

Saturday 2nd January, 2010

JAZZ

GEOFF EALES
TRIO

Master of the Game
(Edition/Planet)

Welshman Geoff Eales may never have created this masterful music had he remained an accompanist for such wildly diverse stars as Tammy Wynette, Shirley Bassey and Jose Carreras. Jazz is richer for his decision.

The album's title refers to Herman Hesse's masterpiece *The Glass Bead Game*, which has also inspired the second track, *Magister Ludi*. That book is certainly a heady stimulus and Eales's response rises to the challenge, *Magister Ludi* having both majestic solemnity and flaring imagination.

After an initial statement of a sombre



theme from Chris Laurence's bowed bass, Eales's piano begins a series of profoundly

moving embellishments, while Martin France's martial drumming unwinds to a looser impressionism.

Lawrence plays a brooding solo with that thick-pile sound of his before France devises luminous cymbal textures behind the piano as the piece unravels to a lighter-than-air conclusion. Among the stream of exceptional compositions and beautifully open improvising, Eales and his colleagues pay tribute to the late Esbjorn Svensson (*Lachrymosa*), whose own trio never reached such heights.

John Shand