

August 2010

Mark Lomax TrioThe State Of Black
America

Inarhyme 1005 | ★★★

**Lomax (d), Dean Hulett (b) and Edwin Bayard (ts). Rec.
2007**

The boldness of the title is matched by an intensity of the group sound. 'Stuck In A Rut,' a pressure cooker opener sees the trio come fizzing into life, thrusting a low slung blues between the kind of hard swing and insistent, percolating ostinato that draws equally on the legacy of Art Blakey and Ornette Coleman. All of the players up the ante but Lomax, a relatively unknown quantity in the UK who has nonetheless worked with big names such as Clark Terry, Azar Lawrence and Billy Harper, asserts himself in no uncertain terms. His snare sound is rugged yet precise

and his bustling drive on the kick drum bolsters the whole ensemble voice to create the impression of a bigger group than a trio. However, much of the music elsewhere really hinges on touch-sensitive interplay between the players, particularly on the easier tempos, no more so than 'The Power Of Knowing', a smart piece of rhythmic trickery which ebbs and flows between mid and fast tempo, with the drums and bass bucking then breaking to ballad pace before they quicken into complex time that implies a 12/8 but constantly stutters around Lomax's resonant offbeats. This kind of small group narrative intricacy can be traced to Oliver Lake and Henry Threadgill and further back to Dolphy and Mingus, but it is perhaps the latter's inclination to gospel that decisively informs some of the most fervent eruptions of Lomax's trio, a timely reminder that the avant-garde may well have begun in the pew of a black church. In any case, this is an impressively conceived and executed piece of work from the drummer-leader, one in which the gravitas of the title is adequately matched by the depth of both the composing and improvising of the trio.

Kevin Le Gendre