

GLOBE UNITY: NORWAY



Memnon: Sound Portraits of Ibsen Characters
Ruth Wilhelmine Meyer/Helge Lien (Ozella Music)
In A Rag Bag

Karin Krog/Morten Gunnar Larsen (Meantime)
Voxpheria Tone Åse/Thomas Strønen (Gigafon)
by Tom Greenland

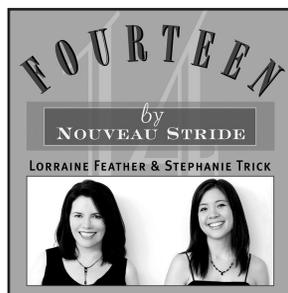
Jazz fans familiar with ECM recordings know about a certain slice of the country's 'cool' school but perhaps know little of artists like Bugge Wesseltoft, the rhythm team of Ingebrigt Håker Flaten and Paal Nilssen-Love, Jaga Jazzist, Supersilent, The Core and legions more that comprise Norway's active and eclectic modern jazz scene.

Memnon: Sound Portraits of Ibsen Characters features vocalist Ruth Wilhelmine Meyer and pianist Helge Lien in a series of composed improvisations inspired by the great Norwegian playwright's protagonists. The pair's modus operandi seems Stanislavski-ian, deeply immersing themselves in a character's emotions before letting the creative sparks fly. Lien's touch is gentle and ethereal, marking a zone for Meyer's plaintive, searching vocal flights, which range from whispers, growls and squelched notes with pinched upper partials to wailing helicopter yodels and ululations, the latter reaching powerful climaxes on "Hedvig", "Hedda" and "Peer and the Mountain King". "Ellida", "Åse" and "Nora" are all notable for their Billy Strayhorn-esque chromatic lyricism.

Another vocal/piano pairing, veteran Karin Krog's duo with Morten Gunnar Larsen *In a Rag Bag*, explores ragtime and traditional jazz repertoire, particularly Bix Beiderbecke and Fats Waller. A versatile singer and Norway's first internationally known jazz musician, Krog phrases effortlessly with a slightly smoky and breathy tone, never over-singing where a subtler touch will do, serving up a saucy scat solo on "Spanish Steps". Larsen is a marvel, a fine technician who deftly tackles the complex rhythmic convolutions of Scott Joplin's "Euphonic Sounds", his own "Olympia Rag" and Waller and Clarence Williams' "Wild Cat Blues", instantly adjusting his timing to accommodate rag, stride or boogie, often within the same piece, yet always maintaining his forward momentum.

On *Voxpheria*, vocalist Tone Åse and percussionist Thomas Strønen take the duo concept one step further, into the realm of improvised electronica. The '50s-era cover, looking like a set-piece from *The Twilight Zone*, aptly telegraphs the music within, a pastiche of textures - radio static, fizzling power-lines, crackling hearth-fires, howling wind, leaky faucets, subterranean drones, shimmering chimes, tearing paper, rusty springs, twanging rubberbands, boiling kettles, shuffling cards and the like - that create a synthetic soundscape through which Åse wends her way with poetry bytes (by e.e. cummings or Rolf Jacobsen) and wordless ad-libs, often harmonized and digitally looped in spontaneous counterpoint.

For more information, visit ozellamusic.com, karinkrog.no and gigafon.no



Fourteen
Nouveau Stride
(Relarion)

by Ken Dryden



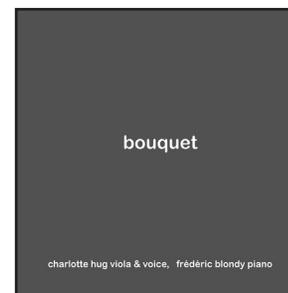
Tales of the Unusual
Lorraine Feather
(Jazzed Media)

Vocalist Lorraine Feather's gift for writing witty lyrics has put her on the map and garnered her both Grammy and Oscar nominations. Feather pens lyrics for decades-old gems by jazz greats with an engaging, at times conversational, singing style.

Pianist Dick Hyman previously worked with Feather and recommended that she listen to Stephanie Trick, a young St. Louis stride pianist. Once they met and played a few numbers, they discovered it was a perfect match, christening themselves Nouveau Stride. *Fourteen* includes new Feather lyrics and some of her earlier works, all played with gusto by the talented Trick. James P. Johnson's "Caprice Rag" becomes "Pour on the Heat", a historic narrative on the development of stride, Feather alternating between rapid-fire singing and narration as Trick provides romping accompaniment. Trick delivers a powerful rendition of Johnson's "Carolina Shout", long considered an acid test for stride pianists. "Vive Le Boogie Woogie" is an infectious boogie-woogie penned by Trick (which she plays with as much authority as stride) with a playful Feather lyric. Willie "The Lion" Smith's "Spanish Rag" reemerges as "The Tango Lesson", imagining a young lady's discovery of the sensuous dance while Duke Ellington's "Dancers in Love" transforms into "Imaginary Guy", a hilarious solution to a lady's problems with various boyfriends. Fats Waller's "Bond Street" began life as his impression of a day in the life of a London streetwalker; Feather's "California Street" transforms it into a nostalgic love story. Nouveau Stride will delight both jazz vocal and piano fans, due to the pair's tremendous chemistry.

