



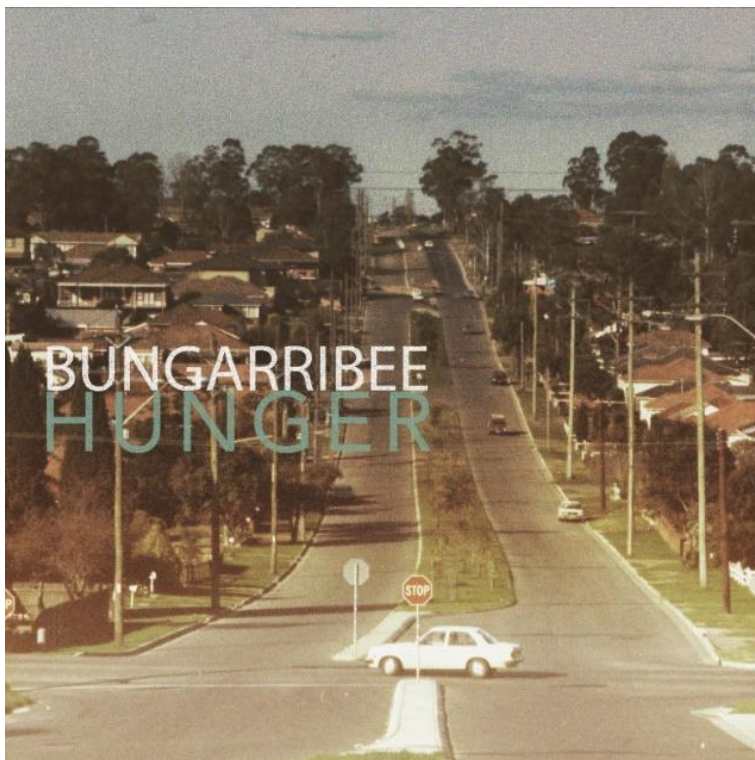
BUNGARRIBEE: HUNGER

Album review by Eric Myers

Label: Independent

Personnel: Gary Daley (piano, piano accordion, electronics); Paul Cutlan (clarinet, E flat clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, alto flute); Oliver Miller (cello, keyboard, Mbira, electronics); Tunji Beier (mridangam, kanjira, ghatam, gangan, morsing, zarb, modified tambourine, cymbal, Tibetan singing bowls, Indian temple bells, mu yu, konakol, electronics and looping).

[This review appeared in AJAZZ 99, November, 2023, on page 18]



The name of this band Bungarribee derives from an Aboriginal word which, according to leader Gary Daley, means an idyllic place with two elements: a bird and an expanse of water. Also it's a "meeting place, (partly my interpretation)," writes Daley, "and perfectly encapsulates my vision for Bungarribee, that is a meeting place of free, open-minded musicians from disparate backgrounds. A meeting place where each musician is free to bring their tradition & contribution to the table. Improvisation (not only jazz) is central to the philosophy & aesthetic of the band."

A glance at the CVs of the four musicians underlines this sentiment. Daley and Paul Cutlan, both distinguished jazz musicians and improvisors, have classical degrees. Between them they have access to a unique range of instruments. Daley has the piano, the piano accordion, and electronics; Cutlan, an extraordinary multi-instrumentalist, has access to all the instruments in the saxophone, clarinet and flute families; Oliver Miller, a classical cellist, has a strong interest in contemporary music(s); and Tunji Beier inhabits the two worlds of Indian & African percussion, where a bewildering variety of percussive sounds are available (see list above).



Bungarribee, L-R, Paul Cutlan, Gary Daley, Tunji Beier, Oliver Miller...
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

While Gary Daley's characterisations are perfectly apt, here's an additional thought of mine. I find it difficult to put Bungarribee's music into perspective without thinking of The Necks. That extraordinary trio, with Chris Abrahams (piano), Lloyd Swanton (double bass), and Tony Buck (drums, percussion & other instruments), combined free improvisation and minimalism many years ago, and created a unique genre which offered music fans a soft and ruminative listening experience. It's been described variously as hypnotic and meditative; Mark Mordue found it "so trance-inducing you lose track of where and whatever you are."

Bungarribee, in the wake of The Necks, offers a similar listening experience, operating at the level of chamber music. Where Bungarribee departs from The Necks, however, is the eclectic range of sounds available to the four musicians. Moreover they juxtapose free improvisation with composed works. On *Hunger*, the latter include “Baba”, by the African composer, singer & percussionist Molla Sylla (a two-minute piano solo); one by Cutlan, “Dimitri’s Mood”, the longest work on the album at 8.37; and three by Daley: “Hunger”, “Bungarribee Road” & “Mbira”. Further evidence of the quartet’s eclecticism is provided by two classical works: by Schoenberg (a minute only) and Bartok, whose “Nottorno” from “Mikrokosmos Vol IV”, stretches to five minutes. These composed works account for seven of the album’s 14 tracks. I conclude that the other seven, being composed by the four musicians, are freely improvised. Certainly that’s how they sound to me.

As a longtime aficionado of Shostakovich’s music I was particularly drawn to “Dimitri’s Mood”, written by Cutlan as long ago as 2007. Cutlan dedicates it to the hapless Soviet composer who, for much of his life, had an already packed suitcase under his bed in case the secret police came for him. Cutlan has revealed that he loves Shostakovich’s “wintery symphonic slow movements”, and indeed there is a suggestion of this at the beginning of “Dimitri’s Mood,” where an eerie sound suggests a winter wind. Cutlan feels that the version on *Hunger* has “an empty snowscape feel to it”, and that the piece suits his alto flute and Miller’s cello. Furthermore, he commends Daley’s “fine piano solo” and says “I overlay some bass clarinet here and there”.



Paul Cutlan: a lover of Shostakovich’s “wintery symphonic slow movements”...
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Listening to this album one is constantly surprised by the expertise with which the four players choose which sounds work from the array of sound sources available.



Another shot of Bungarribee, L-R, Tunji Beier, Gary Daley, Oliver Miller, Paul Cutlan... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

The description of jazz as “the sound of surprise”, credited to the late American writer Whitney Balliett, certainly applies to the highly intelligent and mesmerising music on this album. Bungarribee has been in existence for about ten years, so it’s somewhat surprising that this immensely enjoyable album is only its first. Its release has been greeted with universal applause by respected reviewers, and I heartily join them in supporting their sentiments.
