

Most art-school group projects involve awful modern-dance movements or round-robin haiku sessions. This is why so many people wind up in business school. For University of the Arts students Matthew Engle (bass), Bryan Rogers (tenor saxophone), Dan Scofield (alto saxophone) and Dan Capecchi (drums), getting together meant forming spacious, improvisational jazz group Shot X Shot (pronounced "Shot By Shot"), whose eponymous debut was released by the High Two label.

The Philadelphia group formed as a full-time unit rather than a loose collective of jazz players who come together whenever it's convenient. This sort of stringency—strict rehearsals three times a week—is probably necessary for the breathy, avant jazz Shot X Shot writes. Its music is akin to the heaving cool of Lee

Konitz, the spiritualized hum of John Coltrane and the sinister squeal of Ornette Coleman.

"We used to cover Ornette's 'Blues Connotation' and 'I Heard It Over The Radio,'" says the 26-year-old Capecchi. "But our own stuff has grown further out."

This growth has also meant sticking to the sense of expression and looseness that defines the band members' heroes (such as fellow Philadelphian Sun Ra) while forging their own musical magnetism. Whether improvisational or planned, the integral components are the twin tones of saxophonists Scofield and Rogers leaping from brash to softly sensual, Engle's steady, studious bass lines and Capecchi's rainbow-toned rush of malleted drum and cymbal.

"Chains Of Agree" is as formal as Shot X Shot gets.

It starts with a clear melody and counter-point bass line that crashes into a totally free section that gets denser as time continues. On "Bee Assassins," Scofield and Rogers embrace simultaneous drones of matching melody over a clipped rhythm.

"Various tunes have various levels of freeness," says Capecchi. "We always allow each other the right to do whatever one feels. But we believe that each piece should have an identity that is greater than us."

The members of Shot X Shot—all of whom are music teachers—aren't out to convert rock fans. (When pressed, Capecchi admits to listening to the Replacements and Flaming Lips on occasion.) They do, however, want to break down some barriers.

"I guess if I had one rule for listening, it is to not be scared or intimidated in any way," says Capecchi. "That's my main frustration with our music: that many people view it as above their level, that they don't know enough about music. But once you realize that it holds no secrets in order to 'get it,' everything opens up and either you like it or you don't."

—A.D. Amorosi



SHOT X SHOT || Free Radicals

(l-r): Matthew Engle, Dan Scofield, Dan Capecchi, Bryan Rogers



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Dusted Reviews

Artist: Shot x Shot

Album: Shot x Shot

Label: High Two

Review date: Jun. 3, 2006



The sound of a cymbal being bowed opens up "Bee Assassins," the first track on the debut full-length by Philadelphia jazz quartet Shot x Shot, but it wasn't instantly recognizable. Sounds more like a train slowing to a halt than anything turning up on most studio jazz recordings in the past decade or so. When it hits again, and realization of what it is takes hold, the very space that this recording occupies – created in the cavernous St. Mary's Church, home to the city's only sanctuary for free jazz and improv in the '70s, the Empty Foxhole – in itself becomes a fifth member of the group, its natural reverb making everything bigger than it might normally sound, leaving tones that last just a bit longer than they might otherwise. Drums thud with a room-shaking authority; alto and tenor saxes trade off in filling the space, bass hides in the background, suggesting tones rather than enunciating them; and yet all of these sounds come from players who have the very organic, very intelligent ability to scale back when needed. It's this breathy, spacious technique, a "human mix" of sorts, which imbues these five lengthy pieces with a life that many of their contemporaries seem to have forgotten, in place of chasing down ghosts and stuffing them into their instruments.

