

# SHIPP / LEHN / BUTCHER

**John Butcher** [UK] • soprano- & tenor saxophone

**Thomas Lehn** [AT/DE] • analogue synthesizer

**Matthew Shipp** [USA] • piano



© painting by Gina Southgate @ Konfrontationen, Nickelsdorf/AT 2016

This is a magical journey in sounds, ideas and textures, featuring three sonic visionaries.

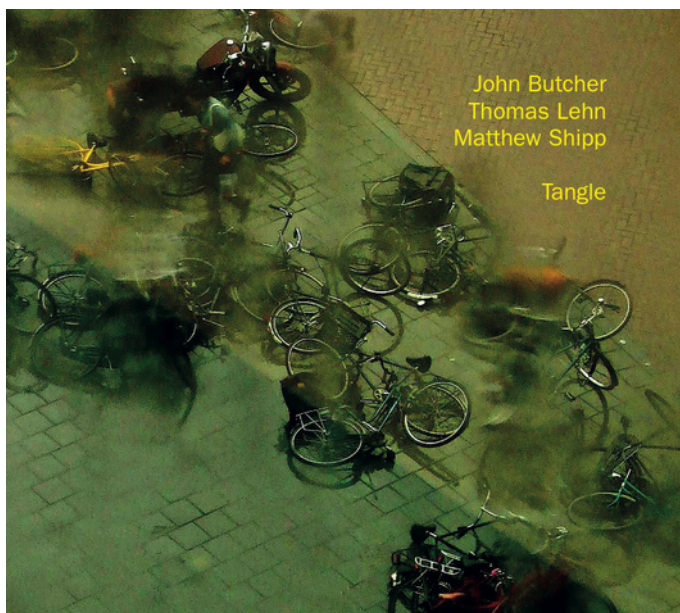
Butcher has developed his own profound method of playing the saxophones. He converses in his own individual syntax, still radiating a surprising playfulness and commanding elegance.

Shipp comes from free jazz but this free-improvised, free-associative meeting enables him to suggest bolder ideas and sounds, rarely heard in his own recordings.

Lehn adds the mercurial element to this live performance. His highly inventive, often aggressive playing of the synthesizer introduces elements of danger and surprise and adds textual references to psychedelia, and sixties electronic experimentation.

The dynamics between these strong-minded musicians are immediate and organic, but their interplay also stresses their individual approaches. All three negotiate imaginative ideas, expressed in lightning speed and mesmerizing subtlety, playing with great focus to detail and structure, but at the same time busy exploring their own sound universes. This constant-complex play of touching and going charges and colors this meeting with tension and reserved drama.

1<sup>st</sup> CD release 2016



## ***Tangle***

label: Fataka

cat.-no.: fataka 14

release date: November 17, 2016

<https://f-a-t-a-k-a.bandcamp.com/album/tangle>

1. – 3.	Cluster	37:09
4.	Tiefenschärfe	5:59

recorded on February 19th 2014  
at Cafe Oto, London

cover photo by Andy Moor

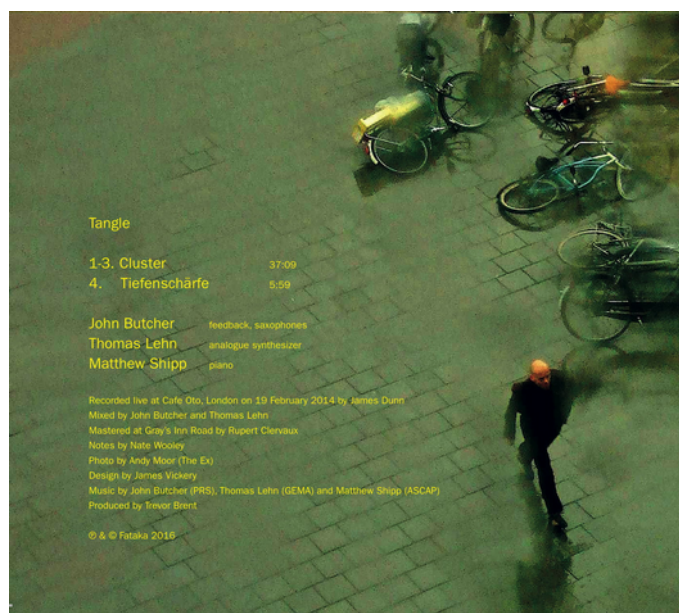
liner notes by Nate Wooley

"***Tangle*** is the standout album of 2016 in my book, across the board.

