

Moment's Notice

Guus Janssen + Wim Janssen
Home made music
geestgronden GG27

When they were teenagers in North Holland, and their parents were at church, the four Janssen brothers would improvise in secret on Sundays, and as two of them would tell it later, they developed a family style. As adults, pianist Guus and drummer Wim have always heard ear-to-ear on timing, conspicuously in the undersung 1990s trio Janssen Glerum Janssen, as heard on Dutch classic *Lighter* and worthy sequel *Zwik*. Five of 12 tunes the brothers play on Home made music, well recorded at an (evidently well-attended) Arnhem house concert in 2019, appear on those discs. But two decades farther along, without a bass player, things are wilder, the playfulness more spontaneous: it's the brothers' *Live at the Plugged Nickel*.

The melody on "Tune for F" was originally voiced in angelic high harmonics bowed by Ernst Glerum on bass; here Guus clacks it out on toy piano under on-the-beat piano feathering; later he bonks out a few hand-stopped piano-bass harmonics, oblique callback to the original. The overall effect is very different – more moonlit surrealism than chaste hymn. "PF," an exercise in trilly little intervals in musing slow rhythm, dates back to the 1980s, when trio Janssen Baars Janssen played it and Guus recorded it solo on Harpsichord. It sounds made for that instrument, though Steve Lacy knew how to handle such obsessive material.

Janssen chestnut "HiHat" centers on Guus tapping out a syncopated rhythm on the piano's highest, quickest-decaying note, imitating a sock-cymbal beat – a gesture that speaks to his precise, percussive attack in general. That collapsing 3:2:1 tish-tit-ti figure momentarily trips over and re-rights itself every few cycles, as if the cymbalist were not quite in control. (Modern Dutch composers love anecdotal written-in 'mistakes.'). On the new duo rethink that hi-hatty beat is looser, more varied in dynamics, phrasing and tempo. Wim riffs right along with his variations, while ever watchful for programmed changeups. Later Guus attacks a mute-pedaled low note in similar diminishing rhythm: piano this time as bass drum. This duo's "HiHat" mashes up with/ morphs into and out of another item from the trio book, Lee Konitz's "Kary's Trance," wherein Guus layers long regular right-hand lines over walking bass, nodding to his early hero Tristano, albeit in more broken time. The Tristanics resurface on "Slow Step." But "April" is Guus's own Latin-bumping (very) light paraphrase of "I'll Remember April," not Lennie's bop contrafact of the same name. "Paloma"'s back half has a similar Afro-Cuban lilt, powered by Wim's caffeinated brushes.

There are a couple of other covers. The brothers' late pal Paul Termos' "Very good weather today" is an earwormy four-bar melody put through its paces; as far as I can tell this is its first recording. As a nod to the concert's homey setting, and in light of Guus's ongoing tenure with the ICP Orchestra, the sibs kick off with Herbie Nichols's "House Party Starting," the drum breaks warming Wim up. Home made music shows off this self-effacing drummer to particular advantage; he sounds especially limber and swingy – like he's having a ball.

Kevin Whitehead