sample of Cliff Edwards singing 'When You Wish Upon a Star'; from Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* – Edwards was actually one of the very first bona fide jazz singers in the 1920s, so maybe his appearance is not that incongruous at a jazz festival – this is a wonderful exposition of a Bourne solo piano concert. Piano episodes segue into samples – mostly odd yet amusing spoken word snippets from old films – which are used to punctuate the mood changes of this spontaneously improvised concert. In all there are 20 episodes, with two encores, 'Kid Dynamite' and 'The Folks Who Live On the Hill.' By the time you've got to these you've been through a bewildering odyssey of dizzying whirlpools of piano colours, strange rhapsodic reveries and samples that any self-respecting surrealist would have been proud. There's a kind of manic intensity and eccentricity to all this which makes it totally compelling. Much as Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* was a metaphor for a journey into the dark recesses of the human mind and imagination, this too is a journey into the inner man, where equally strange things reveal themselves. Stuart Nicholson

Jazzwise

August 2007

Stuart Nicholson