

## **BILL ANSHELL**

### *Improbable Solutions*

Anschell, piano, sound design, electronics; five others

Origin 82886 (auditioned in WAV, available as CD). 2023. Anschell, prod.; Reed Ruddy, Anschell, engs.

Performance \*\*\*\*

Sonics \*\*\*\* 1/2

Digital music technology keeps expanding within the jazz art form. Digital tools come with risks. Many musicians treat them like fun toys. Often, as they twist knobs, musicians are having more fun than their listeners. But electronics can open vast landscapes of sonic possibility for artists who remain committed to fundamental values like musicality and taste.

One is Bill Anschell. He has been the best mainstream jazz pianist in the Pacific Northwest for years. His new project represents a radical departure in creative methodology. When you put on this record you hear an extremely well recorded acoustic piano trio hitting hard on a dynamic tune called “Ambulator.” One of the best rhythm sections in Seattle, bassist Chris Symer and drummer Jose Martinez, is kicking ass. Then you notice that a guitar (played by Brian Monroney) is peeking out in the open spaces. Then you hear an evocative sound, perhaps wind or the sea, around the edges of the piano notes. The third track is an utterly seductive ballad, “Gentle Persuasion.” The wistful melody is portrayed by a rich, resonant piano. There are mysterious whisperings in the distance, as if from a string orchestra, pushing back the horizon of the music.

But there is no acoustic piano. Anschell pre-recorded all the piano parts in his home studio, assembling them from “soft synths” and keyboard samples. He even created the bass and drum parts electronically. But then, in Avast Studios in Seattle, he had Symer and Martinez replace those parts. Monroney added his guitar touches in Anschell’s home studio. Also in his home studio, in a laborious process that took months, Anschell sculpted nine tracks into a complete, organic whole. This stunning album will mess with the minds of purists who still distrust digital music technology.—**Thomas Conrad**