



Kali Trio

The Playful Abstract

Cat-Ref.	RON043CD
Barcode	610098168553
Release date	21.02.2025
Label	Ronin Rhythm Productions (LC-15239)
Style	Jazz / Allgemein

KALI Trio's new album, *The Playful Abstract*, could be a soundtrack to the air we breathe. Repeated listens to this tranquil, ever-shifting and sometimes transcendent record also invoke an association with the Japanese term, Ukiyo (うきよ), meaning the "floating world". Originally associated with Buddhism, where the term also denoted the sorrowful, or transient earthly plane from which its adherents sought release, ukiyo came to describe the sometimes seamy urban lifestyle and culture of Edo period Japan (1600–1867). Nowadays ukiyo is seen as a state of mind emphasising living in the moment, detached from the difficulties of life.

In this aspect it is a remarkably well-named album; the sense of weightlessness in the music really does suggest existing in a "floating world". This quality is achieved in the main by supremely confident and intuitive playing. The three musicians - Nicolas Stocker (drums), Urs Müller (guitar) and Raphael Loher (piano) 'searched for sounds in the studio' that became part of the wider recording process. The considerable serendipity they found with their producer Manuel Egger also helped, as guitarist Urs Müller explained: 'Manuel set up his studio in a way that allows him to mix simultaneously during recording. The sounds he creates during this process then influences the way we play. For example, a highly compressed drum sound or extreme preamp distortion would alter our approach to performing a piece. Manuel is a highly creative engineer who uses his effects in a very musical way.'

The band are celebrating their tenth anniversary in 2025. High time for a change of focus. Pianist Raphael Loher: 'We chose a completely different creative process to the last album, *LOOM*, where we only played compositions. With the new record, we improvised a lot, selected sketches from these workouts and developed them further in rehearsals. In the studio, we started the process again from scratch, and improvised a lot of material directly, and developed the compositions directly from that.'

The album's recording process was key for KALI Trio as people, too, as it introduced them to a new way of interacting musically. Drummer Nicolas Stocker: 'We've all had to "step out", and allow things to happen more organically and throw out preconceived ideas. Distancing ourselves from clear musical structures, allowing the music to become emotional in a new way - somehow brighter and, in the best sense, lighter. The pieces have also become much shorter!' On

Galileo Music Communication GmbH - Dachauer Str. 5-7 - 82256 Fürstenfeldbruck

first listen The Playful Abstract could indeed be described as a set of miniaturist workouts. Tracks are often short - a fair number are three minutes - a few stray over the five minute mark. Many also stop when you least expect them to, the bluster and ego associated with big endings is completely absent. For all its transience, this is a supremely confident and self-assured record and regarded by the band as their 'most ambitious so far', with 16 days recording and another 10 days mixing pulling things together.

Less is certainly more: the opening cut, 'Organelle', announces itself with a dreamy, bubbling Organelle synth part which is reminiscent of the spacewards sounds of Atem-era Tangerine Dream. Guitar effects weave patterns on the surface and a gentle heartbeat is provided by the percussion. The key is minor and the melody line, picked out by the keys, is understated. The surface effects hint that things aren't meant to stick around for too long. To use a word du jour, there is a centring of the senses; though the piece ends sounding like a clockwork toy, slowly winding down. The track acts like a simple amuse bouche; 'Organelle' is there to put the listener in a receptive mood and explore the wider vistas to come.

In '4K Gently Peaceful' a circular riff introduces a rhythmic meditation, built on a swell of shimmering guitar effects and repetitive, increasingly iridescent washes of sound. The percussion taps away intently, now and then allowing a fill to press the beat and keep the sense of sprightliness that also characterises the track. The sound almost strays into ambient, alt-classical territory at times. A sudden drop and a suspense, held on a single chord, brings another more melancholic angle to the music. It also acts as a fade. Throughout, the sense of floating through the ether is never far away.

'Cascading' jumps about on a set of notes and continues to do so over its allotted three minutes. Nothing is unpleasant or there to disturb, rather the track holds the listener in suspense, summoning up a sense of the modern usage of the term ukiyo - the idea of living in the moment, detached from the schlep of the everyday. In the background, however, a few scrapes shape out a pattern - and another tempo. It's increasingly noticeable that, gradually, different senses of time and tempo are invoked by various non-percussive elements.

The plinkity-plonk of the piano that heralds on 'mos3' can put one in mind of certain passages

Galileo Music Communication GmbH - Dachauer Str. 5-7 - 82256 Fürstenfeldbruck

on Tomaga's Intimate Immensity LP; the tempo has a feeling of Jaki Leibezeit's meticulous, zen-like drumming. Guitars swoop and trill over the top of the steady rhythms and - probably due to their increasingly gritty presence - a wider and maybe darker landscape is summoned. Certainly this track has none of the crystalline feel of the opening trio. Again, though, we are left holding nothing but air after a sudden ending.

A melancholy piano part that could sit easily on the Blue Nile's Hats introduces 'Eon'. The track works as an interlude, and the feeling of staring blankly through a foggy landscape is never far away. Following that is maybe the key track on the record, the aptly named 'Shift', where incremental adjustments in tempo, tone and texture are the main drivers. Melody is suppressed, to foreground the timbre of percussion; the subtle reworkings of which draw from other traditions than just European-based modern jazz. All too soon the track draws to a conclusion, on what feels like an offbeat, something that can wrong foot the unwary listener.

'Bendings' plays around with sound courtesy of a conversation between prepared piano sounds and some percussion, before things settle into a steady groove that has a rhythm not too dissimilar from a horse's walk. The guitar parts chip away at the sides, alongside some unearthly noises, and the piano bass adds a subliminal undertow.

The longest track on the album, 'Field', is a marvellous exercise in restraint. The feeling of late sixties progressive rock is never far away, especially in the beginning, where a drone created using E-Bows inside the piano holds sway before guitar notes start to pick out a semblance of a melody. Nothing feels hurried and the music could invoke the idea of watching a hot air balloon ascend into the sky. Slowly a beat starts to tap out a pattern and the pressure builds, courtesy of the guitar's glissando and the increasingly present beat. And, like many other pieces on The Playful Abstract, the track quickly fades out of view, its memory kept alive by a few last taps from the percussion.

Last track 'Flux' acts as a counterpoint to where the record started with 'Organelle', the abstract melody vying for our attention with the sultry chords picked out by the guitar. The track lasts nearly four minutes, but the airy nature of the playing makes it feel like it is over in a matter of seconds. Truly this music is there to trick and to beguile, turning what we think we know into its opposite. A veritable floating world.

Band member

Nicolas Stocker
Raphael Loher
Urs Müller

Drums, Rototoms, Tuned Percussion, Contact Microphones,
Piano, Prepared Piano, Contact Microphones, Organelle, Ele
Guitar, Effects

Mixer

Manuel Egger and KALI Trio

aufnahmestudio

Manuel Egger

Mastering

Simon Lancelot at Studios

Ferber

Tracklist

1.	Organelle M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	03:52
2.	4k Gently Peaceful M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	03:58
3.	Cascading M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	03:33
4.	Mos3 M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	04:57
5.	Eon M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	02:56
6.	Shift M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	03:10
7.	Bendings M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	05:42
8.	Field M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	07:58
9.	Flux M: Raphael Loher/Urs Müller/Nicolas Stocker	03:53