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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Water Prayers for Bass Clarinet by Paul Austerlitz: The Vodou Horn: Asakivle Meets Austerlitz by Paul Austerlitz and Asakivle Austerlitz: Dr. Merengue by Paul Austerlitz

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## Recording Reviews

**Water Prayers for Bass Clarinet.** 2018. Performed by Paul Austerlitz. Recorded and mixed by Randy Crafton in Kaleidoscope Studios, Union City, NJ. Round Whirled Records RWR0083. One compact disc. Booklet (12 pp.) with photographs by Giovanni Savino and Paul Austerlitz and notes in English by Paul Austerlitz.

**The Vodou Horn: Asakivle Meets Austerlitz.** 2019. Performed by Paul Austerlitz and Asakivle. Recorded in Haiti by Jonathan Fallet and Gregory Forbes and in New York City by Chico Boyer. Mixed in New York City by Chico Boyer. Round Whirled Records RWR0084. One compact disc. Booklet (12 pp.) with notes in English by Paul Austerlitz and Haitian Creole lyrical translations by Paul Austerlitz and Franck Desire.

**Dr. Merengue.** 2019. Performed by Paul Austerlitz and the Dominican Ensemble, featuring José Duluc and Julio Figueroa. Recorded, mixed, and mastered by J. V. Olivier at Terranota Studios, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Round Whirled Records RWR0085. One compact disc. Booklet (16 pp.) with photographs by Giovanni Savino and notes in English and Spanish by Paul Austerlitz.

Paul Austerlitz's three-album trilogy, *Marasa Twa: Vodou-Jazz-Merengue*, is a captivating collection of original songs, traditional repertoire, and adaptations of previously recorded material. Austerlitz presents the songs on discs titled *Water Prayers for Bass Clarinet*, *The Vodou Horn*, and *Dr. Merengue*. Corresponding to his areas of musical and intellectual expertise, these three discs draw from his extensive field research, personal connections, and professional engagements with Haitian traditional music, Dominican merengue, and African American jazz. But to label these genres as such feels problematic insofar as it suggests a mutual exclusivity that belies one of the major takeaways from Austerlitz's bold project: the stylistic and cultural boundaries between these musical genres are shifting and permeable. Music, like the people and spirits who engage with it, tends not to sit still, at least not for very long. Throughout

his career, Paul Austerlitz has exemplified the migratory artist who moves within and beyond the musical spaces he frequents. In the liner notes to each disc, he describes himself as a “seeker of life’s meanings,” one whose musical, intellectual, and spiritual goals have yielded this project—“the fruit of [his] sojourn as a musician-scholar.” There is a ceremonial flavor to this trilogy of recordings, which he calls “prayers” and “offerings”—sacrificial extensions of his personal involvement with African-derived expressive cultures. Scholarly and deeply personal agendas intertwine here, and I appreciate that Austerlitz makes no apologies for this. He offers up “jazz fused with music [he has] studied as an ethnomusicologist,” even as this project is “motivated by mystical needs, creative needs, and activism.”

In terms of traditional jazz, *Water Prayers for Bass Clarinet* is the most “straight-ahead” of the three recordings. It is a remarkable showcase for Austerlitz’s skill as an improviser trained in the ways of jazz saxophone “greats” such as John Coltrane and Charlie Parker. But while Austerlitz is a skilled saxophonist, he really shines on bass and contrabass clarinets, instruments that many a saxophonist would consider too unwieldy for the improvisational flights of musical fancy he takes. Bass clarinet is Austerlitz’s main axe, and this is evident both in the maturity of his tone and in the photographs and artwork that grace each compact disc. *Water Prayers* begins with an energetic arrangement of a traditional Vodou song, “Legba nan baye-a,” which is Haitian Creole for “Legba is at the gate.” It is a perfect choice for the opening track, since Papa Legba is the name of a *lwa* (spirit) typically saluted at the start of a Vodou ceremony. I first encountered this melody over two decades ago on Elizabeth McAlister’s compilation of field recordings titled *Angels in the Mirror: Vodou Music of Haiti* (1997). Listeners familiar with the latter recording should appreciate Austerlitz’s creative remake. Sung evocatively by Haitian vocalist Rozna Zila, the melody is mostly unchanged, although here it is but a small part of a much larger ensemble that includes bassist Santi DeBriano and drummer Royal Hartigan on drums. Zila’s vocal part is doubled on a separate track, creating a thick unison reminiscent of the participatory discrepancies one would expect to hear among ritual practitioners. The nimble arpeggios of the bass clarinet add a Dominican merengue flavor to this Haitian traditional piece, even as solos from Austerlitz and Venezuelan pianist Benito Gonzalez keep alive a blues sentiment throughout. Unlike *Angels in the Mirror* (1997) and McAlister’s prior compilation *Rhythms of Rapture: Sacred Musics of Haitian Vodou* (1995), Austerlitz’s trilogy bears more similarity to studio-produced *mizik rasin* (roots music) than a collection of field recordings.

