

jazzwise

MAGAZINE

REISSUES/ARCHIVE //A-Z

Commitment

The Complete Recordings 1981/83

No Business Records NBCD 14-15 | ★★★★★

Jason Kao Hwang (v, via, bird calls), William Parker (b),
Will Connell jnr (fl, b clt, as) and Zen Matsuura (d).
Rec. 1981-83

Asian-American jazz is still a largely undocumented area of the history of improvised music and although the likes of Fred Houn have garnered attention over the years, there are still too many artists languishing in obscurity. The brilliant violinist Jason Kao Hwang is one name that has largely escaped mainstream attention though he has been chipping away at the creative coalface for some three decades now. The same could be said for the other members of Commitment, save bassist William Parker, mind you he also had to labour a long time for overdue props. But what of drummer Zen Matsuura and reeds player Will Connell Jr? They are entirely new names on me. And yet together in this co-operative ensemble that existed between 1979 and 1984, they sound like substantial players, who, according to the well-worn admonition, are deserving of wider recognition. Above all, the ensemble played with notable maturity, considering that they were all, apart from the experienced Connell, an alumnus of Chico Hamilton and Horace Tapscott, at early stages of their careers. Over this double CD of studio and live work, it is clear that they were valiantly attempting to develop a very open, mutative sound that referenced both 1960s new music vocabulary as well as Chinese and Asian folk music, drawing on modes and scales that were alternately majestic and eerie to create epic with marked cinematic and poetic ramifications. Occasionally, the result is not a million miles from some of the recordings of Billy Bang. Although compositionally, Commitment had a lot going for them, they were also worthwhile sound adventurers

and explorers and the sheer range of timbres covered by all members of the group, particularly Hwang's graphically stark string fanfares, artfully magnify the intensity of the music without boosting its decibel count. It is enough to turn the most cynical of heads. Shame that the live session was not better recorded because it suffers from a quite ropey mix at times, but there is definitely no doubting the grandeur and graphic power of this work and the strength of the fearless personalities behind it. **Kevin Le Gendre**