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Oholo!

Mnogobolje

Sploh ZASCD 022

Fiil Free

Under Overfladen

Fiil Free Records FFR 0320

Trying to avoid geographical bromides when discussing these sessions, it's obvious that the compositions and performances on *Under Overfladen* are infused with a leisurely, echoing feel and those on *Mnogobolje* move with jittery, aggressive energy. Yet how much this can be attributed to Fiil Free's septet being based in relatively placid Denmark, whereas Oholo's seven players come from Slovenia with more ruptures in its history, may be moot.

What's most crucial is that the six Danes and one Pole on *Under Overfladen*'s don't allow the welfare state's ennui to effectively smooth out the program to uniformity. There are enough rugged tempo, melody and pitch changes to keep the six tracks expressive. In the same way the bustling fluidity that comes from the players on *Mnogobolje* is like the situation in their country which compared to other states of the former Yugoslavia is relatively placid.

Pianist Lars Fiil, who has worked with Thomas Eiler and Lis Raabjerg Kruse, composed all of *Under Overfladen*'s tracks mixing the tart and the tender. Contributions to the narratives are created by harmonizing Martin Fabricius' vibraphone with Henrik Olsson's guitar and sometimes Henrik Pultz Melbye's clarinet in an Øresund version of Cool Jazz. Other variations, as on "12-6", have vibe ringing and elliptical clarinet tones opening up the piece alongside keyboard clusters and progressions from double bassist Casper Nyvang Rask, culminating in seesaw blowing from Melbye and trumpeter Tomasz Dąbrowski. Moderated march tempo from drummer Bjørn Heebøll finally defines the track as it does on the introductory title track which moves from interlocked andante-paced glossiness to break free into chiming vibes, smeared surges from both horns and a tougher final pulse.

Although there are other instances of these hard-soft transformations, with, for example, pan-flute-like clarinet echoes facing piano key clips and cymbal scratches, the most obvious delineation of an opposing vision is “Omvendtom”. Treble and percussive it builds up to a crescendo of vibe plinks, swirling piano lines and eventually graceful, well-modulated capillary textures from Dabrowski that splinter to altissimo as they’re encircled by piano chording and tenor saxophone slurs. Metronomic keyboard clanks complete the piece.

If Fiil Free enlivens its tempered direction with shards of ratcheting explosions, then Oholo detonates from the beginning. Led by bassist Tomaž Grom from Ljubljana, who has worked with everyone from Michel Doneda to Zlatko Kaučič, three out of the six tunes on the CD were composed by drummer Vid Drašler, who is also in a trio with Tom Jackson and Daniel Thompson, since the idea is to provide a showcase for some of Slovenia’s most accomplished and atonal improvisers.

The disc starts out with an almost literal bang on “Blind Man’s Buff”, as Drašler’s cymbal shakes and drum rumbles back an Aylerian blast of glossolalia and split tones from saxophonists Jure Boršič (alto) and Andrej Fon (tenor), further driven by double bass string stops from Grom and Jošt Drašler plus tremolo strokes from guitarist Andrej Boštjančič Ruda. While the track is resolved as a vamping foot-tapper, solo strength come from the triple stroking scrubs of violinist Marko Jenič, whose speedy glissandi and string bending delineates the theme. By the time the final chipper “Influenced” is heard, the septet has defined itself as a fully functioning band with interlocking parts. That tune for instance, depends on backbeat percussion slaps, honks leaking from the saxes, guitar finger plucks, double bass strums and fiddle swills. With polyphonic cunning, the instrumental virtuosity is as conspicuous as chromatic motion.

“Shards I” reaches the zenith of Free Jazz expression, with its extensive exposition finally climaxing in a zany dance of joined instrumental extensions. Motifs which are previous revealed in the form of bird-like reed squawks, country-rock guitar echoes, slap bass pressure, Jenič’s pizzicato plucks and clarinet hiccups from Fon are intensified by the finale. Overall the tutti construction is voluptuous and voluminous. Tellingly, “Shards II,” written like its twin by drummer Drašler, confirms that energy music is not all Oholo can play. Ascending in pitch, but harmonically still, it advances in minimalist droplets with yearning tones from strings and reeds culminating in a withering crescendo.

Each septet demonstrates its mettle here by its creativity with expected geographically expected sounds and its brisk capability to play in further unexpected fashions.

—Ken Waxman

Track Listing: Under: 1. Under Overfladen 2. Stille Undren 3. 12-6 4. Tid 5. Omvendtom 6. Largo Con Moto

Personnel: Under: Tomasz Dąbrowski (trumpet); Henrik Pultz Melbye (tenor saxophone, clarinet); Lars Fiil (piano); Henrik Olsson (guitar); Martin Fabricius (vibraphone); Casper Nyvang Rask and Bjørn Heebøll (drums)

Track Listing: Mnogobolje: 1. Blind Man's Buff 2. Shards I 3. Shards II 4. Bluesness 5 Influenced

Personnel: Mnogobolje: Jure Boršič (alto saxophone); Andrej Fon (tenor saxophone, clarinet); Marko Jenič (violin); Andrej Boštjančič Ruda (guitar); Jošt Drašler and Tomaž Grom (bass) and Vid Drašler (drums)