On “Rara Indivisible,” Austerlitz’s layered contrabass clarinets sustain a driving groove over which the melody, replete with tritone and minor ninth intervals, rises and falls. It is on this track that we are first treated to the electronic bass

clarinet. It adds an uncommon timbre to a recording of Afro-Caribbean music and foregrounds digital technology's role in what most listeners would consider a "traditional" Haitian genre. The electronic effects never feel out of place. Rather, they add a productive tension to the piece and point to the absorbent character of *rara* (or *gagá*, as it is known in the Dominican Republic). The mischievousness of Austerlitz's playing reflects the genre's characteristic humor and unpretentiousness. These attributes help *rara* to become what Rebecca Dirksen has recently described as a modality of "crowd therapy (*terapi foul*) that treats the population's social and psychological problems: silly, naughty, and transgressive words literally get transformed into acts of social healing" (2020:132). I can picture Austerlitz joining the instrumentalists in a *rara* band rollicking through the streets of Gonaïves, Jacmel, or Port-au-Prince to participate in this Lenten processional music, which McAlister characterizes as "a synthesis of Carnival behavior and religious practice" (2002:31). Austerlitz later recycles this piece as "Rara Remix," a shorter but no less energetic track featuring the blues-inspired bebop lines of guest clarinetist Isaiah Richardson. The absence of percussion instruments allows the clarinets to maintain the groove throughout, revealing Austerlitz's creative strategy, borrowed from jazz greats like Duke Ellington and Count Basie, to dissolve the traditional boundary between "melodic" horns and the jazz "rhythm section." This strategy is likewise deployed on "Boot the Boot," with DeBriano's bass and Austerlitz's contrabass clarinet conversing and counterpunching with low notes.

"Finnish Waltz" is Austerlitz's arrangement of a triple-meter piece he discovered at the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in Finland, the country of his birth. The bass clarinet solo employs a mix of chromatic lines, jazz licks, and precisely articulated melodic phrases. To his credit as an improviser, Austerlitz is never boring in terms of either timbre or melody. His woody tone and pretty vibrato sometimes lull me into a state of pleasant contemplation, similar to how I feel when listening to Harry Carney's masterful bass clarinet solos with Duke Ellington's orchestra. But Austerlitz settles for no easy consonances. He is also unafraid to bend notes until they break into a tortured cry, and he is unbothered by occasional squawks of humanness, which add an air of unpredictability to even his most vintage-sounding performances.

Listeners familiar with traditional jazz will appreciate Austerlitz's borrowings from some of the classics. With its AABA form and up-tempo modal flavor, "Padre" pays tribute to Miles Davis's "So What," released on the classic jazz album *Kind of Blue*. The twist here is that Austerlitz plays a repeated figure on the solo bass clarinet while the rest of the ensemble provides the hits—a notable switch from Davis's 1959 recording, on which the ostinato part resides with the acoustic bass. Another signifying act comes by way of "En-Art" ("Trane" spelled backward), which pays homage to tenor saxophonist John Coltrane and

his notoriously difficult “Giant Steps.” This performance serves notice to anyone who doubts the technical fluency of Austerlitz and his crew. These musicians know the chord changes and have the chops to weave intricate melodic lines over them. Austerlitz infuses his lines with cries and shrieks that lend his solo an undeniable vocal quality. This track is impressive—all the more with the outstanding work of pianist Benito Gonzalez. Still, “En-Art” inspires me less than the other pieces on the album. The extended swing solo section feels less imaginative compared to the fresh rhythmic arrangement of the melody, the introductory and final iterations of which consume only about sixty seconds of the nearly five-minute track. I would have enjoyed hearing Austerlitz or Gonzalez improvise over a less formulaic rhythmic backdrop.

