



Recording Sessions

Concert series focusing on recording projects of free improvisation, free jazz, electro-acoustic improvisation and contemporary compositions.

John Butcher – saxophones

Pat Thomas – theremin & electronics

Ståle Liavik Solberg – percussion

IKLECTIK Art Lab, Old Paradise, 20 Carlisle Lane, London, SE1 7LG

Wednesday 19th July 2017, doors open 7:30pm - starts 8:00pm.

Entry: £8 adv / £10 doors.

Website: <http://www.gioannilarovere.co.uk/recording-sessions/>

This concert series is made possible through the goodwill of the musicians involved and the support of IKLECTIK Art Lab.

Curated by Giovanni La Rovere

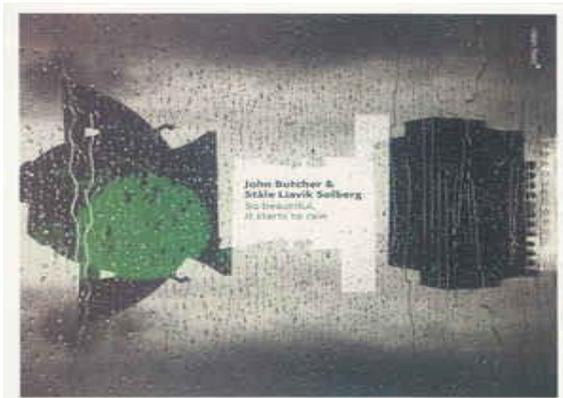
Recording Sessions

Recording Sessions is a concert series focusing on live recordings of free improvisation, free jazz, electro-acoustic improvisation and experimental composition projects. This series of events works with musicians and artists to develop an idea (or project), undertake research, capture a specific meeting of particular musicians and ultimately to explore the creative resource that is listening and the differences between the two predominant modes of making music: composition & improvisation.

Experimental music and recording technology has undeniably influenced 20th and 21st century music making and developing a culture of listening to experimental music. *Recording sessions* intends to explore the interconnections among the aesthetics of Experimental Music and the aesthetics of sound recording with a focus on the act of Listening to research & explore our responses to music as it is experienced at live events (or when listening to recordings).

Some reviews about musicians and their recordings

Ståle Liavik Solberg



**(So Beautiful, It Starts to Rain –
released September 2016 by
Clean Feed)**

The much longer (16:32) “It Starts” is more experimental, an economic discourse beginning with Butcher’s feathery electronic sonorities. He soon becomes throatier, but, besides the occasional flare-up – Solberg moving up through the gears, then easing back – there’s remarkably little tension with Solberg, who plays around his kit with a gestural busyness punctuated by silences and isolated hits. That is until, just over halfway through, Butcher starts circulating breath,

I know Solberg primarily for his association with guitarist John Russell, and as the rhythm partner of cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm in Party Knüllers. He seems a pretty obvious match for Butcher, as he’s close if not as playful in spirit as one of the very few drummers with whom Butcher displays a close affinity, his percussion foil in The Apophonics, Gino Robair (cf. my review of their 2012 duo set at the London Review Bookshop).

“So Beautiful” exemplifies the Butcher/Solberg duo’s even-handedness, and it’s striking in its relaxedness. The saxophonist is fully in command here, moving from easy full-tone discourse to rasping reed kissing and popping to Solberg’s taut, dry attack.

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producing flocking multiphonics, and the atmosphere is highly charged until normal relations are restored by a brittle but assured percussion solo.

On third and last cut “To Rain” the duo lean that bit harder into each other, so the atmosphere seems that bit more abrasive, but they actually give each other plenty of room for an economy of discourse to develop. At 6:00 there’s a watershed. Butcher plays a few terse solo phrases, and eventually Solberg counters with loose-limbed full kit percussion. But again they draw back, until all that remains for a while is the rasp of Butcher’s flecked spittle fizzing against metal.

