

SIGNAL to NOISE

Robert Stillman

Horses

Mill Pond MP004 CD

Robert Stillman's background playing jazz in Portland and New York City provides a shortcut into the heart of his debut solo album, *Horses*. It's also a cheap shot: although the album refers to jazz via arrangement, melancholy and fluidity, Stillman's music is closer to wayward composers like Pascal Comelade or Nick Palmer of Directorsound. Like those artists, Robert Stillman knows that accessing the freedom of the moment isn't necessarily about the wild ride of the free jazz blow-out. His music works at breathing pace, bringing in melodies and slowly building harmonies and contexts as he spins these elegant tunes into the night sky. While Stillman's

music is cinematic in scope, it is not 'soundtrack for non-existent film' material, as *Horses* is a complete and evocative document of itself. (If anything, it sounds like incidental music played alongside an old silent film.) Full of gorgeous sweeps of melody, flecked with ripe puffs from clarinet and saxophone, occasionally ebbing back to form puddles of quiet repose, and arranged with idiosyncratic intent, *Horses* feels a little too self-contained to attract a wide audience.

However, for those who access the cracked core of the album, its sepia flashbacks and tilted moods yield endless pleasure. An overlooked example of textbook understatement. **Jon Dale**