The hypnotic melody of “Oriki” establishes a modal mood using pendular major seconds a perfect fourth apart. The title refers to a type of Yoruban praise poetry dedicated to royalty and ancestors. For Austerlitz, this piece is thus a synecdoche for the album, just as the trilogy itself is an homage to the musicians, teachers, collaborators, and practitioners Austerlitz has encountered throughout his career. Austerlitz dedicates “Bara Su Wa Yo” to Eleggua, a Santeria spirit similar to Papa Legba. The multitracked clarinets of Austerlitz and Richardson create a rich choral tapestry that supports Richardson’s cadenza-like explorations. Eventually, the two players enjoy some collective improvisation over a rumbling bass clarinet ostinato.

One of the highlights of *Water Prayers* is “Prayer for the Primal Wind.” Based on a body of supplications Austerlitz learned from renowned Vodou priest Max Beauvoir (1936–2015) and featuring vocalist Rozna Zila, this piece demonstrates Austerlitz’s commitment to cross-cultural conversation. The tonic–subdominant vamp at the end supports Austerlitz’s soulful riffs. The groove of “Funky-Be-Sea” provides another vehicle for Austerlitz’s electric bass clarinet. From start to finish, the track is both danceable and harmonically adventurous. Gonzalez provides sparse accompaniment and soloing on the Fender Rhodes, leaving time for a drum solo by Royal Hartigan. Stretching for nearly ten minutes, “Lapriyè Djò” (also titled “Prayer for the Primal Wind”) is the final track on the disc and the longest of the entire trilogy. Austerlitz’s tenor saxophone summons Ogou, Danbala, and Atala, spirits of a mythic Africa known as Ginen. Six distinct prayers are targeted toward the spirits and arranged in a jazz style with the “vociferous encouragement” of renowned Vodou priest Max Beauvoir. The numerous spirits working together are, for Austerlitz, a way of signaling strength and unity. There is a modal jazz feel throughout the piece, but it is nuanced by Hartigan’s deft ride cymbal, which alternates between a  $\frac{12}{8}$  bell pattern and a heavy swing vibe. As Austerlitz highlights connections among the African spirits, his jazz arrangement also uncovers the connective tissue between parts of the African

diaspora and sonically situates Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner, and John Coltrane within the pantheon of respected ancestral spirits.

Like *Water Prayers*, *The Vodou Horn* represents Austerlitz's continuing foray in the world of Haitian spirituality. This is a world he has come to know well through numerous "pilgrimages" to Haiti, along with the mentorship of Vodou clergy such as Frisner Augustin, Max Beauvoir, and Nicole Miller. *The Vodou Horn* is thus also a testament to Austerlitz's two-pronged career as a performer and scholar. Featuring Franck Desire's dance and drum troupe, Asakivle, this recording is, among other things, a noble attempt to convey the emotional substance and feeling of a Haitian sacrality that is too often maligned as "witchcraft" or dismissed as "superstition." One can only hope that those most in need of experiencing this musical "offering"—both within and beyond academia—will hear the message and gain a better appreciation of the cultural wealth of Haiti and the richness of its spiritual traditions.

Lyrics to most of the tracks on this recording are provided in the liner notes. "Gade yon rara" opens the disc in celebratory fashion with an energetic tribute to the vitality of Haiti's processional rara bands. Electric bass and guitar approximate the interlocking parts typically played by traditional rara instruments such as the *banbou* and *vaksin*. Austerlitz's improvisations on electric bass clarinet and tenor saxophone extend the full range of the horns with shouts and wails that aptly convey the vocal exuberance of the genre. The song also gestures toward the trilogy's other two discs, both of which also contain rara-influenced pieces.

At just over two minutes, "Tintinjo" is the shortest track on the recording. Crisp percussive attacks and breath sounds provide a backdrop for drone-like vocals sustained a perfect fifth apart. I suspect many listeners will find this performance mesmerizing, especially when listened to on repeat. "Paren Legba" likewise evokes a trance-inducing Vodou ritual. The octave effects of the electric bass clarinet, along with the song's undulating compound meter, support lyrics sung in the incantatory language, or "langaj," of the Vodou spirits. Austerlitz's inspiration for the Dahomey-based percussion rhythm featured here, as well as on the lush-sounding "Lamesi," derives from his pilgrimages to Souvenance in Haiti's Artibonite Valley, the site of one of Haiti's most sacred Vodou festivals. Austerlitz adds heavy reverb to his tenor saxophone on the latter piece, giving the impression of one beckoning the spirits to emerge from underwater or travel across a great distance.

