

Interview with Anomalous Quintet's Jason Newsom and Michael York about *Life on an Oblate Spheroid* By Kristin Valinsky

KV: Can you describe your emotional connection to AQ's music?

JN: I suppose music, as with any art form, is part emotional expression, but it is also an intellectual expression, an expression of creativity, and an attempt to communicate. I don't ever sit down with the intention of writing something that expresses a particular kind of emotion. I think when people do that, you can hear it in the music and it sounds contrived. I try my best not to manage the ideas or the emotional content of the music when I am writing. All the good stuff comes out when you are relaxed and not thinking too much. I'll take an idea that has a great feel over one that has a clever device any day (but we all have our weak moments).

I believe that the best musicians are in touch with their feelings and are emotionally mature. I also think the best musicians are sensitive to others' feelings, various emotional contexts, and the emotional content of the music. The musicians on this record [Michael York, tenor sax, Brad Schrandt, alto sax, soprano sax, Daniel Covrett, alto sax, baritone sax, Kelley Albrecht, bass, Paul Hunter, drums] fit these descriptions perfectly and are amazing when it comes to putting the appropriate feel into the song. All of these guys are superb at integrating technical skill and a soulful feel.

KV: What do you think are the strongest or most innovative songs on the CD, and why?

JN: My favorite songs are *Life on an Oblate Spheroid* and *Groove of Happiness*. I'm most happy with the feel on these two songs.

I'm not sure any of the songs are particularly innovative. I don't want to create a new musical style—that's easy to do. Have you ever heard electronic klezmer trance? Probably not. Does it sound appealing? I'd rather be a good composer. What that means, I'm still trying to figure out, but at this point I think it means being adept at generating and combining unique musical ideas into coherent musical expression capable of affecting people. This is what I strive for, and I don't bother with trying to figure out whether I'm there yet or not. I only think about improving in this regard.

KV: Tell me about some of the songs. What about "Life on an Oblate Spheroid"?

JN: A West Coast Sly Stone-type funk with kickin' tenor and baritone sax. There are two musical allusions to the title, one to Sly and the Family Stone's album "Life" and the other, is a nod to jazz pianist Thelonious Monk whose middle name is Sphere.

KV: How about "Silver Key"?

JN: Syncopated, angular groove with counterpoint melody. The title is an allusion to a famous jazz musician.

KV: "Groove of Happiness"?

MY: "Groove" is innovative in it's 20-bar through-composed construction.

JN: Groove of Happiness was a new song that we had not played live before. Daniel and Michael came in to record that tune having never played it. I went over the song structure with them and they played the melody at the beginning, which I think had to be redone once because of some intonation problems. They then

played the melody at the end. I told Michael to be unrestrained on his tenor, a part that follows the melody at the end and is played over a motif that Daniel repeats on alto. It was at the end of several hours of recording and I was expecting to have to pack it in any minute. But we decided to give it one try. Michael just starts blowing on this part and it just knocked me out. It is one of the best sax solos I've ever heard. When it ended, I said "Michael, that was just beyond my ideal!" It's my favorite part of the CD—I can listen to that solo over and over again.

KV: How would you describe "Eightfold Way"?

MY: A latin-tinged diminished harmony jazz with a strong see-saw-like tension and release element.

JN: "Eightfold Way" is a title inspired by a physics term used by Murray Gell-Mann, the Nobel Prize winner who named a system for organizing subatomic particles after a Buddhist concept. The song is so named, because it is derived from an arranging device called "four-way close" that inserts diminished chords into a progression.

KV: What makes "Convocation" so different?

JN: "Convocation" is based on some minor sixth inversion explorations and was conceptualized as a kind of mambo with a funk bridge. Paul plays a great Afro-Cuban cascara drum pattern and a really tasty solo—a first and only take of that solo by the way.

MY: I really like "Convocation" because of its challenging harmonic ambiguity (even Richard Strauss would be impressed!). It also has a cool beat.

KV: What about "Monkey Puzzle"?

MY: Monkey Puzzle is puzzling because, though it has an implied traditional 12-bar blues form, it doesn't sound like blues. It's just fun to play and listen to (and it reminds me of Rufus' "Tell Me Something Good.").

JN: The title refers to a Chilean tree with a spiky trunk that monkeys have to step around. The melody steps around the beat.

KV: And "A Lick and a Promise"?

JN: Harmonic minor-based blues a la Zeppelin

KV: Describe "Wuca Buca Wuca Buca."

JN: Shufflely funk with a syncopated sax melody. Wuca Buca Wuca Buca is something I used to say to my daughter when she was very tiny.

MY: "Wuca Buca" would normally be an eight-bar tune, but the extended line in the eighth bar makes it an unusual nine-bar tune and therefore more of a challenge improvisationally.

KV: How about "Goodbye Belize"?

JN: Soulful 70's-style ballad with a melody you'll have trouble forgetting.

MY: Redemptive.