Tim Owen¹

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In this meeting with Oslo-based percussionist Ståle Liavik Solberg, saxophonist John Butcher shows his dedication to openness, space and texture, forsaking the more demonstrative approaches that often prevail when it comes to sax/drum duos. Fortunately, he has a highly sympathetic counterpart, as Solberg is just as willing to renounce any over-the-top theatrics in favor of close listening and patient collaboration. The resulting recording, while rather brief at a mere 35 minutes, does offer a number of intriguing exchanges between the two improvisers.

As one would expect, Butcher shows little desire to develop an overtly lyrical or melodic conception in his playing here, instead being largely content to explore the sonority of his instruments (both soprano and tenor), which gives Solberg ample opportunity to comment on the multi-tones, extended techniques, and percussive flourishes that Butcher offers in abundance. At times on the opening track, “So Beautiful,” Butcher becomes in effect a second percussionist, countering Solberg with assorted atonal pops and flutters in rhythmic interplay. As for Solberg, don’t expect a lot of fireworks here: while he is quite capable of matching Butcher’s occasional powerful bursts (see the duo’s kinetic, spirited exchange on “In Starts,” when Butcher goes into extended breathing), he’s more content to provide precise, careful small-scale percussion on his kit, with subtle work on the toms or snare rather than a lot of splashy bombast or cymbal crashes. Both musicians are in fine form, with Butcher being (as always) a marvel: his technical palette remains astonishing in its range and variety. This record certainly offers proof that it’s not only in explosive intensity, but sometimes the calmer, more patient explorations, where free improvisation truly casts its spell.

Troy Dostert<sup>2</sup>

### *Biography:*

Ståle Liavik Solberg (1979 ) is a Norwegian jazz and improvisational musician ( percussion , drums ) and musicians.

Solberg has earned a master's degree in improvisation at the Norwegian Academy of Music and since then he has worked with Øystein Eldøy , Frode Gjerstad , Fred Lonberg-Holm , Eivind Lønning , Stine

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<sup>1</sup> Owen, T. (2016) *John Butcher & Stale Liavik Solberg – So Beautiful, It Starts to Rain*, [Online], Available: <https://dalstonsound.wordpress.com/2016/11/03/john-butcher-stale-liavik-solberg-%E2%80%8E-so-beautiful-it-starts-to-rain-john-butcher-paal-nilssen-love-%E2%80%8E-concentric/> [Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017].

<sup>2</sup> Dostet T. (2016) *John Butcher & Stale Liavik Solberg – So Beautiful, It Starts to Rain (Clean Feed, 2016)*, [Online], Available at: <http://www.freejazzblog.org/2016/12/john-butcher-and-stale-liavik-solberg.html> [Accessed 5th June 2017].

Janvin Motland, David Stackenäs, Joe Williamson and Per, in the Norwegian and European improvisation scene Zanussi in the formations Hot Four, Motsol, S / S Mtsol and VDCD. He also played in duo with John Russell and the trio with Steve Beresford and Martin Küchen, 2014 in trio with Alan Silva and Mette Rasmussen. With Paal Nilssen-Love he organizes the Blow Out! Festival in Oslo. Solberg lives in Oslo.

# Pat Thomas



**(Al-Khwarizmi Variations - released  
January 2, 2013 by FATAKA)**

mathematician credited with inventing algebra. (Continuing the Islamic theme, the cover features artwork from a fifteenth century Mamluk tile.) However, the music within displays no particular connections to Al-Khwarizmi, his writings or to Islam.

Studio-recorded in June 2011, *Al-Khwarizmi Variations* features Thomas alone at the piano, playing ten "variations" ranging in length from under ninety seconds to just over eight minutes. Despite their titles, the pieces are not variations in the accepted sense—there is no obvious "theme" to vary—but a series of explorations which are independent and very different to each other. Some are clearly improvisations while others seem to include sections of pre-composed material.