Not the work of mannered conservatory students, nor that of undisciplined skronksters, it's important to note that the members of Shot x Shot are (at press time) ages 26 and under. It is remarkable to hear musicians so young playing with such expression, and above all, discipline; their music and its shifting balance draws the listener in and slowly circles around, a veritable shark tank of unfolding improvisational jazz. Each piece unfurls like tendrils of smoke, dissipating into the air, then pouring out from under a door with a hot handle. And they accomplish this dynamic – one that is at once constantly shifting, equal-handed, and filmic – to ends that few musicians their age, or even twice that, can hope to match. Check the seasick swing toward the end of "One Point Three Full Breaths," with Matt Engle's lopsided bass pattern eventually pulling Bryan Rogers's tenor and Dan Scofield's alto into its orbit, before releasing them into the stew of gentle chaos powered by Dan Capecechi's deft, adventurous, yet mannered drumming. Observe the theme, then eventual descent into chaos of "Two Improvisations," making superb use of the counterpoint between the tones and manners of playing of the reeds, from *mise-en-scene* to the ensuing strangulatory mood when the system is thrown off balance. Or the persistent, steady-handed stroll of "Chains of Agree," ending the album on its most straightforward path, albeit one littered with percussive explosions and commendable push-pull when the carpet is frequently pulled out from under its steadiness.

Too much exposure to the same styles of improvisation led me away from a healthier appreciation of improvisational musics. That a group like Shot x Shot could bring me back into the fold speaks volumes on their songcraft, musical acumen, and innate sense of purpose and creation. This is a thunderous, thoughtful debut from a group well on its way to turning every last head that will listen.

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SHOT X SHOT

SHOT X SHOT

HIGH TWO CD

BY PHIL FREEMAN

Shot X Shot's two saxophonists, Dan Scofield (alto) and Bryan Rogers (tenor), interact with grace and consideration, never grappling at centre stage like John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders (to whom they're inaccurately compared in the booklet) or Borbetomagus's Jim Sauter and Don Dietrich (to whom they're somewhat more accurately not compared). If anything, Shot X Shot recall the New York group Test, whose music, gentle and introspective, belies the amount of time its creators spend playing in crowded subway stations. The group's debut, recorded in a Philadelphia church, documents a battle between the participants and their environment. Natural reverberation is the fifth instrument — delicate horn duets shimmer away into Ambient haze, as Dan Capecchi's drums thump and rattle and bassist Matt Engle struggles manfully to make an impact.

Things begin slowly, with Capecchi eliciting sounds very much like feedback from his cymbals, before the horns come in — Rogers droning, Scofield playing slow, beautiful sequences of notes that seem only tenuously connected. But each sound chosen is indisputably right. From that moment on, the five tracks are more similar than different. All stride purposefully beyond the ten minute mark, but stop shy of becoming the 15 or 30 minute blowouts credulous audiences continue to endure from older free jazz groups, like parents sitting indulgently through school talent shows.

And all leave an impression, upon completion, of being neither solipsistic nor beholden to cliché — a small miracle, these days. This calmly assured debut bodes well for the future of all involved.

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DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

Shot x Shot

Shot x Shot

HIGH TWO 007

★★★★½

Shot x Shot takes deceptively simple, bare-bones structures and turns them into spacey, infinitely layered improvisations. This is a sober, serious debut. Saxophonists Dan Scofield (alto) and Bryan Rogers (tenor), bassist Matt Engle and drummer Dan Capecchi put the collective at the core of their art. While this live set is mostly based on predetermined structures, instant composition seems the key to their experience. “One Point Three Full Breaths” may have its conceit—a set rhythmic platform—and “Chains Of Agree” its mazy, pointillist line, but in every case the tunes turn into provocative, 10-minute-plus landscapes.

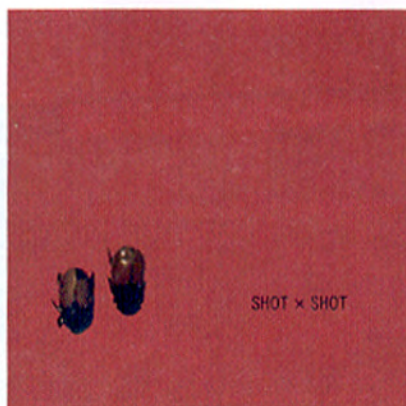
Without a chordal instrument, the saxophones unfold their own melodic and harmonic fabric. They never run each other down, and they share a similar esthetic—cool, fractured melancholy, elaborate and linear line-making. On “Bee Assassins,” Scofield and Rogers swoop up and over each other, spinning circles around and around in tempestuous gusts.

