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Daniel Erdmann's Velvet Revolution

Won't Put No Flag Out

BMC CD 282

Arrias-Davies-Ullén

Crystalline

Ausculito Fonogram AUF 005

Stripped to essentials, trio interaction among one reed, one violin and another instrument can result in wildly diverse textures as these two European sessions attest. With microtonal, fragmented and notated music overtones, Crystalline adds preparations onto the six improvisations created by Stockholm-based clarinetist/alto saxophonist Johan Arrias, Korean-born pianist Lisa Ullén and Welsh violinist Angharad Davies. Descended from the swinging chamber-jazz tradition on the other hand, is Velvet Revolution, featuring German tenor saxophonist Daniel Erdmann, French violin/violist Théo Ceccaldi and British vibraphonist Jim Hart.

With interactions alongside innovators including Elaine Radigue, Axel Dörner and Lucio Capace among many others the Crystalline trio members pare away many of their timbres so that the results fragment past microtonal to infinitesimal, with sliding drones and disconnected judders subsuming straightforward narratives. Furthermore depending on the expression, violin strokes and reed trills can sound almost identical, with only Ullén's measured piano pushes often moving the themes forwards. Still no matter how teeny and limited clips, stings and trills may be polyphonic patterns are open enough so all of the trio's strategies are audible. Thus strained rugged soprano breaths from Arrias are present on a track like "Rydal Mount", despite the sonic detours from string buzz and keyboard clicks. While the concluding "Coda" is just a designated summation, the reed whistles thinner than floss and inconsistent piano patterning on "Etude" concentrates into ratcheting drones when joined by upwards string sweeps as the true finale. These formal restrictions are also expressed on the antithetical "Rituals B" and "Rituals A", with the subsequent "Rituals A" building on the sharp, almost accordion-like tremolo propelled by the fiddler and reedist by adding bottom note affiliations from the pianist. The resulting ululating continuo creates a distinctive meandering exposition where each displayed tone is more discordant than the next.

Discord is not one of the adjectives you attribute to Won't Put No Flag Out. In fact some of the feathery and rhythmic tracks composed by Erdmann sweep very close to the territory staked out by Herbie Mann, George Shearing and the Modern Jazz Quartet. This is despite – or perhaps because – each of the Velvet Revolution trio members have experience working with more genre-shattering improvisers such as Vincent Courtois, Christian Lillinger and Joëlle Léandre. There are points, for instance where Ceccaldi's swirling sweeps and overt Belle Époque-like romanticism appear to relate more to the Budapest studio in which the CD was recorded than his upbringing in rugged Corsica. Additionally Hart's structured metal bar beats sometimes head into the rhythmic politeness more favored by Shearing and Mann's 1960s combos than the MJQ's quasi-funkiness. Also no matter how out of the ordinary the exposition of tunes like "Except the Velvet Flag" may be, a conventional recap of the head is frequently featured. That's why the most compelling material here is when the accent is on distinct swells and patterns.

A track such as "Justine" for example takes the form of a broken-octave discursion with Hart's echoing jitters and Erdmann's heavier glissandi arriving in tandem as the fiddler provides the underlying continuum soon intensified with tap-dance-like vibe pops. With harsh, sul tasto scrubbing from Ceccaldi, tougher tone variations from the saxophonist and percussive plinks from Hart, "Outcast" manages to judder irregularly without upsetting the track's linear sweep. Most notably the hint of continental romanticism expressed by the violinist on "Kauas pilvat karkavaat" is firmly swept aside with vibe pitter-patter and slithering reed-biting split tones that the sweaty interface can almost be felt. This leads to the most notable creation which manages the difficult feat of touching both passion and playfulness.

As an instance of realized, advanced trio exploration Crystalline can be commended. However as swinging as Won't Put No Flag Out is throughout, a more erudite program with fewer, lengthier tracks probably would have better displayed each player's skills.
—Ken Waxman

Track Listing: Crystalline: 1. Undercurrent 2. Rydal Mount 3. Rituals B 4. Rituals A 5. Etude 6. Coda

Personnel: Crystalline: Johan Arrias (clarinet, alto saxophone and preparations); Angharad Davies (violin and preparations); Lisa Ullén (piano and preparations)

Track Listing: Flag: 1. Won't Put No Flag Out 2. Except the Velvet Flag 3. La Tigresse 4. Give the Soul Some Rest 5. Justine 6. Over the Rainbow 7. Abstract Love Song 8. Outcast 9. Bring Me Moon 10. Kauas pilvat karkavaat 11. Justine, Again# 12. The Fuel of Life

Personnel: Flag: Daniel Erdmann (tenor saxophone); Théo Ceccaldi (violin and viola) and Jim Hart (vibraphone, percussion #)