

JOERG SCHIPPA

UnbedingT

Konnex

Was ist chamber jazz? I don't think anybody really knows. This term has been introduced a long time ago and generally used to denote numerous different phenomena. So, you could think Laurindo Almeida on the one hand and MJQ on the other. Oscar Peterson Trio, Jimmy Giuffre or Chico Hamilton. In fact, a lot of performers between Benny G. and Bennie M. And talking about Bennie Maupin, if you asked him for a definition, he might tell you just what he told me a couple of years ago: "limited number of musicians, no conductor, it can be acoustic or electric".

Anyway, it is good to know this when you listen to a new project by Joerg Schippa, called UnbedingT. Schippa is an experienced Berlin-based jazz guitarist. He's been in many bands before but is also a leader in his own right. Developed interest in guitar at the tender age of 12 and later studied with Walter Norris, John Abercrombie and Dave Liebman among others. Recorded with the amazing Kenny Wheeler. And now he's got his new band. And a Band of Gypsies it is, indeed. Their backgrounds, starting points and destinations are so different and varied. So familiar and yet exotic. I guess the key word for both the project and the recording might be "unique". Have a look at the line-up. It's a pianoless quartet. Well, this has been no news for about sixty years now. But it's also a bassless quartet! Along with the acoustic guitar, there is a clarinet (Jurgen Kupke), a bass clarinet (Florian Bergmann) and drums (Christian Marien). The result sounds very convincing and fresh as they do not follow any single well-trodden path. Joerg Schippa, who composed all the material, draws upon as diverse sources as jazz and blues, European classical tradition, contemporary, rock, ethnic or film music.

The tunes on the album are ingenious, intricate and, what is their true asset, are never predictable. And within the precise and rigid compositional frame Schippa leaves a lot of space for soloing and improvising. All four players are adventurous musicians, with Schippa and Kupke particularly standing out. Their virtuosic skills allow them to move easily from genre to genre, be it Gypsy swing, free improv, rock, modern classical, dance or klezmer jazz. Some of the stuff here employs the "eastern sounds" and the odd time signatures.

Pairing a clarinet and a bass clarinet is a brave idea and results in great sound textures and exquisite interplay between the two and the guitar as well. The instruments often interchange, questioning their assumed roles in the group. On occasion, Bergmann's bass clarinet serves as a double bass and the musicians counterpoint one another, making the music livelier and more exciting. And again, you would never expect a chamber jazz drummer to sound like the one in a garage band. And yet, he does. Joerg Schippa's guitar is the busiest, since it is both a solo and harmonic instrument, but also substitutes for the absent bass at times.

However, these are all details. What is the most important thing is the music itself. If I understand the message correctly, UnbedingT takes us on a trip around Berlin at night. And hence the multicultural, multidimensional landscape. It's a fascinating journey. Gewiss!

PIOTR SIATKOWSKI / März 2011/ www.slojazz.net - Krakau/Polen