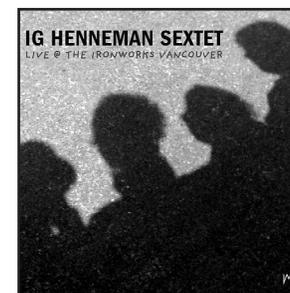
Tales of the Unusual blends humor and an occasionally eerie flavor as Feather collaborates with some of her favorite musicians, which include Russell Ferrante or Shelly Berg (piano), violinist Charles Bisharat and either Grant Geissman or Mike Miller (guitar). The captivating alto is a terrific storyteller, crafting lyrics that take on a more introspective nature in this collection while adding to the exotic air of the music. "The Hole in the Map", with music by Ferrante, is Feather's amusing story of exploring the Amazon. "Where is Everybody?" combines mystery and humor, with Bisharat spicing his solo with gypsy flavor. "Five" features music by Tony Morales (Feather's husband) and creative use of overdubbed vocals in a song about a young girl's obsession with the number five. "Get a Room" is a hilarious tale of opposites attracting with plenty of romantic fireworks, with Berg's engaging music and lively solos all around supporting Feather's engaging vocal. She revisits "Indiana Lana", an earlier work adding words to Duke Ellington's "Jubilee Stomp", singing a lively duet with Berg (a masterful stride piano player, among many things) about a female runner who outruns everyone and everything. Feather's imagery in the haunting "To Lie Another Day" describes loneliness in an atypical fashion. With the diverse *Tales of the Unusual*, Feather reaffirms her status as one of the most gifted lyricists and compelling vocalists.

For more information, visit lorraine feather.com and jazzedmedia.com. Nouveau Stride is at Metropolitan Room Mar. 28th. See Calendar.



Bouquet
Charlotte Hug/Frédéric
Blondy (Emanem)

by Ken Waxman



*Live @ The Ironworks,
Vancouver*
Ig Henneman Sextet (Wig)

What's the difference between a dog and a viola? The dog knows when to stop scratching. Of all the stringed instruments, it's the viola that gets the least respect, with this joke only one of hundreds. Yet because of its unique intonation the viola has become a favored method of expression for inventive improvisers like Switzerland's Charlotte Hug and the Netherlands' Ig Henneman.

The selections on *Bouquet* by Hug and Paris-based pianist Frédéric Blondy are perfectly designed to confuse types whose allegiance is to contemporary so-called classical music. Both have enough academic expertise to work in the notated milieu, but the dozen tracks here are improvisations, off-handedly displaying exquisite technical smarts while cooperating to create sound pictures that are extravagant without being egocentric. Most tracks consist of inside and outside piano tropes ranging from methodical to stratospheric, plus fiddle sweeps that encompass mangling, melding and mixing textures. The overlapping cadences create a genuinely moving program.

A track such as "Thalia Remontant" finds Blondy vibrating miniature cymbals resting on the top of the piano's internal string set, complementing Hug's low-pitched spiccato swipes. In contrast, "Rosa moyesii" is completed with a (faux?) sexy sigh from Hug after the two have methodically exposed parallel tonal chords, with the violist's instrument attaining cello-like resonance as she roughens her attack. Blondy is so skillful that on "Sombreuil" he creates a cavern-deep ostinato from pure pedal motion alone and then uses broken-octave keyboard jumps to define a response to Hug's melodic invention. Elsewhere embroidered textures oscillate so quickly and are so opaque that ascribing them to a particular instrument is nearly impossible.

The six Henneman compositions that make up *Live @ The Ironworks, Vancouver* include so-called classical references as well. Her international sextet is made up of bassist Wilbert de Jooede and multi-reedist Ab Baars from the Netherlands; Berlin-based trumpeter Axel Dörner and two Canadians: Montreal clarinetist Lori Freedman and Toronto pianist Marilyn Lerner.

Note the versatile turns on the final "A'n B", with the exposition moving from straightforward swing, replete with graceful trumpet lines and contrapuntal cascades from Lerner, to tougher sequences when honking bass clarinet explosions from Freeman and angled riffs from the violist take over. De Jooede's steady pumping personalizes the title of "Bold Swagger". Henneman's gift for descriptive lines are on display with "Prelude for the Lady with the Hammer", which could serve as a film noir theme. The group's abstract turn arrives with the deceptively titled "Light Verse". More like a dramatic epic, the juddering exposition include whinnying trumpet flutters, unaccompanied, altissimo reed squeals and jittery lines from Henneman.

More sessions like these and eventually there may be a dearth of jokes like: Why is a viola like a lawsuit? Everyone's happy when the case is closed.

For more information, visit emanemdisc.com and stichtingwig.com