

Mako Sica & Hamid Drake
Ronda

FEEDING TUBE 409/ASTRAL SPIRITS 071
★★★★

Dan Phillips & Hamid Drake
Trail Of Inevitability
LIZARD BREATH

★★★

There's a very good reason why Hamid Drake is one of the busiest, most in-demand percus-

sionists in improvised music: He lifts up everything he's involved with. While the Chicago-based performer is well known for his tight bonds with bassist William Parker, fellow percussionist Michael Zerang and saxophonist Peter Brötzmann, Drake works tirelessly with an ever-expanding array of collaborators, and these two Chicago-based partnerships reveal just how versatile his playing remains.

Mako Sica is a veteran experimental rock trio whose penchant for exploratory textures and haunting moods gets a serious boost on *Ronda*, a sprawling double album that conjures the sort of mystical, pan-stylistic music sought by Don Cherry in communion with musicians from South Africa, Turkey and Sweden. (Naturally, Drake often worked with Cherry.) Although the music is far more easygoing here, there's also an irresistible engagement with hypnotic grooves and blankets of sound that recall Miles Davis' work during the early '70s, while some of the guitar twang summons the Spaghetti Western scores of Ennio Morricone.

The members of the trio alternate instrumentation, toggling between guitars, trumpet, keyboards, hand percussion and more to carve out seductively thick atmospheres, a sensation enhanced by the ghostly chanting of Brent Fuscald, which reinforces a ritualistic vibe to the proceedings. Hovering keyboard arpeggios, guitar lines that slalom, dissipate and dissolve in

ambient puffs, and rustic harmonica bleats churn and levitate. But it's Drake's peerless sense of time and motion that shoulders the cumulative weight and gives the amorphous sonic fog inexorable shape.

Drake has worked in various configurations with guitarist Dan Phillips that cling more overtly to jazz tradition, particularly in the guitarist's Edge Ensemble, which Phillips formed after returning from a lengthy stay in Bangkok, Thailand, as a music educator. As with the Mako Sica collaboration, the music on *Trail Of Inevitability* blends composed kernels and free improvisation in seamless fashion. Phillips moves between tenderly resonant playing that suggests the influence of Bill Frisell and more aggressive, noisy passages marked by gnarled, tightly coiled phrases. In addition to a muscular rhythmic backbone, Drake also provides conversational rapport, particularly on the title track, where the path taken by the guitarist feels anything but inevitable.

—Peter Margasak

Ronda: Dance With Waves; Emanation; The Greatest Gift; The Old Book; The Wu Wei. (61:22)

Personnel: Hamid Drake, drums, tabla, frame drum; Przemyslaw Kryszewski, electric guitar, classical guitar, trumpet; Brent Fuscald, vocals, electric guitar, classical guitar, thumb piano, bass, harmonica, percussion; Chaetan Newell, congas, electric piano, piano, percussion, cello, bass, flute, drum kit.

Trail Of Inevitability: Trail of Inevitability; Forked Tongue; Inside Voice; Imminent Recline; Excursion; Afternoon Ambush. (58:19)

Personnel: Dan Phillips, guitar; Hamid Drake, drums.

Ordering info: feedingtuberecords.com; danphillips1.bandcamp.com

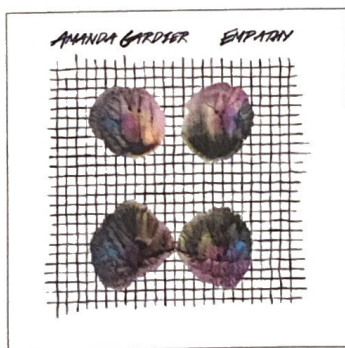
Amanda Gardier
Empathy
GREEN MIND

★★★★½

Indianapolis-based alto saxophonist Amanda Gardier finds musical repetition calming, and often uses the technique in her compositions. On her debut, *Empathy*, the bandleader experiments with drone-like harmonies, repeated riffs and cyclical melodies to deceptively soothing effect. As a listener, it's easy to settle into the lustrous tones and elegant structures in her compositions, remaining only subliminally aware of the tension that runs throughout the music. But that would be to miss the thrill of it.

For Gardier, empathy is finding the middle ground between two contrary forces, whether in music, politics or within oneself. She shows how this might work on the title cut, which features the saxophonist's disquieting lyrics and Mina Keohane's forceful indie-rock vocals. To the extent that there's violence in the vocal line, there's restoration in the horn section: After a plaintive solo, Gardier falls into a harmonic duet with tenor saxophonist Rob Dixon in a slow Latin groove, playing the same comforting lick over and over, like an incantation. In this one short, redemptive phrase lies Gardier's point about the power of empathy. "Here we are again," her music says, "let's figure it out."

—Suzanne Lorge



Mark Kavuma
Kavuma
UBUNTU 0007

★★★★

To the galaxy of exciting new trumpeters, add Uganda-born Mark Kavuma. From "Into The Darkness," the opening tune on *Kavuma*, his debut album, his horn is a pure delight. He seems to relish the blistering pace set by his rhythm section,

and the combined saxophone work of Mussinghi Brian Edwards and Ruben Fox pushes all involved faster and further into a collective fury.

There's an edgy, hard-bop ambience on "Carolina Moon," one of two tunes not composed by Kavuma, and the solo by Edwards is beautifully rendered, paving the way for the bandleader's sketch that includes a nod to Miles Davis at its conclusion. Of all the tunes here, "Papa Joe" is the most straightahead, though in several ways it's an extension of "Into The Darkness," with Kavuma digging deep into some of his influences. But a complete change of mood comes on "Abide With Me," an age-old Christian hymn. And thankfully it's given a fresh turn by Kyle Poole, a drummer who consistently is ingenious across this recording.

In Swahili, the national language of Uganda, "harambee" means "all pull together," and that pretty much summarizes Kavuma, his ensemble and this stellar recording.

—Herb Boyd

Kavuma: Into The Darkness; Carolina Moon; Modibo; Barbar G; Papa Joe; Abide With Me; Church. (40:05)

Personnel: Mark Kavuma, trumpet; Mussinghi Brian Edwards, Ruben Fox, tenor saxophone; Artie Zaitz, guitar; Conor Chaplin, bass; Reuben James, piano; Kyle Poole, drums; Michela Marino Lerman, tap dance (7).

Ordering info: weareubuntumusic.com

Empathy: Giants; Revolving Door; Fjord; Joga Intro; Joga; Smoke; Two Sided; Thin Line; What Will Happen; Empathy; Leap of Faith. (61:07)

Personnel: Amanda Gardier, alto saxophone, flute, clarinet; Rob Dixon, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 5, 7, 10); Charlie Ballantine, guitar; Clay Wulbrecht, piano; Jesse Wittman, bass; Chris Parker, drums; Mina Keohane, vocals (6, 10).

Ordering info: greenmindrecords.com