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Trio Werchowska/Pontévia/Boubaker

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Décalage vers le rouge
Petit Label pl son 002

Ingrid Laubrock with Liam Noble & Tom Rainey

Sleepthief

Intakt CD 146

Two takes on the piano-drums-and saxophone trio end up with widely divergent emphasis on the colors accessible from the instruments' timbres. Free form as possible, the unbridled *Décalage vers le rouge* extends an identity that was initially advanced by pianist Cecil Taylor's pioneering units. More neutral and technique-oriented, *Sleepthief's* orientation leans towards the sometime free, sometime formalist trio of pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach. Each strategy is equally valid.

German-born, but a London resident since 1989, soprano and tenor saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock studied with some of jazz education's top names and won music prize. But despite this, she is still also part of F-IRE, an arts collective. An Oxford University music grad, pianist Liam Noble has worked with jazz men as traditional as flugelhornist Kenny Wheeler and saxophonist Stan Sulzmann – coincidentally one of Laubrock's teachers – as well as composer Moondog, and also explored outer-directed programming playing keyboards and samplers. Finally American Tom Rainey has established himself as the go-to percussionist for many advanced improvisers including saxophonist Tim Berne, bassist Mark Helias and trumpeter Herb Robertson.

Awards and schooling is a little more opaque for the other trio. However Bordeaux-based Mathias Pontévia, who plays a horizontal drum kit, is part of the Trio de batterie with Didier Lasserre and Edward Perraud and has worked with pianist Frédéric Blondy. Paris-based Nusch Werchowska is a band called Two Spoiled Strings with violinist Mathieu Werchowski, and has worked with electronics manipulator Uli Böttcher and American saxophonist Jack Wright among others. Toulouse-based Hedy Boubaker operates his own performance space, and works with dance companies as well as with fellow sound experimenters such as trumpeter Birgit Ulher

On *Décalage vers le rouge*, the interface is midway between dissonance and imperfection, with distended and stretched tones evolving in layered and clashing multi tones. The pianist scratches, bows and plucks her instrument's internal strings with the same intensity that she brings to keyboard pumps and pedal expansions. The drummer screeches a stick along cymbal tops and spansks, clanks and whacks other parts of his kit. Meanwhile the saxophonist expends blurry pressurized pitches from his horn.

At points Pontévia splinters his strokes as if an entire cymbal factory is exploding around him; other times it appears as if he's smacking his sole snare with a thick stick. Yet in a sometime reversal, the result brings out what could be the sounds of someone exploring a playroom full of percussion toys – including glass harmonicas, rattles, squeaky plastic animals and chains. On his side, Boubaker tongue slaps and exposes miasmatic peeps and metallic scrapes as he pitch-slides from staccato vibrations to intense buzzing. When bursts of key percussion don't mark his presence, he rams air through his horn's hollow body tube.

Trio Werchowska/Pontévia/Boubaker's characteristic track is "Plus près". Here intermittent reed chirps and basso echoes from the saxophonist quickly overcome Werchowska's inchoate drones and Pontévia's drum pops and gong smacks, until the pianist asserts herself. Splayed cadenzas reverberate against the piano sound board producing knife-edge supplementary tones, as piano keys are depressed for hollowed-out reverb. Meanwhile Boubaker growls irregularly and the percussionist batters and slaps his cymbals and

snare. As fractured tones progress in an adagio fashion, the track fades to a microtones – then disappears altogether.

Laubrock, Noble and Rainey also collectively produce their share of drum set clinks and clanks, as well as peeping reed trills and rolling keyboard note clusters. But over the course of nine tracks their influence(s) are a bit more exaggerated and obvious.

“Zugunruhe” for instance, comes into focus with the saxophonist expending Evan Parker-like distanced puffs, as Noble distributes Thelonious Monk-like note displacement throughout. Only Rainey’s light strokes appear unaffected, and by the finale it’s his kettle drum-like rumbles that resolve an unbalanced piece which earlier on threatened to capsize. Harmonic convergence is more obvious on compositions such as the title tune, summed up with rubato low pitches alternating with almost Woody Woodpecker-like chirps from Laubrock positioned with irregular octave jumps. Initially the saxophonist advances the theme with lip-bubbling slurs interconnecting with tremolo arpeggios from Noble and near-Native Indian tom-tom beats from Rainey.

Evolving in a contrary fashion to the other trio, however, this mixed British-German-American combo produces statements that are as lucid as they are hectic. Some tunes such as “The Ears Have It” even flirt with romanticism. Worked out with gentling dynamic overtones from the pianist and emphasized pauses, those melody snatches are knit together with distinct, but distanced blowing from Laubrock, zigzagging from low-pitched to mid-range. While Rainey clip-clops and cymbal smacks, Noble pats his keys and the saxophonist arcs her tone to sound identical note clusters in tandem with the piano.

Proof that there’s still plenty of life left in this sort of trio interface, the music on these CDs impresses without ever becoming indispensable. Still, depending on the listener’s proclivities, each can be appreciated.

-- Ken Waxman

Track Listing: Décalage: 1. Parsec 2. Plus près 3. Un renvoi vers l’onière 4. Etabli/Diminutif/Rien 5. Sursaut X 6. Optique du crabe 7. Radiosource 8. Sursaut mu

Personnel: Décalage: Heddy Boubaker (alto saxophone); Nusch Werchowska (piano) and Mathias Pontévia (drums)

Track Listing: Sleepthief: 1. Zugunruhe 2. Sleepthief 3. Oofy Twerp 4. Never Were Not 5. Environmental Stud 6. The Ears Have It 7. Batchelor's Know-How 8. Social Cheats 9. Amelie

Personnel: Sleepthief: Ingrid Laubrock (soprano and tenor saxophone); Liam Noble (piano) and Tom Rainey (drums)

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