



Michael Formanek *Small Places*

ECM 2287

★★★★★

This music plays like one long song, with pauses. Michael Formanek's group with alto player Tim Berne, pianist Craig Taborn and drummer Gerald Cleaver is a mesmerizing unit, a collective whose musical syntax continues to suggest there aren't four musicians here but one. Think of Wayne Shorter's ongoing band with Danilo Perez for reference.

When I reviewed their first CD, 2009's *The Rub And Spare Change*, I mentioned that the music "works on you incrementally, to the point where you forget where you started and only know of what you're hearing at the moment." That's exactly what continues to take place with *Small Places*. The title refers to what Formanek says the album is about: "the things within the thing." The nooks and crannies are where the music takes place, so you want to eavesdrop as much as possible. Examples abound on *Small Places*, a cycle of eight Formanek songs even more developed than the six he offered from *The Rub*. "Slightly Off Axis" begins as a quiet duet between Formanek and Taborn, as if to further the fevered dream of the building swinger "Rising Tensions And Awesome Light." But once again, as the "axis" begins to tilt, time seems to be standing still, and the dialog between players continues to be everything, what came before and any future music to be heard mysteriously in the air but beyond the realms currently occupied. Berne's echo-y alto lines mirror Taborn's toward song's end, in this, a kind of elegy to night, or a strange dream, or a longing heart. Recurring patterns—as with the closing, building statements of "Rising"; the whimsical here-and-there statements of "Pong"; the loose-limbed frame that holds the laconic "Seeds And Birdman" together—are like gathering points as the quartet moves towards and away from them.

—John Ephland

Small Places: Small Places; Pong; Parting Ways; Rising Tensions And Awesome Light; Slightly Off Axis; Seeds And Bedtime; Wobbling And Spill; Soft Reality (7:21)

Personnel: Tim Berne, alto saxophone; Craig Taborn, piano; Michael Formanek, double bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums, shruti box.

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