The ideas are flowing thick and fast, with everyone at the top of their game and perfectly in sync. There's a raw vitality to the performance, and the music is unabashed and direct in channeling relatively conventional lyricism.

This is thrilling, peerless stuff, played with vivacity and animation. I was at the concert, and in my diary I jotted down a rare post-gig note that reads simply "!!!! f\*\*\*\*\*k", but I'd forgotten it was quite this good."

- Tim Owen | Dalston Sound | Nov. 30th, 2016



February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at Cafe Oto London © unknown

### **webinfo**

[www.johnbutcher.org.uk](http://www.johnbutcher.org.uk)  
[www.thomaslehn.com](http://www.thomaslehn.com)  
[www.matthewshipp.com](http://www.matthewshipp.com)

### **info & audio**

### **video**

*Tangle* on □ discogs



## Liner notes | by Nate Wooley

"It seems very simple", I said to my van-mates, "there's a spectrum between accretion of raw ideas and refining a very specific language." The thought coalesced as we careened through red lights in a rented van in downtown Detroit. During a short period of my life this was not necessarily an unusual situation for discussion—it became my preferred social energy for thinking, in fact. In a nutshell, I was saying that, as musicians, we swing between the addition of new ideas and the act of whittling down those ideas into some sort of elegant language. We vacillate between the two according to need: sometimes feeling dissatisfied with the building blocks we have been using to construct musical statements and wanting to add something—anything—as long as it's different; then feeling dissatisfied with the raw state of our new ideas and wanting to perfect them technically and understand their place in our musical aesthetic.

I went on to say that some people work closer to one end of the spectrum or the other, even though they still go through the same process of acquiring and editing. "Give me an example", said the driver/percussionist, taking us to the organ trio bar for off-night drinks. "Well, for example, John Butcher. He is very refined. He has a specific language and it is all about the elegance and rigor of how he uses it." "Okay, and the other side?" he said as he pulled into a parking spot. "Matthew Shipp. Not that he's raw, but you get the feeling that the newness of the thing is the most important, over the need for editing those ideas down to their essence." The van-mates, cellist and percussionist, nod and we promise to take up the conversation again once we are out of the club and back in the van.

And, we do. And, I do with others. This idea comes up over and over again and the examples change to suit the listener. Sometimes I defend, other times I'm met with yawns of agreement. Over the years, I have had different relationships with this idea, as I have taught it to students, fleshed it out in arguments, or thought it through again to occupy my mind during subway delays. Recently, however, I've felt that if this is all there is, then I've reached a depressing kind of stasis—a place where improvised music is simply a Marcusian A/B seeking the ever elusive C—the truly new—outside the system. I have become trapped within my own thought cycle.

But now I am faced with this recording. It is the C. It is the something surprising that, if not rewriting my van ride theory, renews my energy for it.

John Butcher continues to refine. He continues to be elegant, rigorous, and profound in the way that he uses his instrument to converse using his individual syntax. His playing on this recording, however, is wild in turns. While still being rooted in a precise attention to timbre, it quite simply shreds with a certain abandon that feels slightly unhinged at points, and in a way that makes you so happy you are there to experience it.

Matthew Shipp is still a fount of ideas. He continues to be an unfettered conduit of gestures, shards of melodies, and full-blown sonic assault. But he is putting his lightning in pristine bottles and stacking them into designs we've never attributed to him before. There is an obvious sense of architecture in Shipp's playing here that is shocking in its ability to structure the way we perceive the trio improvisations.

And, yes, it is a trio. Shipp and Butcher are the A and B in my theoretical dyad. They represent two opposed ways of thinking that, luckily for the listener, meld beautifully, especially when they play against character. This leaves a very important space open for Mr. Lehn, the C. It is a rare pleasure to hear someone so in tune with a group's dynamics that she or he can forgo the parts for the whole and create from a distant place: not transcendent or confrontational, just . . . indescribable. Lehn is this element, and his synth colorings of the saxophone and piano and the subtlety of even his most aggressive electronic statements create certain aural-historical connections to psychedelia and 60s electronic experimentation via Stockhausen and the Columbia-Princeton Center.

These connections are made without being eye-wink referential, however, and that is the power of these improvisations from all three players. Shipp's manic repetitions, Butcher's scalar blankets, and Lehn's warm reverb remind the listener of certain eras of experimental improvisation and composition, but it isn't the remembrance that contains the power, but the feeling that this is something fresh and new. It is a music that brings up new ideas and paradigms, thought through and shared as I did, after my first listening, by immediately calling my old van-mates.



