

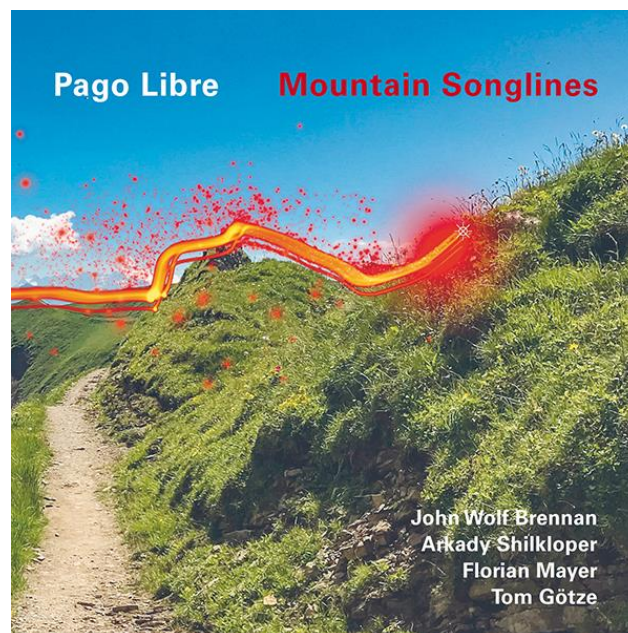


## THE ART MUSIC LOUNGE

An Online Journal of Jazz and Classical Music

JULY 7, 2020

# *Pago Libre's Mountain Songlines*



BRENNAN: *Hornborn Hymn. GTE [Grande Traversata Elbana]. Tü-da-do.\** MAYER: *Urwuchs.* GÖTZE: *...von der armenischen Prinzessin [Armenian Princess]. Cümbüs.* PAGO LIBRE: *PreGap: At the Abyss of Nothing. Ridge Walk, Selbsanft. Vertical Vectors.* GASSMANN: *Hol-di-o-U-ri!+* SHILKLOPER: *The Melody of the Earth.\** BRENNAN-SHILKLOPER: *"Mountain Songlines" Medley: Föhnsturm; Randulin Variaziuns; Robin; Crested Butte Mountain /*

**Pago Libre:** Arkady Shilkloper, *Fr-hn/alphorn/alperidoo/ +voice;* Florian Mayer, *vln/+voice;* John Wolf Brennan, *pno/arco-pizzicato pno/+voice;* Tom Götze, *bs/+voice;* \*Sonja Morgenegg, *voc*

Leo Records CD LR 886

From the liner notes: *Ten albums and a few lineups into its recording history, Pago Libre...combines the drive and groove of jazz, the melodic impulse of folk music, and the timbral qualities, density, and orchestration of chamber music... With **Mountain Songlines**, the quartet arrives at a high point, inspired by alpine vistas and other grandeur. To explain the title, Irish-Swiss pianist and composer John Wolf Brennan cites two texts: Alfred Leonz Gassmann's book *Zur Tonpsychologie des Schweizer Volksliedes* (1936)... [and Bruce Chatwin's] *The Songlines*, an account of his time among Aborigines of Australia, interpreting their mythical perceptions as best he could from his Western viewpoint.*

So there you have it, and knowing **Pago Libre's** work from two prior releases, I knew that I could only expect—the unexpected. And so it was. After a fairly conventional opening theme, the music pauses, Brennan enters on piano and Shilkloper plays a rather melodic tune on the French horn. The violin and bass enter behind him to play accompanying lines, then Brennan begins playing a rhythmic riff as they move into improvisation., the violin coming up first.

By and large, this piece (***Hornborn Hymn***) is a rather pleasant piece. So too is the opening of ***GTE***, but the introduction of the “alperidoo,” a sort of Alpine didgeridoo, adds a touch of weirdness to the proceedings, as does Brennan's playing the arco-pizzicato piano in addition to tinkling a few notes on the standard piano. We're not in Zurich any more, Toto!

Eventually, Brennan turns to the regular piano to improvise, but this in turn becomes a sort of chamber music piece when the horn and violin play their own melodic line in tandem behind him. The jazz element returns, again, via Florian Mayer's violin solo. Indeed, despite the strangeness of some of this music, one can hear that it develops along classical lines. When the tempo increases, it is Shilkloper's turn to improvise on the horn.

***Urwuchs*** opens with extraneous noises, which return after Brennan and the bass enter playing ominous, slow figures in their low ranges. The arcopiano and some odd creaking noises are heard as well. It almost sounds like a “strange interlude” between ***GTE*** and ***...von der armenischen Prinzessin***, another quite melodic piece, even quieter than the opener.

In fact, by and large this is a strangely quiet album for Pago Libre—and as much strange as quiet. They almost seem to have “filling space” as their goal here, as much of the sounds one hears on this disc are more ambient

than constructed pieces. As the band swings into Tom Götze's *Cümbüs*, however, a piece with a sort of combination Latin and Middle Eastern beat, jazz finally returns. The band joins their voices in intermittent song on *Hol-di-o-U-ri!*, a track dominated by Shilkloper's French horn. This blends seamlessly into *Tü-da-do*, a track that features the superb syncopated yodeling of **Sonja Morgenegg**, singing star of Brennan's other group, the **SOOON** Trio. The CD ends with a collection of tune snippets spliced together, kind of but not really a medley, some of it hot (particularly *Föhnsturm* and *Robin*) and some of it not.

To be honest, I'm not quite sure how to assess *Mountain Songlines*. It's a strange album, to my ears more ambient than structured, with the jazz and even the folk elements subjugated to a vision that includes a lot of extraneous sounds but not necessarily much in the way of jazz or even music in the strict sense of the word. The good moments come and go, primarily due to Mayer and Shilkloper, but it's a very eclectic mixture to say the least. I liked it, but not consistently so.

—© 2020 Lynn René Bayley