



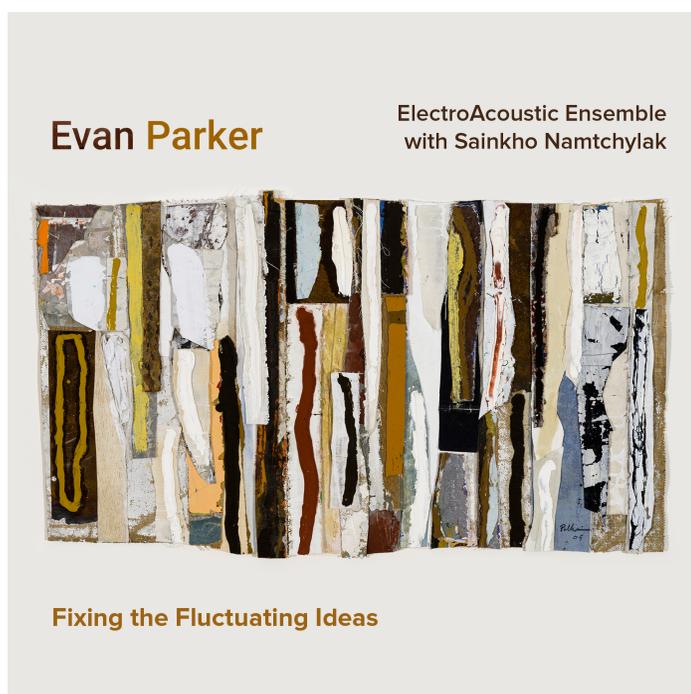
Evan Parker ElectroAcoustic Ensemble (w/ Sainkho Namtchylak)

Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas

(Les Disques Victo)

Review by John Eyles

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This album was recorded on May 19th 1996 at the thirteenth Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville, yet was not released until 2021. That is curious considering how historically significant the music here is. The album is credited to Evan Parker alone, but the sleeve bears the subtitle "ElectroAcoustic Ensemble with Sainkho Namtchylak". Although Parker's Electro-Acoustic Ensemble (the name varies slightly, maybe for contractual reasons...) had been founded in 1992, it did not record until May 1996 when the first of its five ECM albums, *Toward the Margins*, was studio-recorded in London. Given the timing, it is no surprise that the personnel on that album and this live one match — Parker on saxophones, Barry Guy on bass, Paul Lytton on percussion and live electronics, Phil Wachsmann on violin, viola, live electronics and sound processing, Walter Prati and Marco Vecchi on live electronics and sound processing. Yes, four of the six members used live electronics, and three sound processing.

The other strand of the story concerns Parker and renowned Tuvan singer Sainkho Namtchylak. On May 15th 1996, when both were en route to appear at the Victoriaville festival, they played a duo gig at the Music Gallery in Toronto, the recording of which was issued as *Mars Song* (Victo, 1996), their only release together until this one. At the festival, Namtchylak appeared with the ElectroAcoustic Ensemble, alongside the six members who recorded in London. Unlike the ECM album, which comprised twelve tracks ranging in length from under three minutes to just over seven and a half, *Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas* only has two extended tracks — possibly two sets at the festival — "Fixing" with Namtchylak and "Fluctuating" without the singer, totalling just over seventy-two minutes.

Just as *Mars Song* did, "Fixing" illustrates how suited Parker's saxophone and Namtchylak's voice are to one another. It also demonstrates how suitable each of those elements is for the signal processing in which this ensemble specialises. After an opening ululation from the singer, which gives a taste of her extraordinary capabilities, Namtchylak falls into line and her contributions no longer dominate but are on a par with the other ensemble members. As the singer would find it very difficult to be ordinary, her contributions, both real-time and sampled and manipulated, repeatedly command attention. On this showing, it seems strange that this was a one-off performance with the ensemble and she was never (yet) invited back. By comparison, it would have been easy for "Fluctuating" to sound flat and empty. Fortunately, that is not so, as the piece has its own fascinations, in particular that it is a rare early live recording of the ensemble, something ECM did not get around to for another six years. Yes, in different ways this album is historically significant; just as importantly, it also makes great listening.

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