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Larry Ochs - "Palm" (The Mirror World (for Stan Brakhage))

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One of the pleasures of following the development of San Francisco's [ROVA Saxophone Quartet](#) is not only keeping pace with that group's marvelous expressions, but also seeing what its individual members can come up with on furlough, ranging from Bruce Ackley's sprightly trio sessions to Jon Raskin's mischievous small group work. Most compelling to my ears have been the projects associated with tenor/sopranino specialist [Larry Ochs](#), including the outfits What We Live, Drumming Core, and Maybe Monday.

For this project, recorded in 2005, Ochs has convened a full version of the OrkestROVA and an ensemble he calls the ROVA Special Sextet, each realizing Ochs' piece dedicated to filmmaker [Stan Brakhage](#). Ochs is careful enough to ensure that the piece isn't about mimesis of Brakhage or, what would be infinitely worse, creating a score for his silent films. Rather, *The Mirror World* is about contrast, juxtaposition, pacing and light/space, elements central to the work of both creators.

"Realization 1: Hand" is for the Orkestrova, here comprised of the ROVA quartet (Ochs sticks to conducting), guitarist John Schott, cellists Joan Jeanrenaud and Theresa Wong, bassist Lisle Ellis, clarinetist Ben Goldberg, trombonists Jen baker and Toyoji Tomita, trumpeters Darren Johnston and David Bithell, electronics whizzes Tim Perkis and Matt Wright, along with percussionists William Winant, Moe! Staiano, and Gino Robair. Many of these players aid Ochs in conducting, and a handful supplement their regular axes with electronics, too. This version of the Orkestrova is masterful, and Ochs does a wonderful job at coaxing all the colors, textures and extended techniques from this group, while also being canny enough to leave them room to simply play. It's a really intense piece, filled with vast amounts of counterpoint (mostly from the horns, including some superb contributions from Steve Adams' bass flute) and all kinds of metallic, percussive sounds that suggest some object in decay. Central to this dimension of the music is Schott, at times oscillating and at times menacing, almost bullying the clanking vibes and honking bass clarinet during some of the early passages. Things swirl, elements cohere, and occasionally the music seems to coalesce naturally, as on the exquisite melancholy of "Fable," the big Mingus-derived riff anchoring "That Hunts," or the slide guitar on "14 Fingers."

"Realization 2: Wall" is for a smaller, more savage unit, the ROVA Special Sextet, where the four saxophonists are joined by Robair and Winant at their most lusty. That's not to say that this music's not gracefully played, as there's considerable dynamic variety here as well. But the opening passages – "Hit" and "Hung" – achieve their qualities not so

much because ROVA submerge themselves in a larger group sound (as on the first realization) but because they joyfully, raucously define that sound here. As much as I love to listen to this group play, my favorite passages are actually those for twinned percussion, as with “Pulsar.”

Overall, this is a really engaging and provocative window onto the under-regarded Bay Area improvising scene and the creativity of Ochs. This music is better than the OrkestROVA’s [Electric Ascension](#) for sure (a release I found quite overrated) and better even than [the fine collaboration](#) with [Satoko Fujii](#).

By Jason Bivins

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