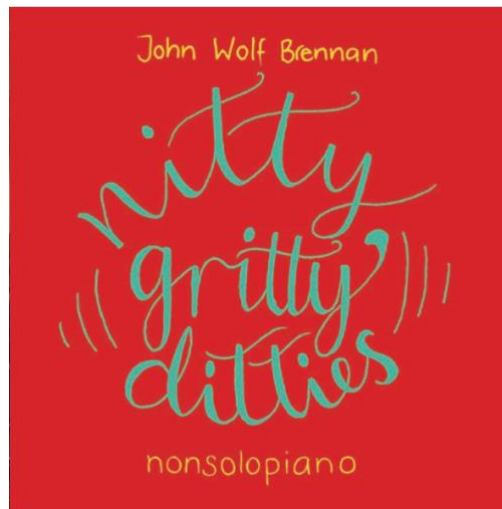


HIS VOICE
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The first part of John Wolf Brennan's red trilogy and the Friendship of Pago Libre and Soon

Thirty-three cover versions and a palindrome for nonsolopiano,
and a bouquet of surprises by two related bands.



In addition to many other projects (often inspired by the fine arts), Irish-Swiss pianist **John Wolf Brennan** has published two colour trilogies in the past, which relate to Vasily Kandinsky's postulate of three basic colours, to which three basic geometric shapes are assigned. The albums **Circle of Coherence** (1989), **Iritations** (1991) and **Text, Context, Co-Text & Co-Co Text** (1994) form the *blue trilogy* (to which the circle form can also be attached). The *yellow trilogy* (related to the triangle signifying exploration of possibilities from different angles): **Well-Prepared Clavier** (1998), **Flügel** (2002) and **The Speed of Dark** (2009). In 2021, the first volume of the *red trilogy* appeared: **Nitty Gritty Ditties**.

Brennan feels red as a square, a reflection of emotion, a heartbeat, a certain amount of erotic energy (but condensed and sublimed), a little (cultivated) anger and a lot of extra courage. The name of the album itself is derived from the term ditty, which is a simple song that a mother sings to her child, but there is also a certain depth and complexity in this simplicity. Adding the word gritty expresses the heart of the matter, the very essence. And ditties are simply trifles.

The subtitle "nonsolopiano" then refers to the fact that in addition to classical or prepared piano, melodica, toy piano, Rhodes, Wurlitzer and Hammond organ are also played here. About the construction of the work, Brennan says: "It is a great challenge to try to deal with the works of real giants. It's much easier for a pianist to play his own stuff than to dare to play "covers" (that's a pretty weird word – I hope my interpretation serves more as a kind of dis-discovery), because in this case the critic can't compare them to the "originals". Whatever that means in the context of music, at any given moment there are countless confluences. At one point someone might become a "unique" voice, despite the fact that the universe

already sounded millions of years ago, and will continue to do so. The best we can hope for is to be a little whisper in the eternal sound ocean.”

Brennan does cover a long period of time on this nearly seventy-four-minute opus. The oldest interpreted author is Thomas Ravenscroft (1582-1635), the youngest Yann Tiersen (1970). The same is true of genres. There are several classics led by Béla Bartók, whose cycle «Microcosm» is represented by four pieces, which intertwine with the album significantly like a red thread or perhaps form a kind of jingle, but also Aram Khachaturian or experimenter Cornelius Cardew. Jazzers (Pat Metheny, Chick Corea, Steve Swallow, Carla Bley, Bill Evans, Miles Davis, Abdullah Ibrahim, Charlie Haden, Kenny Wheeler, Don Grusin) are richly represented here, as well as more or less rock-related people like Tom Waits, Lars Hollmer associated with the R.I.O. (Rock in Opposition, Fred Frith e.a.), and last but not least, Paul McCartney and the Rolling Stones.

This amalgam actually markedly begins by connecting the Rolling Stone composition «We Love You» with Mani Matter's song about the «Eskimo», who bought a harpsichord and was killed by a polar bear, that sounds almost like Filip Topol. The esprit of the original authors is often clear here, and in Shankar's song «Song For Everyone», for example, you almost feel like a sitar. Likewise, «Tango» is Waitsonian and McCartney's «For No One», sung by Anna Murphy, clearly recalls the Beatles' melody.

But there is always something extra. It is a kind of warm or even hot yearning, and surprising arrangement details are given with extraordinary ease. Of course, there is also a remelted Irish folk song, which is reminiscent of Brennan's fondness for folk music. And the icing on the cake is the three-and-a-half-minute micromedley XEDNiINDEX, where we hear excerpts of some songs first backwards and then straight. The individual tones are connected here in a completely new composition, and that's what this whole recording is about. Definitely not just a tribute to role models, but just their reconnaissance in a new dimension.



John Wolf Brennan is also the only original member in the current line-up of the international group **Pago Libre**, which now includes horn player **Arkady Silkloper**, violinist **Florian Mayer** and bassist **Rätus Fisch**.

Their new album **FriendShip** was formed with the **Sooon** trio, which, along with Brennan, consists of singer (and occasional guitarist) **Sonja Morgenegg** and **Tony Majdalani** on all kinds of oriental percussion, with whom Brennan also played in the **Pilgrims** project. The vast majority here are again cover versions, which in this case are sometimes really more a tribute to their favorites.

This is especially true of the phenomenally performed «Soon» from the extensive composition «The Gates of Delirium» from the album «Relayer» by the group Yes, whose admirer and frequent performer is especially Šilkloper, who also participated in the arrangements here together with Brennan. And again, we find added value, whether it's female vocals with a slightly German accent or a frame drum and other small tweaks. Similarly, «The Great Gig in the Sky» by Pink Floyd honours the original, and the «Sarabande» from Jon Lord's solo album (from Deep Purple) is filled with a decent dose of modified world-music.

There is also the "recycled" already mentioned «For No One» by Paul McCartney, but in a larger cast and with another singer, she has an interesting shift to greater pleasure than on Brennan's solo album. And we go back to the ancient past in «ArabesGuggisbärg» based on a song from the seventeenth century. From «Sooon Youchz Now's» only album so far, we can find a composition by Morgenegg, «Der Mongolische Reiter» with her yodeling, which also appears in other places.

Overall, balladism is combined with agitation, and everything blends beautifully in a structurally rich polystylism and expresses the invocation of the spirit of togetherness and inner peace of the world. This is perfectly demonstrated especially by the ritual composition of Majdalani and Brennan, «Oasis of Hope», in which, of course, there are also dark undertones.

Simply, this Ship of Friends is sailing in the waters of hope and rising upstream to the mountain heights of the highest skyline.

John Wolf Brennan: Nitty Gritty Ditties
Pago Libre + Sooon: FriendShip
Leo Records (www.leorecords.com)