

GLOBE UNITY: DENMARK



In Our Own Sweet Way

Carsten Dahl/Mads Vinding/Alex Riel (Storyville)

The Meeting

Hans Ulrik/George Colligan/

Jesper Bodilsen/Anders Mogensen (Blackout)

Precessions

Niels Praestholm/Gyroscope String Trio (Embla)

by Donald Elfman

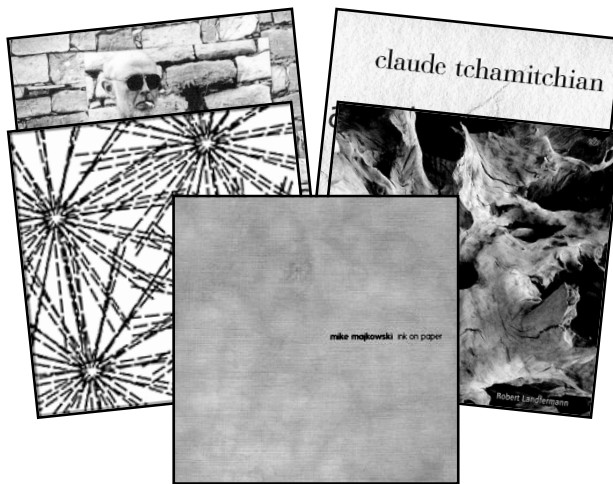
Denmark has long been a vital hub of jazz activity. Many of America's finest traditional players have gone there to work and even live, including saxophonists Stan Getz, Ben Webster and Dexter Gordon. And the country has subsequently produced numerous practitioners of jazz bass, most famously Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen.

Pianist, Carsten Dahl, bassist Mads Vinding and drummer Alex Riel have had a world of experience playing behind some of the world's great jazz players. *In Our Own Sweet Way* is 2005-07 performances from the Copenhagen Jazzhouse and shows the trio's versatility and consummate musicianship on mostly jazz and popular standards. Of special note are: a Danish Christmas song, "Maria Gennem Torne Gar", which finds each player contributing lovely individual color to make an emotional whole; a staggeringly intimate version of the rarely performed "The End of a Beautiful Friendship", suggesting that the hard work comes when love starts and Cole Porter's "Night and Day", a virtuoso display for all.

The Meeting reunites pianist George Colligan with two Danish musicians from his near and more distant past - saxophonist Hans Ulrik and bassist Jesper Bodilsen. Add fellow Dane, drummer Anders Mogensen, to the mix and you have a very simpatico quartet. All the players contribute tunes and they also tackle standards including Kurt Weill's "My Ship", which they turn into a dark, haunting ballad. The saxophonist's jaunty title tune gives the soloists nice stretching room while Mogensen celebrates the New York times of Colligan and Ulrik with the lovely waltz "NYC Revisited". Colligan offers some beautiful slow pieces that showcase a fine ability to evoke moods and play to the strengths of these talented collaborators.

Bassist Niels Praestholm, violist Bergmund Waal Skaslien and cellist Alain Grange, as the Gyroscope String Trio on *Precessions*, spin out compositions and improves that, appropriately, move freely in a number of directions. They call the former Improscopics and there are four short ones that set apart freeish jazz pieces that include Simon Spang-Hanssen (saxophone and flute) and Håkon Berre (drums and percussion). One track is a true surprise: "Three Letters" is a live performance that highlights the bass clarinet work of Danish jazz godfather John Tchicai. The strings provide the sonic framework for his excursions and also go adventuring on their own. The whole recording is that kind of directed, yet seemingly unscripted, trip.