Not everything is seamless. The recording’s boomy echo—live at Philadelphia’s St. Mary’s Church—ruins the visceral impact of Capecchi’s punches and Engle’s drones. But that should be a mere quibble. I wonder what’s next for this excellent young quartet. —Greg Buium

Shot x Shot: Bee Assassins; One Point Three Full Breaths; Two Improvisations; Volzalishe; Chains Of Agree. (56:56)

Personnel: Dan Capecchi, drums; Matt Engle, bass; Bryan Rogers; tenor saxophone; Dan Scofield, alto saxophone.

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SIGNAL to NOISE

the journal of improvised & experimental music

Shot X Shot

Shot X Shot

High Two CD

St. Mary's Church in West Philadelphia is legendary for its basement, which once housed the Empty Foxhole, a venue jerry-rigged to host the likes of Anthony Braxton, Sun Ra, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago back in the 1970's. None of the members of Philly quartet Shot X Shot are old enough to remember those days, but the musical history nonetheless echoes in this May '05 concert, recorded upstairs in the church proper. And I do mean echoes – the cavernous acoustics threaten to drown every sound made in its confines in their own reflections. But the band – drummer Dan Capecchi, bassist Matt Engle,

tenorist Bryan Rogers and altoist Dan Scofield – turn the bottomless sound to their advantage. Opener "Bee Assassins" begins with a tenor drone and percussive effects that reverberate into a murky swamp; when Scofield's keening alto enters and Capecchi eases into a slo-mo shuffle accompanied by Engle's loping bass, the result could be the soundtrack to a David Lynch noir set in purgatory. The sustained sonic hangtime serves the slow-build approach to composition, wherein all four pass the spotlight, spiraling inwards towards the melody by an accumulation of elements. **Shaun Brady**

DOWNTOWN *Music* GALLERY

"From the same diverse label that issued Dave Burrell's Full-Blown Trio disc and Sonic Liberation Front's "Ashe A Go-Go" disc comes another serious avant-jazz gem scooped from the cream of the Philly jazz scene. Shot x Shot is a precocious quartet of young guys finding their place in the tradition of jazz as creative improvised music and not beating a dead bop horse. These are the kind of musicians whose formative influences are 90s jazz peaks like Tim Berne's Bloodcount, Human Feel, New and Used, Tony Malaby's Open Loose, John Zorn's Masada, Thomas Chapin, etc as much as the Ornette Coleman's classic quartet. The game is to write clever charts but let them destabilize in the face of collective improvisation that deals with group dynamics more than individual solo narratives. Saxophonists Dan Scofield and Bryan Rogers will often nurse slow harmonies while drumkitters Dan Capecchi and contrabassist Matt Engle independently move around at contrasting tempos. Parallel lines drop and in out of alignment. Like so much great avant-jazz, they're always in search of a pulse, but like a cat who's not hungry chasing a mouse, letting it go as easily as they grab it. Capecchi is a restless groove tinkerer in the tradition of Jim Black and Lou Grassi, keeping the rhythms ambiguous while the others work through the logic of long, slow semi-dirges. When the ensemble erupts it feels organic and purposeful; their languidity is restraint for the sake of nuance, not a rut for the sake of a concept. It's the kind of jazz where structural experimentalism is matched by an unflinching devotion to melody of the achingly tender, wandering Berne variety even when it works its way into bark and bluster. In his enthusiastic liner notes Francis Davis goes as far as comparing the horn frontline to Konitz/Marsh. The spacious, open feeling is magnified by the recording conditions, a large church with cavernous reverb. I went to see this group play a record release gig last night and they had my rapt attention from start to finish. This record also casts a spell with its bristling tapestry of introspection. These guys have the elusive group chemistry and personal depth that deserves the attention of serious jazz fans." -Michael Anton Parker

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PICK OF THE WEEK:

Shot x Shot

“Shot x Shot” (High Two, 2006)

Dan Capecchi (dr), Matt Engle (b), Bryan Rogers (ts), Dan Scofield (as)

