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one track
mind



Triangulation

DC Improvisers Collective

STANDOUT TRACK:

No. 8, "Mourning in America," a slow, quiet free-jazz rumination. Mike Sebastian's tenor sax is the dominant instrument, with guitarist Jonathan Matis and drummer Ben Azzara providing a sparse backdrop. Though the song's title suggests a dirge, the languorous melody could just as easily be a lullaby.

MUSICAL MOTIVATION:

To spontaneously create music at the intersection of jazz, classical, and rock. Onstage DCIC might have a template, such as a particular scale, that yields a different product at each performance. In the studio, however, improvisation can actually involve a fair amount of advance planning. "'Mourning in America' was actually a series of overdubs," says Matis. "Mike went in [the studio] first and just played something for a couple of minutes; Ben went in, listened to it, and worked something out on the drums; then I went in with the guitar."

THE MAKEUP:

Matis is as accomplished a composer as he is an improviser. He works at combining the two, but results vary with the musicians.

"I tend to write for people rather than for instruments," he says. Currently he's writing what he calls a "post-rock" string quartet for musicians with classical and jazz backgrounds; Matis is still trying to decide how much space to leave for improv, since musicians have different levels of comfort with it. As for his own comfort zone, Matis admits that improv lets him disguise his shortcomings. "That's really about my limitations on guitar," he says. "If I were a better player, I'd probably spend less time playing free."

—Michael J. West

DC Improvisers Collective plays Saturday, March 22, at the Velvet Lounge.

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