

## Of Other Narratives

tracings in the ground of  
*Collective Autonomy*  
people–practice–theory–history

### Volume 2

Australian Art Ensemble

Trio '79

Gebert-Simmonds-Treloar

Feeling to Thought : FT-009

#### FEATURE REVIEW by JOHN SHAND

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*THE AGE* - Entertainment : *A sublime moment in time*

*The Sydney Morning Herald* - SPECTRUM : REVIEW OF THE WEEK



Composer and percussionist Phil Treloar. Photo: Narelle Autio

#### JAZZ

**Trio '79**  
**Australian Art Ensemble**  
**(Feeling To Thought)**

★★★★1/2

COUNT this among the momentous albums of Australian jazz. In 1979, Mark Simmonds (tenor saxophone), Bobby Gebert (piano) and Phil Treloar (drums) formed the Australian Art Ensemble, which only performed twice but did record. The power that exploded in that three-hour session became legendary, thanks to a widely circulated, poor-quality bootleg, in the absence of an official release. Now this recording has been meticulously remastered from a cassette dub and appears as Volume 2 of Treloar's *Of Other Narratives* retrospective.

The simple, soulful melody of Gebert's opening *Nexus* sounds as ancient as the land. It is phrased in surges and therefore spawns improvising that arrives that way. The drums and piano roll in mighty waves, threatening to swamp the saxophone, which hurtles like a yacht whose skipper refuses to reef the sails, despite oblivion beckoning. But, then, this music is partly about staring at oblivion; about daring to shout that the triumph of life is to exalt in the face of death, rather than be cowed by it. It is torrential and utterly gripping.



When Simmonds' solo ends, it is as though a hint of blue sky appears through brooding clouds and the piano and drums seem uncannily like one instrument, one stream of consciousness. The recapitulation of the melody is the drawn-out sigh after a vast expenditure of energy and the closing drum detonations are both exhilarating and crushing in their finality.

Gebert's *Chuggin'* is all tension. Shards of piano shower the jostling drumming before Simmonds steams into the fray, already at fever pitch. Somehow the three players raise the stakes still higher, until the music is almost frightening in its intensity. Yet, as furious as it is, it is much more multifaceted and deep than merely expressing anger or aggression.

The group-devised *Dream Time* begins with Treloar's other-worldly synthesiser, which beckons a sad and stately saxophone/piano theme. Gradually, the statement of this becomes more dramatic, until it unravels into a saxophone solo of desperate sadness against the heaving swells of piano and drums. Simmonds' sound is magnificent, compounding the effect of some of the most moving, compelling tenor saxophone ever recorded. When his outpouring subsides, the drums drop out and, against swirls of synthesiser, Gebert sustains the mood but astutely reduces the scale of the drama.

Ornette Coleman's whizzing *C.O.D.* is a radical contrast.

After a brief statement of the theme and a saxophone/drums duet, Gebert joins for a thrilling section of machine-gun-like rhythmic interaction. The piano solo swings more conventionally against the drums, even as it embraces dazzling melodic invention. Treloar's phrasing in the restatement of the theme is rousing and inspired.

His final hammer blow collapses the curtain on a moment in history when three people collectively met the challenge of making the highest art of which they were capable.

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## PHIL TRELOAR

Of Other Narratives Volume 2 (FT009)

★★★★1/2

Percussionist-composer Phil Treloar now lives in Japan, but he was a vital presence on the Sydney jazz scene in the '70s and '80s, as a drummer, improviser and bandleader. Better late than never, this cd makes available the music of the short-lived Australian Art Ensemble from 1979, in which Treloar played drums and electronics with Mark Simmonds (tenor saxophone) and Bobby Gebert (piano). Given the open, exploratory nature of this music, they may seem like strange bedfellows (Gebert has since reaffirmed his commitment to the jazz tradition and the necessity to swing). But this recording shows that, at that time, they were perfectly attuned to each other. Their interactions are thematic rather than simply 'free'. Simmonds' impassioned tenor is the focal point : his tone is buzzing and potent, his logic clear and compelling. Gebert and Treloar ebb and flow around him, creating music that is both powerful and unpredictable.

Adrian JACKSON, Limelight, April Edition, 2012