

BMC OVERVIEW

The Budapest Music Center in Hungary has not only been a centerpiece for the finest European art and culture, but especially music. Americans in particular must be more aware of their contributions to 20th- and 21st-century, classical and chamber, progressive, jazz and creative improvised musics. Their CD catalogue is as impressive as the recent works of the ECM, ACF/Innova and Intakt labels.

Recent issues have also focused on modern New Music, reinterpretations of classical, symphonic or romantic period music, and even chamber music.

The Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra is a centerpiece for BMC offerings. Their range is wide, presenting the musics of Beethoven, Bach, Rachmaninoff, Dvorak, Liszt, Bartok and others. They collaborated with Arthur Rubinstein, and have more post COVID projects on the way, live and recorded.

The ESP Group is a progressive ensemble, having to do more with anticipation and shared feelings. They are not part of the American ESP-Disk label, but stand alone as an entity in and of themselves. *Colours* from 1999 is a fine example of their work.

Drôles De Dames 3 is an ensemble that plays music truly beyond category. Brass player Fabrice Martinez, tenor sax and synthesizer doubler Laurent Bardainne and saxophonist/vocalist Thomas De Pourquery alchemize the sounds of their influences to create original new 21st-century music all their own.

Trio Kontraszt lives up to their name in so many real and important ways. Their CD *Cryptic Scattered Images Of Time Forgotten / A Feledésbe Merült Idő Rejtélyes Képfoszlányai* is a complex title reflecting the mixed woven polyrhythms, space sounds, and earthy classicism extant. It's pure art ranging from early jazz through Latin and improvised music through the mind of multi-instrumentalist Steven Kovacs Tickmayer and friends.

Probably the most progressive project is *Debussy Now*, an acoustic base with slight electronic underpinnings. A reinvention of Claude Debussy's music, featuring lovely vocals backed by harp and guitar, this is a revelatory reimagination. The so-called impressionist music of Debussy is as much romantic as it is serene and alluring. Then there's a substantial jazz component, with improvised electronics and modern or straight ahead elements mixed in.

The late and great trombonist Carl Fontana is featured in a rare recording with the Hungarian Trombone Company ensemble, and should be on everyone's want list. Issued in 1998 *First Time Together* is their only issued release, but is a gem and a keeper. It likely is the final recorded epitaph for Fontana.

I was fortunate to work with producing and promoting live shows with Carl Fontana through his friend and bandmate pianist Carl Alexius, a New Orleans pianist/arranger/composer who came up in the ranks before living for many years in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Carl was a great player, friend and collaborator who has since passed. He was the President when I was the Business Manager of the Ann Arbor Federation Of Musicians. We brought Carl Fontana to Michigan for some memorable performances.

Rebellions (2) is a heady modern combo led by saxophonist Sylvain Rifflet and bassist Sebastian Boisseau that features acclaimed American drummer Jim Black and top drawer saxophonist Jon Irabagon. It is highly recommended to all.

Steve Argüelles is arguably one of the finest improvising percussionists anywhere. He is teamed with Csaba Palotai who plays acoustic guitar for duets on *Cabane Perchée*, ranging from improvisations, Bulgarian folk derivations, Asian-inspired pieces, and modern jazz. Argüelles even plays prepared guitar.

Miklós Lukács, on the hammered dulcimer, presents another Euro-American collaboration that is folk art unique unto itself. With the well-traveled bassist Larry Grenadier (Brad Mehldau, Fly, Pat Metheny, Ethan Iverson, Joshua Redman, Chis Potter, etc.) and the truly great Top Three drummer Eric Harland (Charles Lloyd, David Holland, SF Jazz Collective, Lionel Loueke), the combo Cimbalom Unlimited offers music truly without boundaries.

The remarkable Japanese via Berlin pianist Aki Takase adds to her substantial discography with *Isn't It Romantic?*, a program of mainly originals from Aki and award winning saxophonist Daniel Erdmann, showing both players in fine form.

Guitarist Gábor Gadó is building a reputation and discography that is as impressive as any. His recording *Whispering Quiet Secrets Into Hairy Ears* is as unique as anything by peers Bill Frisell, Lionel Loueke, Samo Salomon or Nguyen Le. In tandem with a saxophonist or string players, Gadó is reaching for previously uncharted territory, and deserves close listening, as are all his works. You need to seek out the music of Gábor Gadó.

Then there's the TransEurope Express Ensemble, led by the fine keyboardist Hans Lüdemann. Majid Bekkas is featured on oud, guembri and voice lending to the multi-ethnic vibe. A large ensemble, *On The Edges 1* features a five-part suite, Middle Eastern diet flavors, and great Euro players like trombonist Yves Robert, woodwind player Silke Eberhard and drummer Dejan Terzic along with a violin, guitar and bass complement.

Balance is a group that certainly lives up to its name. Their five-star CD *For We Know In Part* features saxophonist János Ávéd, also featured on the aforementioned Gábor Gadó recording. Balance is a trio of uncommon depth and substance. It's not only brilliantly played but fun to listen to.

XJAZZ! Is another BMC project in a live concert form. They have presented festivals, club dates, and showcase the BMC artists in Budapest and Berlin. Since 2014, XJAZZ! has presented up to nearly 100 concerts, recently including Syrian trumpeter Milad Khawam, and multi-instrumentalist Bobby Rausch among others. Next spring you might plan a trip to these events.

The art work on the CD covers of these beautifully packaged recordings is worth noting. They are striking, colorful and sweepingly captivating.

BMC prevails through the pandemic to create a vital, vibrant and important presence in the European pantheon of artful music happening right now!

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