Butcher/Lehn/Shipp at Atelier Claus, Brussels © Laurent Orseau

## **review** excerpts (on CD *Tangle* )

**Jazzwise Magazine** | by Kevin Le Gendre | February 2017

"The combination of personalities is winningly combustible. All of the players are drumming with razor sharp focus, but they also have more serene impulses and create glistening soundscapes in which the analogue synthesizer is well complemented by the two acoustic instruments that are inspired to match the strange and beautiful noise that fills the air. Music with an on-the-edge intensity that is nonetheless handled with considerable rigour and attention to detail.

**The Free Jazz Collective** | by Paul Acquaro | February 26, 2017

"The trio of saxophonist John Butcher, pianist Matthew Shipp, and analog synthesizer player Thomas Lehn deliver powerful and unique music on 'Tangle'. [...] The chemistry of Butcher, Shipp and Lehn is apparent and with the analog synthesizer, their music is a truly refreshing."

**Dusted Magazine** | by Bill Meyer

"[...] This music does not tell a tale of dominance and submission, but one of three strong personalities bound within a tangle of knowledge and unknowing. [...] The music on Tangle stands apart from what all parties have made before, but makes sense of their individual and collective histories at the same time that it sounds unique unto itself."

**Point of Departure** | Ezz-thetics | by Stuart Broomer

"[...] What is remarkable about Tangle is that it isn't exactly a "tangle": the distinctions in the musicians' approaches instead invite a kind of independence of listening [...] in which we follow parts singly, in pairs and as three [...]. The experience is then all the more remarkable when there is evidently intentional interaction among the parts. We're invited to a benevolent conception of time in which it is conceived as both static and dynamic, both still and moving, like time experienced as two places at once. The final brief track is called "Tiefenschärfe" ("depth of field"), the title suggesting just how we might approach this remarkable music.[...]"

**All About Jazz** | by John Eyles

"[...] The first three tracks, together entitled "Cluster," play seamlessly as one continuous piece which takes up the lion's share of the album, with the six-minute "Tiefenschärfe" rounding it off. [...] The end result is a model of trio improvisation in that all three seem constantly aware of the others' playing [...]. Changes of mood or tempo do not happen at the behest of any one player but evolve organically from the playing of all three. The music is at its most thrilling when all three are playing full-on together — but even then, it never becomes, um, tangled. Just as impressive are the more measured, ensemble passages. If, as we must hope, this trio records together again, they should not name the group after this album!"

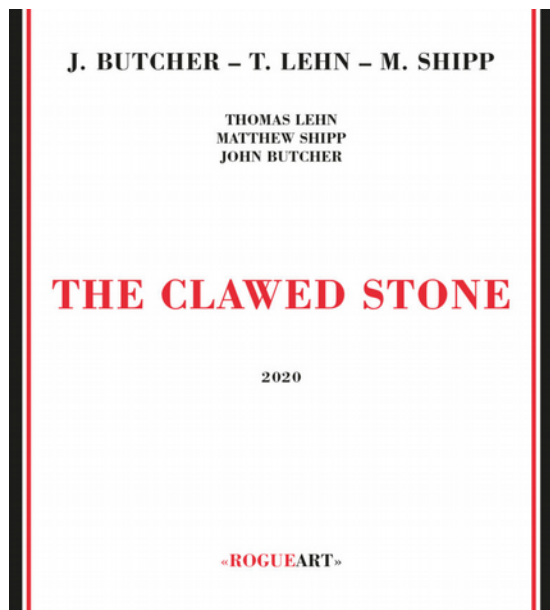
**Avant Music News** | by Mike Borella | September 4, 2016

"[...] Tangle documents a 43-minute set recorded live at London's Cafe Oto in February of 2014. What is unexpected, if not remarkable, about this recording, are the roles played by Shipp and Butcher. [...] Shipp reins in his outside leanings and takes on a more staid approach. [...] Butcher provides his intellectual take on sax blowing, employing extended techniques and controlled chaos when appropriate [...] Lehn is a perfect counterpart to the two instrumentalists, as his modernism fills the spaces that the other two create. [...] Tangle is aptly-titled. This is a dense, reflective piece that will take the listener some time to unpack. To use an appropriate cliché, Fataka has captured lightning in a bottle with this release."

**The Attic** | by Scorio

"There isn't really a sonic history for that combination."

