

A man in traditional Polynesian attire, including a floral headband and a fringed grass skirt, is captured in a dynamic pose. He holds a large, flaming torch aloft in his right hand, while his left hand is raised near his face. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

PERCUSSIVE NOTES

Three Story Sandbox

Jack Mouse and Scott Robinson
with Janice Borla

Tall Grass Records

If I were to sum up this album in a short phrase it would say “daring, expressive, and full of unbridled creativity.”

Three Story Sandbox is actually quite a logical, yet more spiritual, sequel to Jack Mouse and Scott Robinson’s previous free jazz collaboration, *Snakeheads and Ladybugs* (reviewed in the May 2015 issue of *Percussive Notes*). This album also features vocalist Janice Borla, Mouse’s spouse and musical collaborator.

The title refers to Mouse and Borla’s home studio, here quite literally a sandbox for the play of super trippy avant-garde free jazz on some 21 different instruments (toys). I love it, though it will likely stretch the definition of “jazz” for many purists. Mouse, for instance, rarely plays the drums, but mostly plays a variety of world instruments including gongs, thundersheets, and bells. Robinson also plays a variety of world flutes and assorted wind instruments. The real soul of the project is Borla’s vocals, which are at times haunting, soaring, whimsical, and everything in between. I’ve struggled with how to describe the music, but suffice it to say that it sounds like a combination of the most sophisticated and challenging western art music (e.g., John Cage), combined with an exotic world music ambience, tied all together with the sensibilities of free jazz. How’s that for a description?

Completely improvised throughout, the playing by Mouse, Robinson, and Borla is brilliant all the way around and totally uninhibited. It is very inspiring to see this kind of daring dedication in the pursuit of sophisticated improvised music.

—John Lane