Composed by Franck Desire, "Zaka's Wedding" is a celebratory fanfare for Zaka and Gran Bwa, two Vodou lwa with agricultural expertise. The song switches gears, opening with Austerlitz's tenor saxophone minor-key melody establishing a merengue-like feel that is enhanced by percussion and bass. Layered vocals

join Austerlitz in a thick unison as the melody repeats throughout the track. “Met, Met, Met” (“Master, Master, Master”) is another emotional homage to the lwa. Light percussion provides the sole accompaniment to Asakivle’s vocalists, who “throw water” (*jete dlo*) as a gesture of ritual salutation. With “Latibonit” (a reference to Haiti’s Artibonite region) comes a faster pace and heightened sense of urgency. The lyrics recount the illness of “Soley,” a man whose name also means “sun.” The song thus signifies on at least two levels, expressing the need for both personal and environmental healing in Haiti. Austerlitz employs a “hot” Central African Kongo rhythm on “Carolyn and the Mermaid.” The mermaid here is the Vodou sea spirit known as Lasirèn, who shares her love of Kongoles heritage with her companion Labalèn (the Whale). The cast of characters in this medley is represented by the call-and-response between electric bass clarinet and tenor saxophone. Austerlitz’s ascending arpeggios and trills evoke some of Sonny Rollins’s Caribbean-inflected improvisations on pieces such as “Duke of Iron,” “St. Thomas,” and “The Everywhere Calypso.”

Despite its title, “Sè Manbo” (“Sister Mambo”) is actually a praise song to mothers, whom, as Austerlitz states, “you can call on when you are in trouble.” Given Sè Manbo’s role as the “mother” of all Vodou spirits, the song honors familial bonds experienced in terms of mystical and biological support. Vocals and electric bass clarinet engage in some asymmetrical call-and-response over a ten-measure melodic theme. Austerlitz’s four-measure responses provide textural contrast with the heterophonic blend of the vocalists’ six-measure melodic phrases. The vocal pitches on this track and on “Rele Bondye” are occasionally a tad sharp in relation to other instruments, but the overall sound strikes me as faithful to the way ritual singing unfolds outside of the studio. One can appreciate the earthiness of these performances without the unnecessary imposition of an autotuned “perfection.” On “Sè Manbo,” “Zilibo,” and “Rara Jam,” Austerlitz uses lower registers to evoke the sound of a husky baritone singer while injecting his solos with growls, bends, and other timbral surprises. “Rara Jam” also prompts Austerlitz to explore the saxophone’s upper register. He squeals and moans over a bass clarinet ostinato that imitates the single-note trumpets (*vaksin*) used in rara street bands. It is fitting that Austerlitz concludes this disc the way it begins, with “Gade yon rara.” This time, however, we are treated to a remixed version of the track that lasts almost ten minutes, ample time for the percussionists to have the spotlight for an extended solo, before clarinet and vocals return to draw the song and the disc to a definitive close.

While *Water Prayers* and *The Vodou Horn* revel mostly in the dialogue between jazz and Haitian traditional music, *Dr. Merengue* places more emphasis on the music and culture of the Dominican Republic. The first track, “Hom-enaje a Nico Lora,” is an homage to early merengue, described by Austerlitz as a



“pan-Caribbean genre” with manifestations in Puerto Rico, Colombia, Haiti, and Venezuela, as well as the Dominican Republic. The arrangement is inspired by the work of legendary Dominican composer and bandleader Níco Lora (1880–1971) and the stylings of his saxophonist, Pedro “Cacu” Lora. “Homenaje” is pitched a fifth higher and performed a touch slower than the original (see track 1 of the compact disc accompanying Austerlitz’s 1997 book), but it retains the vocal timbres and high energy that characterized the classic merengue style. Austerlitz even manages to translate the sound of lightning-quick saxophone lines to his bass clarinet, gifting us with a performance that is simultaneously modern and old school. On “Los Saxofones,” Austerlitz burns throughout a repeated vamp with rapidly ascending and descending arpeggios and patterns, along with a healthy dose of melodic playfulness, multiphonics, and false fingerings on his alto saxophone. “Pri-pri electrónico” allows Austerlitz to share a lesser-known regional style of Afro-Dominican merengue known as *pri-pri* or *palo echnao*, a variant of merengue that is still popular in the country’s rural south. This genre is distinguished by its compound meter feel—what Austerlitz refers to as a “ $\frac{12}{8}$ ” rhythm.” This track is an adaptation of Austerlitz’s 1991 field recording, featured on the compact disc accompanying his book *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (1997).

