'They Speak for Themselves'

*Variation and Creation: The Story of Paz*, Paz (3CD, Jazz in Britain)

I used to see Paz play pretty regularly in West London, particularly in the upstairs room of The Kings Head in Acton, where they regularly gigged, and occasionally from outside the Bulls Head in Barnes – I rarely had the money to pay to go in. Their music was the kind of jazz that sometimes strayed in to bop, sometimes into Brazilian rhythms with lots of propulsive percussion, sometimes in to Miles Davis jazz rock exploration, always accessible and enjoyable although you didn't know whether to call it jazz, funk, jazz-funk or fusion. Not that it mattered.

*Variation and Creation* gives listeners three CDs of music from across the broad spectrum of sounds, from all of the line-ups from 1970-2019, along with an informative history and discography. I thought I had all the Paz albums but it turns out there are still six I need to hunt down, having had no idea there were fourteen in all , though this does include a Best Of and some live recordings. Nor did I know that Lol Coxhill had ever played with them, nor Allan Holdsworth, Jim Mullen or Brian Godding. I wonder who I didn't recognise back in the day in those pub venue?

Many of these tracks are live or demo recordings, all are previously unreleased: a deliberate policy by the compilers and selectors, although they make clear that many Paz favourites are included, albeit in different versions. It's a glorious mix of material: toetappers rub musical shoulders with freeform flute riffs, big bass riffs and delicate guitar shadings. Saxes weave in and out, vibes and keyboards fill out the sound, percussion emphasises the dynamics and propels the music along.

Sometimes there's ensemble playing, with a sense of withheld force and power; elsewhere the music is more disparate, several instruments dancing across the backbeat, darting to and fro, before clicking together in absolute unison. There's a killer cover version of Coltrane's 'Love Supreme' (with echoes of Soft Machine) that will shred your speakers if you play it too loud, a moody and mystical 'Solar Wind', not to mention the brief 'Mullenesque' which does what it says: foregrounds some exquisite guitar by the man himself.

Many people, like me, will know of and have seen Paz over the last fifty years, but I suspect I am not alone in not knowing how long they kept going, and of simply consigned them to 1980s pub jazz history. They've never received the critical consideration or praise their music deserves, so I hope this triple album will help do both of that. It's great stuff, and not scared to showcase or hybridise all its influences and inspirations. *Variation and Creation* is a spot on title, and this is a fantastic album that is currently on constant rotation on the stereo.

Rupert Loydell (480 words)