Their durations mean that in any single piece there is time to explore one particular idea or technique but little or no variation. Instead, there are considerable differences between them. So, "Variation 2" opens with some quasi-classical flourishes leading into an impressively dramatic accumulation of rumbling chords. In total contrast, "Variation 3" is an extended improvisation inside the piano, including sounds from percussive scrapings and rattlings right through to prolonged passages of delicate melodic plucking and tapping. Simply exquisite.

*Al-Khwarizmi Variations* is the most recent addition to a select group of albums—the solo recordings of pianist Pat Thomas. It is Thomas's fourth solo outing in twenty years, and follows *Nur* (Emanem, 2001) and *Plays the Music of Derek Bailey & Thelonious Monk* (FMR, 2008). Both of those are hard to follow, but *Al-Khwarizmi Variations* is a worthy successor to them.

Thomas is known to be an adherent of Islam, which may be why the album title name-checks Al-Khwarizmi, the Baghdad-born eighth-century Islamic

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In the hands of some pianists, such a collection of relatively short, contrasting pieces could be too diverse to hang together well and end up being unsatisfying. With Thomas, nothing could be further from the truth; taken together, the tracks present different facets of him, giving a clear picture of the breadth and depth of his piano playing. *Al-Khwarizmi Variations* is a major achievement. –

By John Eyeles<sup>3</sup>

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"Thomas runs the gamut of techniques, splashing clusters, weaving contrapuntal lines and building elaborate structures from the inside out. Despite their variety, they share a fundamental quality – they truly sound like spur of the moment creations, not the final draft of ideas mulled over for weeks, if not months on end. Their impact is enhanced by one of the more effectively engineered piano sounds in recent memory, one that puts the piano right in your lap. The value of this is felt immediately, as the first variation is brimming with above-the-staves clusters that are wincingly bright. Conversely, Thomas creates china-rattling thunder when he plunges into the bass register." –
By Bill Shoemaker⁴, Point of Departure

Biography:

Born 27 July 1960; Piano, electronics.

Pat Thomas started playing at the age of 8 and studied classical music and played reggae. He began playing jazz at sixteen after seeing Oscar Peterson on television then listened to snatches of jazz on the radio before, in 1979, playing his first serious improvised gigs. From 1986 he played with Ghosts which was Pete McPhail and Matt Lewis.

In addition to programming his keyboards, Pat Thomas also utilises prerecorded tapes. He told Chris Blackford (1991), 'As far as the tapes are concerned I'll probably just sit in front of the TV and tape whatever's going on and so some editing afterward to decide what might be useful. ...But I don't actually put a label on each tape saying what's on there, so when I come to use them I don't know what I'm going to be playing. That obviously prevents me from setting things up. I pick them at random and see what happens. So I'm just as surprised as anybody else at what comes out'.

In 1988 he was awarded an Arts Council Jazz Bursary to write three new electroacoustic compositions for his ten-piece ensemble, Monads: Roger Turner and Matt Lewis, percussion; Pete McPhail, WX7 wind synthesizer; Neil Palmer, turntables; Phil Minton, voice; Phil Durrant, violin; Marcio Mattos, bass; Jon Corbett, trumpet; Geoff Searle, drum machines. The intention was to feature different aspects of electronics using improvisation so, for example, one piece - *Dialogue* - featured Pete McPhail and Neil Palmer, another concentrated on the interaction of percussionists and drum machines, and a third piece had Phil Minton and Jon Corbett improvising with a computer. The pieces were performed at the Crawley Outside-In Festival of new music in 1989.

Pat Thomas was invited by Derek Bailey to play in Company Week in 1990 and 1991 and he also took part in the 1st International Symposium for Free Improvisation in Bremen with the guitarist. He has been a member of the Tony Oxley Quartet (documented on Incus CD 15) and played in Oxley's Angular Apron along with Larry Stabbins, Manfred Schoof and Sirone at the 8th Ruhr Jazz Meeting and in the percussionist's Celebration Orchestra. He plays with Lol Coxhill in a range of combinations from duo to being a member of 'Before my time', is a member of Mike Cooper's Continental Drift,

