

Oster, Downes, & Eaton

Seven Conversations

7Conversations.com



I have been listening to *Seven Conversations*, the first release by Jeff Oster, Vin Downes, and Tom Eaton for several weeks now and no pun intended, but these guys have their act together. The trio, who have the pleasure of working with or at Imaginary Road Studios have known each other for years. I don't know the story, but Eaton has been the magician behind the control board for some time. Oster started out as a client and an in demand sideman, and Downes was a client. Let's get the players straight. Jeff Oster plays flugelhorn. He has made his reputation from knowing music on an intimate level and having the ability to infuse just about any genre with his exceptionally exotic horn tracks. Vin Downes is one of the most extraordinary acoustic guitarist on the planet. He truly surprised me with his electric guitar embellishments on *Seven Conversations*. Then we come to Eaton. Tom Eaton is the Cinderella story of contemporary music. Everyone that lays a track down at Imaginary Road Studios ends up thanking Eaton in the credits of their album. And for good reason. He makes their music come alive adding the umami to the music. And yes, he performed his usual miracle on *Seven Conversations*. Eaton, however, is a gifted musician in his own right and I haven't heard of an instrument he couldn't best. Every album he has released is singular in its content and emotion. Let's hear what the guys have to say and I mean that literally.

A Confession, has a covert jazz sensibility that incorporates the swirling sound of Oster's horn mixed with a medium tempo electric piano theme. This first conversation evens out the rough edge of your psyche, but it's a set up. There's more where that came from. Eaton's piano's reminds me of Lionel Hampton's work back in the sixties with notes that echo throughout the piece. **Her Wisdom** fades in like the dawn of a new formed planet. It has a silky horn melody with a river like flow and it is now evident that the trio depends on the magic of reverberation to establish a sense of calm that lulls the listener in the new world. The tune gives "go with the flow" its meaning.

Opening like a dream sequence, **Hours Slip By** is, at first listen, languid and liquid, but then Eaton's quirky background soundscape comes to the forefront and offers a pulsating, midtempo collation of spacey rhythms as, all the while, Oster's horn flows in and out like a surreal stream of sound. This is track three Vin Downes' guitar is not prominent on any tracks as yet. At least not in any obvious terms. Ah, there it is on the next track called **Hushed** and quite welcome. Downes' theme is surrounded by an ethereal, inorganic chorus and buoyed into weightlessness by Oster's horn. The tune is an ambient creation of quiet sounds, which offers a slow, immutable respite that lets you catch your breath.

A Reckoning starts out with some soothing sonic waves generated by Downes' subtle guitar. For three men that are known for their contemporary finesse, this tune, and another successful attempt at an ambient soundscape, is more than effective. This is music in slow motion, but with

real time awareness. This sonic dream world is where you want to be. At least, I was pretty comfortable here. The tune **Subliminal** balances all three instrumental contributions symmetrically. This carefully measured tune peels back the layers of a complex mind exposing the intricacies of thought. We're just about to discover the why.

Words Overheard is the last song, but certainly not the end of the conversation. Downes' guitar opens the exchange, establishing the tone, Oster's horn slides in giving us a possible direction, and Eaton supplies the bass, a deep rooted foundation for this avant garde discussion. I say avant garde, because this genre is the mother of all experimentation and the trio's final offering has the hints of improvisation with the interconnection of stylized notes that call precision into play.

To put it plainly, as a discerning listener, you are going to want in on this conversation. In fact, all seven of them. These three artists have been doing what they do for such a long time because they love the music. Seven Conversations is a thinking person's music. You put this on and you lose track of time. You ponder. But most of all, you escape. This is great music doing its job.

- R J Lannan, ArtisanMusicReviews.com