2<sup>nd</sup> CD release 2020



## ***The Clawed Stone***

label: RogueArt

cat.-no.: ROG-0099

release date: July, 2020

<https://rogueart.com/product/the-clawed-stone/154>

1. Stitched Equivalence	6:44
2. Blurred and Sewn	2:06
3. Trippy Revelation	8:49
4. Off Kilter	6:03
5. Re(assemble	3:58
6. Links on Canvas	15:03
7. Tastes of Song	3:01
8. Tapping Signs	7:59

recorded on October 18th 2017 at Studio Sextan –  
La Fonderie, Malakoff, France

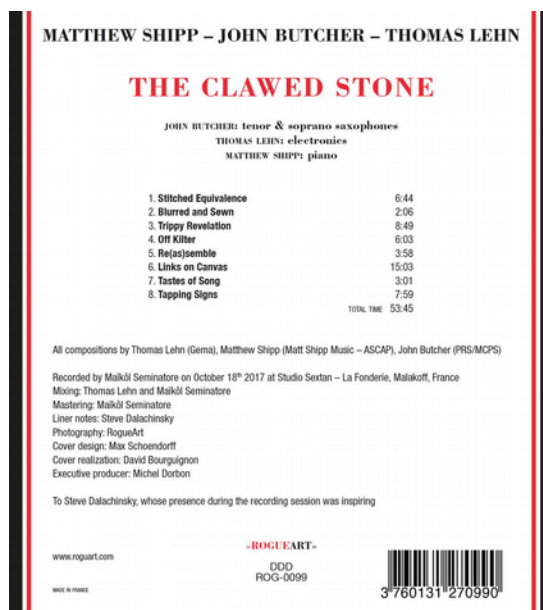
liner notes by Steve Dalachinsky

**Matthew Shipp** (piano), **John Butcher** (saxophones) and **Thomas Lehn** (analogue synthesizer) in a studio album recorded in France in 2017, a uniquely voiced collective trio of transformative improvisation, Lehn's additions and modifications blending perfectly with Shipp's solid foundations and Butcher's advanced technical expression, for an engrossing and expressive set of recordings.

– soundohm

*"They manage to perfectly combine the many elements of the music while always keeping their individual identities intact."*

– Rogueart



John Butcher, Thomas Lehn, Matthew Shipp, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Paris © Michel Dorbon

*The Clawed Stone* on □ discogs

shipp butcher lehn

## 1. a possible intellectual perspective

there's that over-done morphing of sound. let's call it the clean approach though too much DNA can destroy one's identity all together. the morphing approach appears to say nothing new though at times the means to achieve it appear to be. but it makes one wonder what a person might have sounded like if all those frills weren't added. in the case of S B & L what we have are diverse aspects/approaches to/of sound/music together managing to morph/combine/corrupt the many elements available to them while always keeping their individual identities intact. their languages have the unique ability to accelerate or de-accelerate showing how these 2 factors can balance or unbalance each other.

there's also the problem of continuity where one doesn't try to or know how to approach/integrate jarring elements as these 3 do, mixing both the physical & the meta-physical. i feel what is often missing in art is the transformation of the common place not so much the elevating of it as poet William Carlos Williams suggested. i am not assuming supremacy over his ideas but do feel that not enough artists challenge themselves by grappling with & including the metaphysical in their work. though easier for some than others, once tapped into, one's language can automatically expand & extend in all directions. so much of what i see & hear remains only on the physical plane & rarely incorporates or reaches the other side.

so what is the perfect middle ground? i'd say discontinuity within the continuous process of creating. either obvious or perfectly blended "chaos." what i've often referred to as chaotic structuralism. this is something these 3 have managed to attain. there are those factors of who YOU are & how you present yourself on & off the stage. sometimes rather than giving them enough, too much or leaving them wanting more we get the "leave them wanting...more or less..." am i making sense here? trippy inside revelation of sound energies. bright then suddenly dark auras & restraint / tight full melodic sound/tone - not crushed yet residing somewhere inside the gravitational pull while hovering just above the atmosphere. clarity & density. a non-linearity of what is the logical, oft times omitted foundation of music. the architecture on this disc comes in all forms. its structures or lack therein coming from a co-intermingling of many musical languages some of which have not yet been named. disparate yet intervening genres providing evidence for the proven & yet to be proven steeped in daring yet practical decisions. the artist alone with his own river to cross. & the artist who jumps right in. defying the odds these 3 jump right in creating something completely new/never heard before that comes out of & thru the past & into the future without relying on yet firmly rooted in a foundation of historic bones.