For more information, visit storyville-records.com, blackoutmusic.dk and nielspraestholm.blogspot.com



Solo Barre Phillips (Kadima Collective)

Another Childhood Claude Tchamitchian (Émouvance)

Walcheturm Solo Christian Weber (Cut)

Null Robert Landfermann (Jazzhaus Musik)

Ink on Paper Mike Majkowski (Creative Sources)

by Andrey Henkin

It is remarkable to think that in just over 40 years, the role of the acoustic bass has been completely upended. Once solely a rhythm section instrument with only a handful of practitioner-leaders is now encouraged as a solo voice. Indeed, any improvising bassist worth their salt is expected eventually to make a solo bass album, to demonstrate their command of texture and timbre, extended technique and extreme tonality. Unlike the scattered forays into the genre by 'straightahead' players, these unaccompanied expositions almost always traffic in original music and/or spontaneous compositions.

Barre Phillips got the bass wheel rolling in 1968 with *Journal Violone* (Opus One) though the elder statesman of avant garde bass playing would probably be loathe to take credit for the dozens of albums that followed (to say nothing of his championing of multi-bass recordings). But he remains committed to the form, releasing a new solo album every several years. *Portraits*, recorded live in Austria in 2001, is a far different beast than *Journal Violone*. Years of playing in every conceivable improvisatory situation has given Phillips a broad perspective. So now, even as he still sounds totally modern, his playing has a quality of an old blues guitarist on a porch somewhere, an easy-going feel that can lull you into forgetting that he is still exploring on a very deep level.

Claude Tchamitchian, born in Paris to Armenian heritage, must inevitably, at least taken solo on *Another Childhood*, be compared to François Rabbath, another mixed heritage Gallic bassist. Indeed Rabbath, born a year before Phillips, represents the other major school of solo bass thinking - virtuosic technique in the service of melodic development. Tchamitchian has his Rabbath-ian qualities but has also absorbed the Phillips model, making his first solo album the most listenable under discussion. Pieces dedicated to such figures as Raymond Boni, Jean-François Jenny-Clark and Peter Kowald are clearly evocative and remarkably beautiful at times. Though Tchamitchian can summon a wide range of sounds and grains from his instrument, he is not particularly interested in an aural document as he is in a romantic tableau.

Christian Weber was born in Zurich, Switzerland and that lovely city is the location for this 38-minute seamless recording. This is not Weber's debut as a soloist - it's like getting a tattoo - but listeners may know him from recordings with Paul Dunmall, Oliver Lake, Co Streiff and the band Day & Taxi. Think a slightly more cerebral Leon Francioli and you've got the general idea. With no breaks in *Walcheturm Solo*, it is easy to forget that you are listening only to an acoustic bass. The music has a drone-like quality through emphasis on arco techniques that becomes mesmerizing, like the inexorable tides of the ocean or the amplified drip of water in a cave. Its impact comes

from this unrelentingness, surrounding you until you are breathing nothing but bass notes.

Robert Landfermann is a continuation of a long-standing tradition of German avant garde bassists, Peter Kowald and Buschi Niebergall in the forefront. His profile is rising working alongside such progressive pianists as Simon Nabatov and Achim Kaufmann as well as peers like drummer Christian Lillinger. It is a testament to Landfermann's vision that he didn't even wait until he exited his 20s before making his first solo disc. He emphatically states that all the music on *Null* is bass and bow, without preparations or effects. The caveat is necessary as otherwise some of the otherworldly sounds he elicits seem nearly impossible to be produced purely by a bass - maybe a creaky door in a windstorm or leaking warp coil but not a bass. But he also works within 'recognizable' tonalities like hornets' nest pizzicato.

Mike Majkowski is the baby of this group, a year younger than Landfermann. The Sydney, Australia-based instrumentalist waited even less time than anyone else before diving into the solo bass pool (still relatively a puddle). *Ink on Paper* is the only album here to use overdubs and that only for the plucky title track. The title is illustrative as are the drawn ants crawling around on the inner sleeve. Majkowski is still in that phase where he is fascinated by the sounds an acoustic bass can produce - arguably more than any other unamplified instrument. So connective tissue is somewhat lacking on the longer tracks as is the grand scope that the Barre Phillipses and Barry Guys of the world took decades to master. But it would be surprising if Majkowski doesn't revisit this form.

For more information, visit kadimacollective.com, emouvance.com, christianweber.org, jazzhausmusik.de and creativesourcesrec.com

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