This is a remarkable album and a rare event in that we hardly ever see a debut recording from a group of musicians whose eldest member is 26 as conceptually solid and well executed as Shot x Shot's. The interplay between musicians can be so beautifully layered one doesn't know what to listen to first. The playing itself is truly experimental as Shot x Shot doesn't fall into any of the neatly organized categories for modern jazz. Part of the reason is that it doesn't follow closely to a particular aesthetic. Shot x Shot's emphasis on ambiance and texture draws it closer to post-rock while its instrumentation and emphasis on improvisation puts it squarely in the jazz/free improv camp. The sound quality of the saxophones is certainly on the softer side and the liner notes are right to invoke the duo of Lee Konitz and Wayne Marsh as a comparison, but their improvisations stray closer to free jazz sound manipulations than Konitz and Marsh ever do. All of this is not to say this record doesn't have its flaws (it would have been nice if it didn't sound as if it had been recorded at the bottom of a well), but Shot x Shot's debut represents a meaningful step forward in jazz's evolution.

Shot X Shot

Shot X Shot

(High Two)

US release date: 11 April 2006

UK release date: Available as import

by Robert R. Calder

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At the start, Dan Capecchi achieves some amazing atmospheric effects in the echoey acoustics of the church where this set was recorded. Dan Scofield's alto sounds not quite eerie, and anything but passionless, from its clean and clear entry, with Bryan Rogers on tenor developing an accompaniment before coming to the front, and Matt Engle maintaining a steady pace on bass. The bass sounds rather doomy at times, as the saxophones proceed into a more involved interplay. The notes refer to these performances as

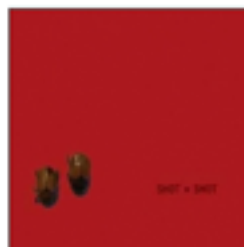
"compositions", and over the

eleven-and-three-quarter minutes of "Bee Assassins" the bassist and drummer contribute to a maintenance of continuity. Nobody wants to lose the listener, although with a lack of concentration quite a lot of listeners could feel lost. A third of the way into this opener there is a pause, Engle takes things up, solo, and when the horns resume it's clear enough how much they've worked together, harmonising as well as playing counter-lines, each knowing when to lay out—here mostly the tenorist—to let the other develop a solo line. The pioneers of this sort of playing, and too many exponents of more orthodoxly structured post-bop jazz, have not always had such a concern with the sonority of their saxophones as these men. They think, and they are patient. They phrase, which is one thing that differentiates them from Pierre Boulez. The repeated phrase between eight and nine minutes in does seem to be a shade overdone, however.

The notes' reference to Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh isn't bullshit. "One Point Three Full Breaths" is a few seconds longer than the opener, and also composer-credited to Capecchi. The two maestri of the "cool" do come to mind from the start here, and again at the opening of "Two Improvisations", no composer credited. There is a certain elevation to the music, which is not cold or eerie, but a work of intense concentration. Konitz and Marsh don't seem that far away, although the textural blending is different from anything I ever heard from them. The drummer and bassist open the second improvisation and Scofield sounds a shade like the young Charlie Mariano. The drums dance, the bass plays pedal notes, and then there's more textural interplay between masters of their horns.

At the beginning of "Volzalisle", Scofield's handsome sound rings out over Rogers's tenor, initially unaccompanied, then with triangle-cymbal highlightings. The theme resembles "Fanfare for the Common Man". The tenor goes down, and the alto, as occasionally before, performs a lyrical falsetto. The textural effects are impressive—the tenorist digging in, the alto flying, and the drummer clicking and crashing as the music builds to a dramatic volume—and it's hard to imagine there are only two horns; amazing to observe that each saxophonist is still committed to phrase and line.

Engle's "Chains of Agree" opens very lyrically, with even more Konitz and Marsh, with the bassist making a sizeable contribution and the altoist making it even more clear how accomplished a player he is. There are thirteen minutes to that performance, and the preceding pair last just above ten minutes each—the music is not short on inspiration, or indeed structure, but it's definitely for the committed listener, and short of a very intense study, hard to discuss in terms other than the above.



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