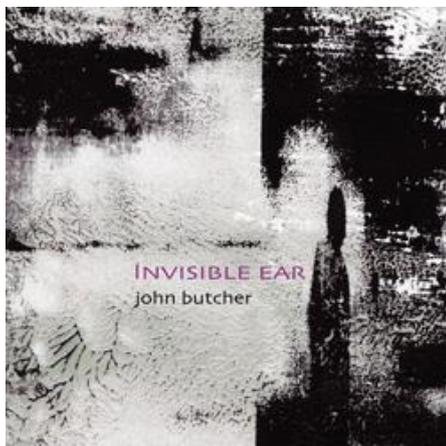
³ Eyeles, J. (2013) *Pat Thomas: Al-Khwarizmi Variations*, [online], Available: <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/al-khwarizmi-variations-pat-thomas-fataka-review-by-john-eyles.php> [Accessed 5th June 2017].

⁴ Shoemaker, B. *Pat Thomas Al- Khwarizmi Variations Fataka 4*, Available: <http://www.pointofdeparture.org/PoD42/PoD42MoreMoments5.html> [Accessed 5th July 2017].

and he has a well established duo with percussionist Mark Sanders and a trio with Steve Beresford and Francine Luce. In 1992 Pat Thomas formed the quartet Scatter with Phil Minton, Roger Turner and Dave Tucker; funded by the Arts Council they toured the UK in 1993 and again at the beginning of 1997.

On the 'Festival circuit', Pat Thomas has appeared at: the Young Improvisors Festival at the Korzo Theatre, Den Haag (with Jim O'Rourke, Mats Gustafsson and Alexander Frangenheim); Angelica 95 in Bologna, Italy; the Stuttgart 5th Festival of Improvised Music 96 (with Fred Frith, Shelly Hirsch, Carlos Zingaro and others); and the 3rd International Festival 96 in Budapest (with Evan Parker, Phil Minton, John Russell and Roger Turner).

John Butcher



(Invisible Ear – released on 2010 by Weight of Wax)

breathing for continuous sound production and multiphonics, multiple tones and lines created by false fingerings, over-blowing, etc. Butcher assembles layers, complex and subtly evolving sounds with granular textures that resemble nothing so much as a bank of oscillators.

John Butcher is the saxophone's most intrepid current explorer, building on explorations in multiphonics that began in the 1960s with free jazz players, most specifically Pharoah Sanders though touched on by John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy and Albert Ayler.

The clear antecedent for Butcher's activity is fellow Englishman Evan Parker who for three decades now has performed solo soprano saxophone concerts in which multiphonics and circular breathing combine to suggest virtuoso keyboard music or a flock of songbirds. It's John Butcher's particular genius to have taken Parker's techniques in an utterly different direction, using similar methods of circular

He has explored it both in various improvising ensembles (among them the *Spontaneous Music*

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Ensemble, Chris Burn Ensemble, Phil Minton Quartet) as well as in duo and solo settings, working in both electronic and acoustic contexts. At the centre of a school of British improvisation that includes pianist Burn, violinist Phil Durrant, and harpist Rhodri Davies, Butcher has advanced the logic and practice of spontaneous music in a direction that often sounds like electro-acoustic composition.

Invisible Ear - issued in an edition of 600 copies - marks a fairly dramatic turn for Butcher's work, representing a fresh emphasis on electronic processes: close-miking; multi-tracking; and amplified feedback. The results are continuously arresting, and I don't think listeners would rapidly guess that a tenor and soprano saxophone are the sources of Butcher's palette. Just as striking as one sound might be, it's amazing that Butcher finds so many different kinds of wind, string and drum timbres within his horns. It's a major way-station in the process that began in 1993 with the first Butcher solo CD, the recently reissued *13 Friendly Numbers* (originally on Acta, now on Unsounds) which simultaneously launched Butcher's overdub work.

