

Frank Kimbrough's Album "Air"

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Music Album Review

After listening to album after album of artists' tributes to traditional jazz songs of the past, it was a breath of fresh air to hear the musician Frank Kimbrough playing something new and unique. Released in 2007, the album "Air" is a compilation of fresh and original music that is a joy to listen to. Even though the album features a solo pianist in all its songs, the music still includes several elements of jazz in the textbook sense, including syncopation and call-and-response. Upon reviewing three of the album's songs, including hits "Air," "Wig-Wise," and "Three Chords," Kimbrough shows his ingenuity, creativity and poise on the piano and changes my perspective on solo jazz and how it can be played.

Frank Kimbrough, born in Roxboro, North Carolina, has been playing solo piano since he was four years old (Palmetto). His first great influence was his father, a piano teacher. Frank became the church organist by the age of twelve and organized his own bands before reaching high school. After discovering his love for jazz, he left high school and found work in Chapel Hill, NC just before moving to New York City in 1985. This move signified his transition away from classical piano music into a world of freestyle and jazz. In New York, Kimbrough found his enthusiasm for music by Herbie Nichols, also a solo jazz pianist. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) gave him funding for his performances, which led to the release of the highly acclaimed recordings of "The Herbie Nichols Project" (Palmetto). From that point on, the influence of playing Herbie Nichols' music was the driving force behind Frank Kimbrough's future path as a solo pianist (D'Gamma).

As a pianist, Frank Kimbrough was never in the main spotlight of jazz music, never topped the charts, but his musical brilliance is unquestionable in his album "Air." The entire album takes on a Herbie Nichols style, created almost entirely by improvisation and played by

one instrument, the piano. In addition, Nichols' music did not always maintain a constant tempo, which is very similar to Kimbrough's style.

Nonetheless, the song "Air" offers its listeners a slow, soothing sound set to relax the mind. Unlike the jazz that causes dancing and shouting, Frank Kimbrough demonstrates his control of the senses as he slowly paces through the piece. Though metronome is an important element in jazz, Kimbrough follows his own beat and demonstrates his poise as he calmly progresses through "Air." His notes resound confidently and with intention, holding the pedal down longer to mark the importance of some notes over others. The song's title causes speculation that it may have been Kimbrough's intention to play the keys lightly and softly to surround the listener gently with music. The song, like the air around us, is easy to take for granted until it is gone. Fortunately for the song, you can press the "repeat" button.

Common jazz elements like metronomic sense, syncopation and call-and-response are all noticeable in the following track "Wig-Wise" of Kimbrough's CD. You can hear a distinct sense of constant tempo that changes very little as he moves his hands across the keyboard. In the song's beginning, his hands compliment each other as the left plays the base line and the right follows with the melody. But near the end, his left and right hands play against each other. As such, the left hand calls a solo melody with lower notes, and the right hand responds with a variation on the left hand's tune (and adds in more notes to it). This is a common "call-and-response" pattern in solo piano jazz that resonates well in "Wig-Wise."

Lastly, the song "Three Chords" reveals Frank Kimbrough's creativity as a composer and artist. As the title suggests, Kimbrough uses only three chords in this piece. The beginning starts out simple and slow like most of his songs. He builds the chords, note by note, using a variety of different sequences, and then plays them all together in harmony. Kimbrough's

ingenuity is evident through the different ways he builds the three chords, improvising a short solo each time as he builds. The sound he creates in this piece with the piano, the timbre, is like that of three saxophones, sweeping together and wailing on a chord at the peak of his musical statements.

The lack of other independent instruments on the album posed a challenge to me initially because I was unaccustomed to hearing jazz being played in this way. To the untrained ear, this album may sound monotonous, hearing track after track of slow piano music. But after closer observation, Kimbrough's music is actually quite colorful. He was able to make the piano sound like different instruments, especially in "Three Chords," where I heard the creation of saxophone sounds without the horn. This is something that truly talented piano musicians can do with their music, and almost all of his songs were first takes, according to one source (D'Gamma).

Kimbrough's style and ability to create multiple sounds are both impactful and natural.

A jazz reviewer from the "All About Jazz" website named Raol d'Gama Rose says "musical artistry is often a solitary pursuit." After leaving high school and church piano music behind to discover piano jazz in a new light, Frank Kimbrough plays alone in his album "Air." He shows his artistic brilliance, taking the solo piano to a higher level. There is no need for other percussion and horn instruments to make great jazz music. Frank creates these sounds when he needs them. The songs "Air," "Wig-Wise," and "Three Chords" are just three of thirteen tracks on his CD "Air" that Frank Kimbrough plays which include basic characteristics of jazz like syncopation and call-and-response. At the same time, these songs expose chord-building creativity using one man, two hands, and a seamless flow of soothing jazz.

Works Cited

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