

Reviews

HAPPY APPLE

Happy Apple Back on Top (Sunnyside)



Dave King's work with the Bad Plus might be earning him greater attention, but the drummer's other trio, the 11-year-old Happy Apple, presents a fuller picture of his brainy composing skills as well as his drum chops. Saxophonist Michael Lewis and bassist Erik Fratzke also contribute tunes to the album. Together, the group has come up with 11 tracks that give Lewis a chance to unleash what seems like an unending stream of melodic ideas on his tenor (and alto and soprano on one song each), with the rhythm section setting a backdrop or pushing him as required.

King's love of jerky rhythms drives the climax of "Rise! Mark Anthony," on which a repetitive motif builds out of a free drum/sax exchange, much like a Tim Berne piece. He doesn't sound as unhinged as he occasionally gets with the Bad Plus, but there are plenty of moments where he dances around the time. Fratzke often stays in the background, gently stroking simple grooves, but when duty calls he can rip into a fast solo ("1996 A.D.") or change textures from medium to heavy. Lewis, who also adds keyboards to a couple of tracks, has a playful approach to his horn, somewhat reminiscent of Ornette, that makes even the simplest melody engaging. **MIKE SHANLEY**