The diasporic bridge-building that characterizes this trilogy is nowhere more explicit than on “Con el alma,” a tribute to Dominican musicians such as Tavito Vásquez, Juan Colon, and Darío Estrella, who blended merengue and jazz to push Dominican popular music in a new direction. This blending also characterizes “merengue-jazz” compositions “Naak Owt” and “Two Kan,” which Austerlitz recorded in honor of influential Dominican saxophonists Sandy Gabriel, Mario Rivera, and Carlito Estrada. The electronic bass clarinet weaves throughout the track, trading with the drums before returning to the fast-moving melody doubled with piano. The wah-wah effect on Austerlitz’s clarinet is given free rein as “Two Kan” draws to a close. A different kind of blending takes place on “Merengaga,” jointly composed by Austerlitz and percussionist José Duluc. The piece draws on both merengue and gagá, which, in turn, “blend easily with contemporary jazz.” I find it helpful to listen to this track and “Rara Indivisible” (from *Water Prayers*) in sequence to hear how Austerlitz and his fellow musicians reconfigure Haitian and Dominican traditions in relation to jazz. Listeners would likewise benefit from comparing these tracks to field recordings of rara and gagá songs on *Caribbean Revels: Haitian Rara and Dominican Gaga*, which was released in the 1970s and reissued by Smithsonian Folkways in 1991.

A field recording from Austerlitz’s 1997 book is the inspiration for “Merengue de atabales,” which features a five-note sung melody harmonized over a  $\frac{12}{8}$  groove. Austerlitz displays a high degree of instrumental prowess



and versatility—attributes that are rare among musicologists of his caliber. He breaks out his flute on this track, showcasing a warm timbre and a free-spirited solo that uses melodic and harmonic dissonance to create a sense of drama and improvisational intrigue. I find myself wanting to play this track over and over. It captures my attention through trance-inducing bass guitar lines and vocals. Before the piece concludes, the atabales (or palos) drumming takes center stage until Austerlitz's flute cues the rest of the ensemble to reenter. It is also worth noting that Austerlitz does not shy away from engaging with some of the controversial aspects of music making in the Dominican Republic, most notably, the issue of dictator sponsorship. For example, track 7, entitled “La Empaliza,” exemplifies music that was promoted by Rafael Trujillo. There are noteworthy parallels here to the interplay of music and politics in mid-twentieth-century Haiti, where dance bands often performed at the behest of the Duvalier dictatorship (Averill 1994:228–29). Austerlitz's description of “The Afro-Dominican Jazz Suite” as “a microcosm of the globalized multifarious world” could well apply to the entire trilogy. On this particular track, the creative confluence of Afro-Cuban folk music, Stravinskian motifs, and free jazz provides a sonic analogue to dynamic processes of transcultural exchange. The latter half of the suite, with its textural and instrumental changes, may catch listeners pleasantly off guard, particularly at the five-minute mark, where vocals, percussion, and harmonica engage in lively interaction before a recapitulation of the opening bass clarinet theme.

What comes across most strongly throughout *Water Prayers*, *The Vodou Horn*, and *Dr. Merengue* is Austerlitz's musical mastery of Caribbean ritual and popular styles. He deploys them with a playful irreverence that is entirely appropriate and respectful to the spiritual traditions he venerates. Throughout this trilogy, Austerlitz proves himself adept on a variety of woodwinds. As a fellow performer and ethnomusicologist, I am keenly aware of how challenging it is to maintain one's proficiency in both domains. When I lived in New York City during the late 1990s, the ability to do “merengue gigs” was a source of pride for lots of saxophonists I knew. The intricacy and speed of the written lines, featuring flurries of arpeggios and scales, were intimidating to otherwise confident jazz musicians. It comes as no surprise to me that Austerlitz is at ease in this genre, given his decades of experience and hard work.

