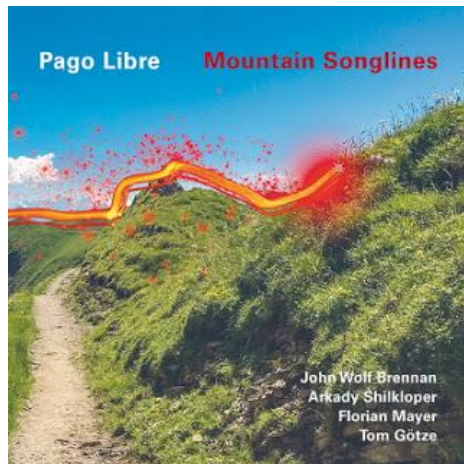


Pago Libre: Mountain Songlines

As we've seen, the musical madcaps of **Pago Libre** take their influences from anything and everything, from the great world of the movies to the Dada movement. So why not mountains and hiking for their latest effort, **Mountain Songlines**? It seems that pianist and composer John Wolf Brennan really likes to get out and walk. And when you do that in Switzerland, well, you've seen pictures of the Alps even if you haven't been there, so you can just imagine the combination of will, stamina, and conditioning one needs to get out on the ridges for a hike.

As Brennan says to Peter Monaghan in the liner notes, when "you hike in the mountains, especially in bad weather ... every step has to be taken cautiously. And standing still is not an option." In a sense, that's also true of music that combines improvisation with composition. Pago



Libre is celebrating 30 years of doing just that with their music. In the current edition of the band, hornman **Arkady Shilkloper** and Brennan, who've been there all along, are now joined by violinist **Florian Mayer** and bassist **Tom Götze**. Brennan's beautiful **Hornborn Hymn**, emphasizing the chamber music aspect of his influences, starts the proceedings, with Shilkloper leading the way.

The more experimental side of the band comes into play with another Brennan composition, **GTE (Grande Traversata Elbana)**, his impression of walking a 60-kilometer trail that traverses the island of Elba. Brennan uses his piano variations of arco- and pizzicatopiano on this one, giving the piece an other-worldly feeling, probably not dissimilar from the

disorienting sense of standing atop Monte Capanne surrounded by the land which is itself surrounded by the ocean. On one hand, there is so much theory and background for this music that Monaghan takes six pages of small type in the booklet to describe some of the many aspects of life and music that become transformed into sound.

We read about Brennan's fascination with the work of ethnomusicologist Alfred Leonz Gassmann (manifested on **Hol-di-o-U-ri!**), Shilkloper's tongue-in-cheek explanation of how he composed his ravishing **The Melody of the Earth**, dedicated to the dolphins of the world, and Mayer's experience of mysterious voices in the middle of the night which led to **Urwuchs**, his first composition for the group.

On the other hand, there is so much beauty amid the often unexpected combinations of sound from these four inventive musicians and guest yodeler and vocalist **Sonja Morgenegg** that, although helpful in detail, you don't really need too much of the background to enjoy their blend of jazz sensibilities, folk song orientation, Swiss motifs, and sheer creativity in the context of a drum-less chamber group. **Mountain Songlines** is an absolute winner, heartily recommended.

Stuart Kremsky

Mountain Songlines: **Leo CD LR 886**; Arkady Shilkloper (horn, alphorn [9,13], alperidoo [3], vcl [8]) Florian Mayer (vln, vcl [8]) John Wolf Brennan (p, arco-/pizzicatopiano [2,3,5,11], vcl [8]) Tom Götze (b, vcl [8]) Sonja Morgenegg (yodel [9], vcl [12]); Winterthur, Switzerland, February 19-20, 2020; exc. 13, Dresden, Germany, February 8, 2018; 1.Hornborn Hymn/ 2. GTE (Grande Traversata Elbana)/ 3.Urwuchs/ 4. ...von der armenischen Prinzessin (Armenian Princess)/ 5.PreGap: At the Abyss of Nothing/ 6.Cümbüs/ 7.Ridge Walk/ 8.Hol-di-o-U-ri!/ 9.Tü-da-do/ 10.Selbsanft/ 11.Vertical Vectors/ 12.The Melody of the Earth/ 13. Bonus track: Medley "Mountain Songlines" (YouTube video soundtrack); 55:24.