

MARK O'LEARY:
SIGNS
(FMRC214-1106)

Mark O'Leary (guitar)
Steuart Leibig
(6-string electric contrabass),
Alex Cline (drums, percussion)



From the poignant acoustic guitar opening track this album promises something special and *Signs* covers an amazing amount of musical ground from slow and haunting electronica to hi energy free improv. Recorded in California, the success of much of this music is down to the excellent playing of leading American musicians Alex Cline and Steuart Leibig. If anything *Signs* is an interpretation of Irish guitarist Mark O'Leary's wide musical language from cool jazz to post Derek Bailey, each track appears to succeed on its own merits..

Irish guitarist Mark O'Leary is one of the most exciting and prolific improvisers to appear on the European and American scenes in a long time. Most of his previous albums have been released on the Leo label and *Signs* is his first for FMR. Featuring West Coast-based musicians Steuart Leibig on six string electric contrabass and Alex Cline on drums and percussion, *Signs* is a powerful and challenging set of performances.

Born in Cork in 1969, O'Leary describes himself as 'socially phobic' and as a 'loner'. If so, he's also a man of great ambition and courage. His determination took him to LA in his late teens to study at the prestigious Musicians Institute and has led to recordings and tours with some heavy company.

Over the last seven years, he's worked with the great Canadian pianist Paul Bley (a long-time hero and inspiration for O'Leary), bassist Steve Swallow, Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko, the hugely gifted violinist/violist Mat Maneri and a whole clutch of others. Albums like *Chamber Trio* (Leo 425) with Maneri and pianist Matthew Shipp, *Levitation* (Leo 445) with Stanko and drummer Billy Hart and *Awakening* (Leo 460) with Swallow and Swiss percussionist Pierre Favre have all earned critical praise and have made a lot of fans sit up and take notice.

Each album so far has been a little gem - each one a different trio - and the listener can hear how each musician's playing changing and adapts through their interaction. Sometimes the music is fragile and delicate as if held together by the thinnest of fibres. Sometimes it's strong, robust and virile. Then at others it just spills forth in torrents and waves with elemental force and violence. Yet it's all Mark O'Leary.

Though he locates himself and his music firmly within the Avant Garde and sees himself primarily as an improviser, O'Leary transcends facile characterisations and expectations. His style and approach are neither the *Sturm Und Drang* of musical hyperbole or the desperate minimalism that hides a paucity of ideas. >>>

TRACKLISTINGS:

1. Tilt
2. Falling
3. Skrakk
3. Signs
3. Want to know a secret
3. Bye for a while
3. Headphase

All compositions by Mark O'Leary except (2) and (3) by O'Leary, Leibig, Cline
Recorded at Castle Oak Studio, Calabasas California, October 2003

Recording Engineer: Rich Breen. Assisted by Hatch Inagaki

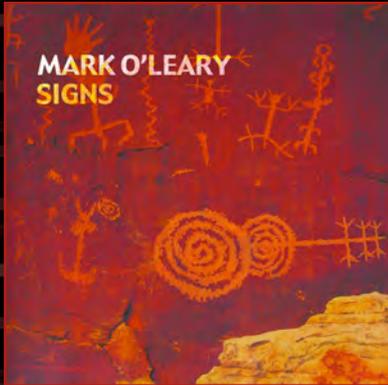
Post Production: Donncha Moynihan at Hub Studio, Cork

and Fin Corcoran BPM Studio, Cork

Produced for FMR by Trevor Taylor

CD Design : Ewan Rigg



**MARK O'LEARY**
SIGNS

>>> His music is one where texture and form are at least as important as the notes or beats each musician plays. In fact, it is the care and imagination with which he builds his soundscapes that actually make his music so approachable and accessible.

Ask him about his influences and the list seems to continue forever, taking in Radiohead and Boards of Canada from Rock Music, Pat Metheny and Terje Rypdal from Jazz and composers like Ligeti and Reich. One thinks that the guy is either utterly pretentious or a cultural

glutton. In fact, O'Leary takes something from each of those composers or musicians he admires but makes it his own. As poet T.S. Elliot once said, "A good poet doesn't borrow, he steals." So, Gyorgy Ligeti and Arvo Part are there in the otherworldly vocalised sounds and textures one hears and Reich is there because sometimes less really is more. And Metheny and Rypdal are masters of textural improvisation. Yes, and even BOC and Radiohead can be heard in the controlled violence and directness that often bursts forth, as can the influence of Finnish percussionist Edward Vesala whom O'Leary describes as a major influence.

Signs is all of these things and matches O'Leary with two musicians just as searching, eclectic and determined as he is. Both Cline and Liebig choose to play Rock, Jazz, Classical or Free Improvisation according to the stimulation offered by the setting and their playing partners, not according to industry demands or insistence. This is perhaps O'Leary's most sophisticated and successful record to date, the one that most clearly achieves some, at least, of his aspirations. And quite a bit of that is down to Cline and Liebig. It's a heaven-made match and let's hope it's one that can continue despite the distances of geography and competing performance schedules.

O'Leary is hungry for success but that's not the thing that drives him. It's as if, he's forever seeking that perfect piece of music, that perfect sound, that perfect combination of musicians. Whether he'll ever find it, I'm not sure. One thing I know is that it's going to be one hell of a ride and I'm going to enjoy following it with him.

duncan heining
January 2007