## 2. poetic underpinnings of 1 plus 1 plus 1

foundation founded foundry > at the studio here in a place where much of Rodin's sculptures were cast > the spell cast by 3 magical musical intertwining artists where the walls hang like Alber's homage to a square > like Rothko's solemn Chapel > like some undefined yet definitive lineage > say Malevich to Rheinhardt > the blurred & sewn distinctions > like Marca-Relli's collaged canvases resembling & reassembling the music > absorbed by & absorbing > not reflecting nor reflected nor bouncing off of but a new kind of abstraction/intervention/improvisation/validation > tastes of song at times but is not > body photo positive negative flow > un/conductorial placement where verge/merge as a life > as of being alive in being a life extension > microcosm in the studio so different yet the same level of artistry & newness as in the club > long & short of this amazing grace relax tension release tension > another walk with... one of my favorite things about the studio is its isolated intimacy compared with the shared intimacy of a live gig... the cushioned walls as if the musicians were enclosed in these paintings > Lehn on electronics < a kind of virtual keyboard > Shipp dense far away from his youthful days > Butcher low/mid-range trilling the notes his sound a gruff softness consumed by & consuming the lush colors > Lehn dancing as if his lens was strictly focused smack in the middle of this reflective frameless refrain-less ballad > a blissful surprise > she & i lounging on the couch embroidered with roses > a history of equations > tapping out signs > stitching equivalences together like a tapestry > breaths blown in toward the bell of the horn patching such restraint for such masters of improvisation > no pressure > raw movement crafting fugue states & powerful singularities > Butcher letting loose a barrage > central collisions > Shipp & Lehn adding the tones like a scientific manual on shades & degrees of color come to life through sound > wobbly > peeling the layers gently luxuriously precisely > uneven electro-tapping > this is almost like primeval origin of blown out hands in caves reddened by the borders of creation > archaeopteryx i shout > Butcher later proclaims pterodactyl > yes prehistoric birds winked thump thump...some caw cry revealing revelatory red bursts of rebirths coming out of the clawed stone > working the links of the canvas spilling onto the floor > spreading over the landscape with the instinctual progression of tracks > we are here still here & extinction is the scaffold that holds all development together > crisscrossing the plus minus of light > about refraction & not reflection > steeled music/s (im)polite @ times soft/quiet transgression of itself > doesn't come back to but keeps away from the primaries of "I'm okay. You're okay" entering the "ALL" which surpasses the "IS" yet itself is the O.K. = the primary fix > an off kilter 3 note melody somewhere in the inside fabric > Butcher on soprano > it's imposed politick > weaving through the track like a fish through murky waters & coming up for air a bird transforming echoes but not mimicking the individual textures of the others > so distinct & so distinctly different as with each gradation of color in all those paintings by all those masters > technique supplanted by passion yet passion so well planted in technique > here/hear the logic/logistics changing dynamics inside the changes strung together as the buzz & hum co-mingle & saturate the soundboard leading to & reducing shock of the moment to its most common denominator > the singularity of seconds forming the WHOLE of temperance & temperament AKA > a flying fish > Lehn staying on a,n acoustic plane the oft uncalculated melancholy of the putt putt putt > the almost imperceptible wind entwined with mystery & imagination & again the fabric of what appears @ times to be the naked ear like what appears to be a monochromatic painting but like the best embodiment of color within the color not really monochromatic for if one looks deeply enough / listens deeply enough subtly hidden seemingly one dimensional but so profoundly interlocking ever changing dominoed fathomless & unbound ... distorting but not distorted long notes sub-tones those bottom 4 notes on the soprano > religious points > very sanctus & inner sanctum > take time to see what is inside / to sense what is there > born of & resumed metaphysical ping-pong > phenomenal circular breathing by Butcher > phenomenal organic breathing by the entire trio > **make that mold > break that mold** > as with the predictable so too the unpredictable when it comes to making choices but with/in the context of the unpredictable there is text in subtext being written & edited on the spot with no natural way of altering one's decision slow deliberate steps then following each other into an automatic buildup & there can be sudden failure or closure & then a grand resurgence of intense immediate idea (flow) / dynamics > at times the work itself is just as much about process as it is the process itself > often that process only exists as metaphor w/in the work > often it doesn't exist @ all for several reasons / the main being that more often than not it (the PROCESS) can not be seen/detected even while possibly being read into if completely effective or non-existent or... the gone expo against itself

as Butcher puts it at the end "sorry about that it was the foundry went right through me." as this music will go through you in only the most enlightening way.