There is a kind of evolution here, from the exotic to the seemingly conventional, though there are pieces that will undercut that, suggesting the movement is otherwise. The CD begins at its most minimal and demanding. "*swan style*" sounds like a whistle of air escaping from a (digital) balloon, while "*cup anatomical*", introduces a repeating texture, a grained, flute-like sound of air in a column. The extremely close miking magnifies the saxophone's microscopic events within the continuum of Butcher's circular breathing, creating a journey into the minutiae of the horn that suggests a science fiction element - an Incredible Shrinking Man or Fantastic Voyage - as Butcher (his doctorate in physics) points out the lacunae of his horns' acoustics.

The exercises in amplified feedback pick up on the instruments' key-pads, distorting them until they become underwater gongs and gamelans - lambent, bending pitches. The quality of Butcher's spontaneous manipulations is really at a very high level. The combined bending and cut-offs of sound in "*streamers*" suggest water bowls and strings or elastics, while "*a controversial fix for...*" mimics blues harmonica, fuzz-box electric guitar and even bass clarinet. "*magnetic bottle*" sounds almost like a Farfisa organ.

The overdubbed pieces have a tremendous cumulative power. "*what remains*", with five tenors and three soprano saxes, is an intense wall of sustained sound, bagpipe banshees or a dark glade in which insect voices magnify to monstrous machines. The concluding "*atelier*", for three soprano saxes and resonant room, is singularly beautiful, a high clarion brassiness that ties the horns together with a consonant orchestral richness.

This is work of high accomplishment. However unlikely Butcher's means might at first seem, the music here testifies consistently to a spontaneous composer making whole music - structured, meditative, deeply involving.

Stuart Broomer⁵

Biography:

John Butcher's work ranges through improvisation, his own compositions, multitracked pieces and explorations with feedback and extreme acoustics.

Originally a physicist, he left academia in '82, and has since collaborated with hundreds of musicians - Derek Bailey, John Tilbury, John Stevens, The EX, Akio Suzuki, Gerry Hemingway, Polwechsel, Gino Robair, Rhodri Davies, Okkyung Lee, John Edwards, Toshi Nakamura, Paul Lovens, Eddie Prevost,

⁵ Boomer, S. *Stuart Broomer's Musicworks review of Invisible Ear*, [online], Available: http://www.johnbutcher.org.uk/solo_invisible_broomer.html, [Accessed 5th July 2017].

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Mark Sanders, Christian Marclay, Otomo Yoshihide, Phil Minton, and Andy Moor - to name a few.

He is well known as a solo performer who attempts to engage with the uniqueness of place. *Resonant Spaces* is a collection of site-specific performances collected during a tour of unusual locations in Scotland and the Orkney Islands.

His first solo album, *Thirteen Friendly Numbers*, includes compositions for multitracked saxophones, whilst later solo CDs focus on live performance, composition, amplification and saxophone-controlled feedback.

HCMF has twice commissioned him to compose for his own large ensembles. Other commissions include for *Elision* (Australia), the *Rova* (USA) & *Quasar* (Canada) Saxophone Quartets, reconstructed Futurist Intonarumori (USA), "Tarab Cuts" (based on pre-WWII Arabic recordings, and shortlisted for the 2014 British Composer's Award) and "Good Liquor .." for the London Sinfonietta. In 2011 he received a Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Award for Artists*.

Recent groupings include *The Apophonics* with Robair and Edwards, *Anemone* with Peter Evans, *Plume* with Tony Buck & Magda Mayas and a trio with Okkyung Lee & Mark Sanders.

Butcher values playing in occasional encounters - ranging from large groups such as Butch Morris' *London Skyscraper* and the *EX Orchestra*, to duo concerts with David Toop, Kevin Drumm, Claudia Binder, Paal Nilssen-Love, Thomas Lehn, Fred Frith, Keiji Haino, Ute Kangeisser, Matthew Shipp and Yuji Takahashi.

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To join the Recording Sessions mailing list, please email: recording.sessions.concerts@gmail.com

For more information about this series visit: <http://www.gioannilarovere.co.uk/recording-sessions/>

This series is curated by Giovanni La Rovere - <http://www.gioannilarovere.co.uk/>