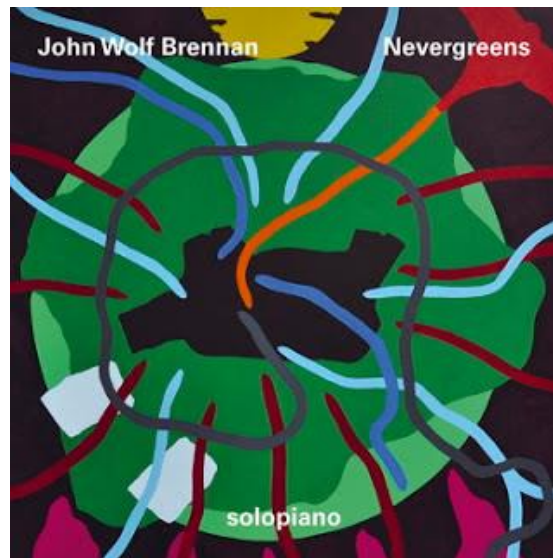


Mr. Stu's Record Room (San Francisco, USA), July 24, 2020

John Wolf Brennan: *Nevergreens*



In addition to his endeavors with Pago Libre, pianist **John Wolf Brennan** has recorded many sessions of his own in an array of contexts. He likes to think big, and the notes for *Nevergreens*, his anthology of solo performances, reveal that the tracks first appeared on six different albums, released between 1989 and 2009. They're conceived as the "blue trilogy," on the Creative Works label, followed by the "yellow trilogy," with two titles on Creative Works and *The Speed Of Dark* (Leo). A third trilogy is promised, but in the meantime, we have this mash-up of tracks from half-a-dozen projects, plus *The Homing*, a short work composed for a "radiophonic play" in 2009.

Faithful chronicler Peter Monaghan contributes a thoughtful essay that touches on Brennan's career and the life experiences that inform his wide-ranging music making. In brief, the Irish-born Brennan's family moved to central Switzerland when he was young, and between the Irish lullabies that his mother would sing, music lessons that he started at age 11, Swiss folk songs, and much more, Brennan has developed an especially inspired life in music. Monaghan describes him as "a musical explorer and geographer, crafting jazz-related soundscapes," an assessment that gets it exactly right. For anyone not familiar with his work, *Nevergreens* seems like an awfully good place to start, as Brennan has assembled and sequenced this CD with an ear towards representing the key aspects of his work.

There's the lovely dance of *Belles 'n' Decibels*, the nuanced exploration of minimalist music via *Para.Ph(r)ase* (a gloss on Steve Reich's *Violin Phase*), the mellow strains of *Strollin' down Memory Lane*, the stately and stunningly beautiful *Circle of Coherence*, and the ruminative *Fake Five*, to pick just a few pieces. A Brennan recital is likely to include explorations of the piano's innards. One variation he calls arcopiano, created with fishing line and bow hairs, which achieves a surprisingly clamorous drone on *Isle of View*. Then there's the pizzicatopiano, which duets with Brennan's melodica via overdubbing on *Lost im Violin*. There's also a piece with prepared piano, the ghostly dance he calls *Rump-L-Rumba*. There's plenty to enjoy here, and clearly there's a lot more music to explore alongside one of creative music's most intrepid figures. Happily recommended.

Stuart Kremsky, San Francisco/USA

Nevergreens: **Leo CD LR 865**; John Wolf Brennan (p, melodica [6,12], arcopiano [7], pizzicatopiano [6], prepared p [11]); Ludwigsburg, Germany, 1989 (1,2,5,10,13,14,19) or 1991 (4,9,18), Weggis, Switzerland, 1998 (7,11), Boswil, Switzerland, 2002 (20), Winterthur, Switzerland, 2009 (3,6,8,15-17), and Zurich, Switzerland, 2009 (12); 1. Did U see the Way?/ 2. Parto/ 3. Ever for Never/ 4. Belles 'n' Decibels/ 5. Kerava/ 6. Lost im Violin/ 7. Isle of View/ 8. Para.Ph(r)ase/ 9. Phi/ 10. Strollin' down Memory Lane/ 11. Rump-L-Rumba/ 12. Homing/ 13. Circle of Coherence/ 14. Goofy's Waltz/ 15. Auf Valser Pfaden -Läntahütte/ 16. Auf Valser Pfaden -Murmeltanz (Marmot's Dance)/ 17. Auf Valser Pfaden -Zerfeila/ 18. Fake Five/ 19. Song of the Moon/ 20. Kyoto; 73:24. www.leorecordsmusic.comwww.leorecords.com