**review** excerpts (on CD *The Clawed Stone*)

**All About Jazz** | by John Sharpe | December 4, 2020

"The unlikely conjunction of American pianist Matthew Shipp, most strongly associated with New York avant jazz, and British saxophonist John Butcher and German electronicist Thomas Lehn, two leading exponents of the European free improvisation scene, works like a dream on *The Clawed Stone*. ... The results are both totally unpredictable and yet strangely logical. Each of the eight cuts defies description in its density of event, fast mutation and episodic shape shifting. It's impossible to know whether a response will be sympathetic or disruptive, and in fact there is a fair share of both.

While avoiding overtly jazzy tropes, Shipp nonetheless remains instantly recognizable and true to himself. His rhythmic figures provide an accessible entry point to the improvisations, but one which is often swiftly subsumed. Butcher manipulates the overtones and harmonics of the saxophone, deploying them in unexpected and oblique ways. Lehn is both wild card and colorist. At times he blends closely with both Shipp and Butcher, only to generate thrilling dissonance as he diverges. ...

All three players of the three deploy their vocabularies for surprising outcomes... It's a fascinating meeting which draws everyone away from their normal centers of gravity, only to find a fertile common orbit."

**Nieuwe Noten** | by Ben Taffijn | December 5, 2020

"In the fall of 2017, Matthew Shipp encountered saxophonist John Butcher and analog synthesizer Thomas Lehn in a French studio, recordings RogueArt released under the title '*The Clawed Stone*'. The three find each other in a rich, but also strikingly unified sound palette, in which the combination saxophone - analog synthesizer - piano works out particularly well. The contributions of Butcher and Lehn in particular appear to overlap considerably, producing clouds of sound against which Shipp can contrast his inimitable solos, with the best example 'Tapping Signs'. And yes, this trio also excels in creative expression. The beautiful 'Trippy Revelation' is without a doubt a highlight: sharp, somewhat disruptive contributions enough, but Shipp can conclude with a completely at odds with fragile solo."

**The Free Jazz Collective** | by Gregg Miller | December 2, 2020

"Compared with *Tangle*, on *The Clawed Stone* Butcher more consistently emphasizes the outside of tone-making for the saxophone. ... On *The Clawed Stone*, you rarely hear that distinctive tenor lushness which appears on *Tangle*. At first, Thomas Lehn's contribution is just to add some ear fuzz and grit, but then his manipulation becomes more intrinsic—always at the edges, but subtly off-setting what is central—phasing, adding vibrating harmonics, feedback, clicks, bumps — just enough random to make it feel alive and unpredictable. Shipp's rotating triads subtly sync with Lehn's colored fogs and echo bursts. The added feedback electronics place Butcher's trilling and vocalizations in an environment governed by forward-looking intention rather than tradition. The Shipp/Butcher/Lehn effort allows the accidents and incidental electronics to have their own say. Shipp in particular allows more space to let be what will be. From the listener's perspective, I find my ears a bit more open, too, wondering how the sounds will fill out a home together— the smooth, the raucous, and the rough. "Links on Canvas" is lovely delicate, truly the plum of this outstanding record."

by **Clifford Allen** | December 7, 2020

"The *Clawed Stone* is a different animal. A trio featuring Shipp, John Butcher on soprano and tenor saxes, and Thomas Lehn on electronics. ... The Butcher/Shipp/Lehn trio has met before, on *Tangle* (Fataka, 2016), a live 2014 improvised recording at Café Oto in London. ... There is a certain formality despite the free playing. Shipp and Butcher in turn imitate and support one another, carrying pulse, groove and melody. Thomas Lehn is the wildcard with his idiosyncratic electronic beats, squawks, muffled fuzz noise, oscillating atmospherics and other unexpected insertions. ...

It's interesting but perhaps not surprising that Shipp would have a fair amount in common with British saxophonist John Butcher, considering the fact that both can bend their instruments — and sound, and space — in pretty striking ways. The pair have released two discs on Fataka, one duo as well as a trio with German electronics artist Thomas Lehn. The *Clawed Stone* (RogueArt 0099, 2020) finds the latter configuration in a program of open improvisations that hew closer to breathability and grace than this configuration might've been privy to on prior releases. Lehn's glitches and live sampling, however, add a touch of instability to keep everyone on their toes."