

DOWNBEAT

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Heiner Stadler *Brains On Fire*

LABOR LAB 7069

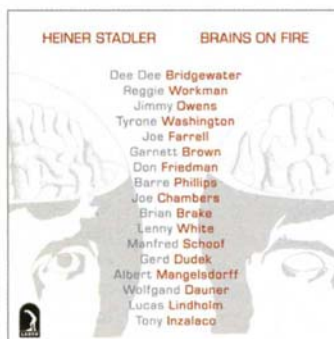
★★★★

This heady two-CD set, recorded between 1966 and 1973, documents the compositions of pianist Heiner Stadler, a figure somehow lost to time. But his achievement in drawing ebullient performances from Lenny White, Jimmy Owens, Reggie Workman, Joe Farrell, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Albert Mangelsdorff is impressive.

These eight extended tracks, five available here for the first time, sound as fresh as if they were recorded yesterday. Beyond “free” or “avant garde” labels, Stadler’s music flows, naturally and robust, as if the musicians are improvising from a single mind, or, yes, a single brain.

Where is the dividing line between composition and improvisation? That’s hard to tell here, and owes perhaps as much to Stadler’s open-ended compositions as the individual musicians’ skills. White scalds rhythms like a whirling dervish on “Three Problems.” The composition juxtaposes playful swing sections with chaotic, tumbling motion. Bridgewater has a riotous time on “Love In The Middle Of The Air,” a gleeful duet with Workman. “Bea’s Flat” begins as a swing vehicle but quickly deconstructs and stops, followed by scattershot solos and jarring ensemble sections.

—Ken Micallef



Brains On Fire: Disc One: No Exercise, Three Problems, Heidi, Bea's Flat (60:22). Disc Two: Love In The Middle Of The Air; U.C.S.; All Tones; The Fugue #2 (72:52).

Personnel: Heiner Stadler, Wolfgang Dauner, Don Friedman, piano; Manfred Schoof, cornet; Jimmy Owens, trumpet; Tyrone Washington, Joe Farrell, Gerd Dudek, tenor saxophone; Garnett Brown, Albert Mangelsdorff, trombone; Reggie Workman, Barre Phillips, Lucas Lindholm, bass; Tony Inzalaco, Joe Chambers, Brian Brake, Lenny White, drums; Dee Dee Bridgewater, vocals.

Ordering info: laborrecords.com