

## **SONAR WITH DAVID TORN**

### **VORTEX**

*Part 44; Red Shift; Waves And Particles; Monolith; Vortex; Lookface! (56.16)*

Stephan Thelen (elg); Bernhard Wagner (elg); Christian Kuntner (elb); Manuel Pasquinelli (d); Torn (elg, live loops, manipulation). Zurich, 15-15 February 2017.

### **RareNoise 087**

One of the most exciting things about catching the Jan Garbarek Group of the mid-1980s live was hearing (and seeing) David Torn first conjure and then cut deep into textured space, soaring high and wide, loose and wild. Back then, serious health issues would take Torn off the scene for a while but he's long been back, as provocative – and thoughtful – as ever. Anyone who enjoyed his last ECM albums *Prezens* (2007) and *Only Sky* (2015) should relish this meeting of the guitar maverick with the excellent Swiss minimalists and art rockers Sonar.

It's an exhilarating session, set up by another outsider with serious form, guitarist Henry Kaiser. The press release calls the album a 21st century rock milestone. However, this pulse-rich, firmly driven yet reverie-inducing music should appeal strongly to anyone who ever thrilled to the Larry Coryell/Elvin Jones classic *Stiffneck*, or who is generally sympathetic to the modal axis of post-Russell, post-Davis jazz – or the current compulsive grooves of another fine minimalist Swiss group, Nik Bärtsch's Ronin.

"It felt like a cross between Miles Davis and Jon Hassell" says Torn about the melodic patterns he weaves within and across the slowly shifting harmonies of *Monolith*. Tritones and abrasive rock shards, thunderous ostinato bass and drum patterns and spacious sound clouds, legato loops and ambient drones: all combine to conjure the sort of layered modal moods which – as in the especially superb *Red Shift* – take you to the place sought by so many, for so long: "somewhere else". Why else did I, one day, play this mesmeric album continuously, seven or eight times straight through? Is it rock or is it jazz – and, who cares? It's brilliant.

Michael Tucker

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