Austerlitz may be stronger on bass clarinet and flute, but his saxophone playing is solid. To my ear, he plays merengue lines a bit on top of the beat in a manner that seems characteristic of the Dominican saxophonists who inspire him. His playing also underscores the influence of an array of legendary jazz performers. His solo on “La Empaliza” calls to mind the dry, muted timbre of tenor saxophonists like Warne Marsh and Hank Mobley, but the gritty assertiveness of his playing on “Latibonito Yo” and “Zilibo” conjures the indomitable

spirits of Coleman Hawkins and Chu Berry. On alto saxophone, Austerlitz sounds equally self-assured, with a technique that is even more agile. I suspect Eric Dolphy is one of many influences on Austerlitz's clarinet playing. Dolphy's Caribbean-influenced recordings, such as "Music Matador," are a subtler muse. Austerlitz also stands on the shoulders of jazz artists such as Jelly Roll Morton, Randy Weston, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, and Sonny Rollins, who displayed creative links to the Caribbean. Ellington's 1967 album *Soul Call* features "Caravan" (cowritten with his Puerto Rican-born trombonist Juan Tizol) and "West Indian Pancake," both of which testify to connections with Caribbean and Latin American musics. Austerlitz's project also invites recognition of the work of modern-day musicians of Caribbean heritage—Jean Caze, Etienne Charles, Jean Chardavoine, Makarious Cesaire, Godwin Louis, and Miguel Zenon, to name only a few—who have been transplanting their roots into new compositions and performances and further stretching the contours of a "jazz" genre whose definition has always been contested.

*Marasa Twa* contains a tremendous amount of musical, historical, and cultural information. Nevertheless, Austerlitz leaves me wanting more, not in terms of the number of words in the liner notes but rather in terms of explanatory narratives regarding how African-derived musical performances in the Caribbean relate to those in the United States. Listeners might enjoy experiencing some tracks of *Marasa Twa* out of sequence. Jumping from "Merengaga" on *Dr. Merengue* to "Gade yon rara" on *The Vodou Horn* sheds light on the sonic relation between Dominican gagá and Haitian rara. I wish Austerlitz had elaborated more on these kinds of connections and overlaps between musical genres, although this may be asking too much of a three-disc recording project that is unusually ambitious as it stands. Listeners may find it just as rewarding to connect the dots themselves by consulting Austerlitz's considerable publications on African Caribbean musical traditions. Like the mizik rasin (roots music) of groups such as Boukman Eksperyans, Foula, and RAM, Austerlitz's recordings make use of the studio as an instrument that is indispensable to the sonic character of each performance. I would have loved even more insight into the production process, namely, the decisions that were made in the studio to give these recordings the desired sound and affect.

I am pleased with the duration of the trilogy as a whole; however, I would have preferred longer grooves and fewer tracks. The shorter songs tend to conclude just as I am warming up to them as a listener. Two of *Marasa Twa's* tracks, "Los Saxofones" and "Santiago," have appeared on the previous Austerlitz recordings *A Bass Clarinet in Santo Domingo and Detroit* (1998) and *Journey* (2008). I appreciate the added context these tracks provide, although the trilogy's repertorial and stylistic breadth comes at the expense of a musical depth that would allow listeners to engage more intimately with the material at hand.

A heavier-handed editor might have justifiably left some tracks on the cutting room floor, making time for tracks such as “Tintinjo” and “Rara Indivisible” to carry away deep listeners on a more sustained journey to transcendence. But these minor critiques are perhaps only accolades in flimsy disguise. In whetting my appetite to see these musicians perform live, this endeavor succeeds on all fronts.

*Marasa Twa: Vodou-Jazz-Merengue* is a courageous recording and a welcome contribution to the body of what we might call “performance scholarship.” It will be instructive for students and teachers of jazz, researchers and performers of Caribbean music, and even spiritual practitioners seeking to better comprehend music as a source of transnational flow and theological insight. Austerlitz’s descriptive liner notes and sustained cultural engagement make his ethnomusicological training obvious. But one need not be a card-carrying academic to find inspiration in *Marasa Twa*. The accessibility of its grooves and melodies will allow “regular” people to enjoy it too. One of the project’s multiple strengths is the leader’s willingness to be reflexive about how his spiritual and professional journeys have coalesced. Born in Finland and raised in New York City, Austerlitz allows various facets of his identity to come forward in a powerful way, and he models a brand of cross-racial allyship that fits his personal and professional philosophy. “What is my contribution, as a white man,” he asks, “to these music cultures?” Austerlitz’s reference to these songs as “offerings” demonstrates an understanding of reciprocity that goes hand in hand with devotion to the spirits and an ethic of intellectual responsibility and cultural exchange. The crossing of boundaries—between insider and outsider, local and foreign, Haiti and the Dominican Republic—is *Marasa Twa*’s most compelling theme. These three discs stand firmly on their own merits, but, taken as whole, they offer us a panoramic view of the soundscapes and bridges that connect music making in the United States to spiritual and cultural expressions throughout the African diaspora.

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