



**Frank Gratkowski/
Simon Nabatov**
Tender Mercies

CLEAN FEED
★★★★

Luis Vicente 4tet
House In The Valley

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From its first batch of 2023 releases, here are a pair of contrasting albums from the Portuguese label Clean Feed.

Frank Gratkowski and Simon Nabatov are both entrenched in the Cologne scene, and have frequently played together in various settings. The live recording *Tender Mercies* was made in January 2022 at The Loft, one of Germany's leading alternative jazz and improvisation venues, which has its own in-house studio feeding into the performance space. Gratkowski commands an impressive array of alto saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet and a pair of flutes, changing his rate of rapidity with harsh clucks, high blasts and a curved hardness. Nabatov operates as a complete ensemble, his piano given to the many roles of rhythm, soloing and rainfall patterning.

The pair pace out notes and phrases in a careful relationship, Nabatov rippling high and thundering low, Gratkowski probing the limits of his horns. Reed friction and spittle-passage are closely caught by the microphones, as a gentle inquiry grows towards a scamper. Flute brings a spell of softness, then bass clarinet rips with percussive jaggedness, raw and writhing out of its restraints. Nabatov drops nervy patterns, and the duo possesses the powerful dexterity of dancing beasts. Gratkowski frequently switches horns during a piece, chasing an ideal palette. Nabatov splits his brain completely, setting out divergent lines with each hand, which of course complement or contrast with each other continually.

House In The Valley finds two Americans in

Portugal, tenor saxophonist John Dikeman and bassist Luke Stewart, joining up with trumpeter Luis Vicente's 4tet, which also includes the Dutch drummer Onno Govaert. It's another voluble live set, this time captured in Caldas da Rainha in July 2021. These are Vicente compositions, but largely having the feel of old-school free-jazz, very deftly organized.

House In The Valley has a big, tough sound. Dikeman indulges in cerebral roughhouse, while Govaert's drums are full-on, lashing and shimmering cymbals, kicking bass drum and rampaging sticks. Stewart is continually on the run, extremely low and fulsome in his strumming ecstasy. The second track has a firecracker bluster from the leader, with Stewart brutally at one with his instrument. A measured construction moves to a riled-up awakening, then a slow-motion passage with sparse horn-smears, and ultimately an acceleration to a climax delivered. This is Vicente at his most aggressive, his solo and trio works tending toward quiet tranquility.

—Martin Longley

Tender Mercies: Turn Of Events; Tender Mercies; Safe Home; Cagey; Layers Of Disguise; Surfaces; Disgruntled Settlement. (49:57)

Personnel: Frank Gratkowski, alto saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet, flutes; Simon Nabatov, piano.

House In The Valley: Anahata + Little Dance; Luisa's Laugh + House In The Valley. (67:15)

Personnel: Luis Vicente, trumpet; John Dikeman, tenor saxophone; Luke Stewart, bass; Onno Govaert, drums.

Ordering info: cleanfeedrecords.bandcamp.com

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