

SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY • Paolo Alderighi, Stephanie Trick (pn) • ATCD 02 (61:57) available at CD Baby, Amazon & emusic

BROWN-HOMER-GREEN *Sentimental Journey*. **MORTON** *Grandpa's Spells*. **TRADITIONAL** *Just a Closer Walk With Thee*. **MEYER-LOESSER- DE LANGE** *I Wish I Were Twins*. **ELLINGTON-MILEY** *East St. Louis Toodle-O*. **BLAKE-SISSE** *Love Will Find a Way*. **JOPLIN** *Stoptime Rag*. **KAEMPFERT-GABLER** *L.O.V.E.* **LA ROCCA-SHIELDS** *Ostrich Walk*. **WALLER** *Handful of Keys*. **BLAKE-RAZAF** *Memories of You*. **McHUGH-FIELDS** *I'm in the Mood for Love*. **RODGERS-HART** *Isn't it Romantic?* **ARMSTRONG-GERLACH** *Swing That Music*. **BUTTERFIELD-JOHNSON** *When You and I Were Young, Maggie*. **ALDERIGHI-TRICK** *Travelin' Boogie*

Over the decades there have been several duo-pianists playing jazz—at times, as in the late 1930s–early '40s, up to three pianists at once (Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson, and Meade Lux Lewis)—but never two pianists at the same instrument playing piano four hands until Stephanie Trick and her now-husband Paolo Alderighi pioneered this a few years ago. To watch them at work in this vein is not merely inspiring but mind-boggling. Sometimes they play together, switching positions from treble to bass and back again, and sometimes they take turns playing a chorus or a half-chorus before the other takes over, but the effect is simply exhilarating. Moreover, Trick has grown as an artist and an improviser from her early days as “Queen of Stride Piano Recreation.” She no longer just copies her idols; she has (pardon the pun) tricks of her own to reveal.

What makes this disc so remarkable, even in the less spectacular tracks, is the way their divergent styles not only complement each other but have grown together. Two years ago, you could tell the difference between Paolo and Stephanie relatively easily: Trick was the one with the more swinging, percussive beat, Alderighi the one with the more lyric flourishes. But now, their styles have so rubbed off on one another that if you are just listening and not watching it's not so easy to tell who is who! Alderighi now swings harder and Trick improvises with greater assurance and more of a sweep to the keyboard. They have become the Janus-mask of jazz, a two-headed piano playing mechanism with both brains acting as one.

In her early years of playing stride, Trick was a copier of others' playing—an excellent one, able to capture the feeling and flavor of her models, but still, just playing what they played. Now she is growing as an improviser, and it is good to hear. Her aesthetic is still rooted in the 1920s and '30s school of stride piano, yet in the opening track (the title tune) both pianists seem to also be channeling a little of Errol Garner and early George Shearing. A surprising key change in the last chorus (down instead of up, but then up halfway through) brings this *Sentimental Journey* to a not-so-sentimental close.

Jelly Roll Morton's *Grandpa's Spells* captures some of the flavor of the original, yet has some Ken Kersey-like harmonic variants in it. The middle chorus swings instead of stomping, and later on they throw in a bit of shuffle rhythm for fun. (I loved it, but I can just hear Morton complaining: “No, no! You're playin' it *wrong!*”) They also have fun with Frank Loesser's *I Wish I Were Twins*, fractioning the pulse with an almost Latin sound, but by far the masterpiece of this set is *East St. Louis Toodle-O* (spelled this way on the CD cover and booklet, instead of the more familiar “Toodle-O,” because the song was named after a 1920s dance craze initially called the “todalo,” later spelled as “Toddle-O”). Here Alderighi and Trick take the early Ellington classic apart and put it back together again with multiple shifts in tempo (even switching to 3/4 time in one place), completely turning the music inside-out. Their rhythmic

variance here is astonishing, even throwing in a 3/4 waltz tempo at one point. They completely deconstruct the music and put it back together again, stride following waltz and then throwing the listener into off-rhythm limbo, suspending the harmony for a few bars, then getting back to the original melody, only this time in counterpoint. This playfulness continues through to the end of the piece, which finally ends on an unresolved chord, followed by a single bass note on the tonic.

Alderighi and Trick give *Love Will Find a Way*, one of Eubie Blake's less-well-known songs, a lovely waltz treatment in the first chorus before moving into stride. (Blake wasn't really a stride pianist—his style predated it—but he was certainly sympathetic to the younger pianists who played it.) Their duo-improvisation is a lot of fun, filled with surprises. Scott Joplin's *Stoptime Rag* is a look backward for Trick to the days when she played ragtime almost exclusively (in her pre-stride years), but here, too, the duo shifts the rhythm around, giving it a sort of Rhumba beat and playing a little behind the time for one chorus. Bert Kaempfert's *L.O.V.E.* is, perhaps, a bit less effective if only because it's a hard song to improvise on (how many jazz musicians have you heard attempt it?), its melodic and harmonic progression rather tame by jazz standards, but they make up for this with another unusual treatment of an old classic, the O.D.J.B.'s *Ostrich Walk*. Here, the duo produce more of the "rolling" beat of that band's successor, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, than the stiff ragtime feel of the original. At times, in fact, this rendition has almost a boogie feel to it, at other times it's swing. Fats Waller's famous *Handful of Keys* adheres fairly closely to the original in tempo as well as overall contour, yet Alderighi and Trick throw in some interesting variants that didn't occur to Waller, including a bit of counterpoint.

Blake's most famous song, *Memories of You*, starts off as a romantic ballad but gently slips into a medium-tempo swing half way through the first chorus. This, however, is but the first tune of a three-song medley, the other two being *I'm in the Mood for Love* and *Isn't It Romantic?* Both Alderighi and Trick are in a ruminative mood here, perhaps even a bit more wistful than on *Sentimental Journey*, and the sounds they produce are quite lovely. *Swing That Music*, one of Louis Armstrong's few compositions, moves into Waller-like stride action by the second chorus and never lets up, not even when they halve the tempo and indulge in some nifty running bass lines beneath the four-handed improvisation (they even slip in a little of Duke Ellington's *Jubilee Stomp* for fun). *When You and I Were Young, Maggie* is another of those tunes one wouldn't automatically think of as a jazz vehicle (it's one of those songs that goes along with *Silver Threads Among the Gold* and *Home, Sweet Home*), but the duo has some fun with it—just think of the way some jazz musicians of the 1930s "swung the classics." The recital ends with an original piece, *Travelin' Boogie*, which definitely has a Meade Lux Lewis-type feel to it (except for Jimmy Yancey, Lewis was my favorite boogie pianist, so I didn't mind). Perhaps you can think of it as the *Honky Tonk Train Blues* on the return trip home...in any case, they have a ball with it, at one point turning it into a modernistic-sounding *moto perpetuo* with rather advanced chords. (Lewis would probably have dug it, but I think Pete Johnson would have been lost.) Eventually they just get into a nice ride-out figure, and bring the tune (and the set) to a close.

The only regret I had in listening to this disc was that I wished a rhythm section had accompanied them. For those of you who'd also like to hear this, as well as see the duo in action, go to <http://jazzlives.wordpress.com/2014/04/01/stephanie-trick-paolo-alderighi-marty-eggert-danny-coots-a-night-at-the-rossmoor-jazz-club-march-11-2014-part-one/> and check out the videos there. You'll be amazed and delighted. Other than that, however, this is a gem of a disc.

Lynn René Bayley