



Rhombal
Stephan Crump (Papillon Sounds)
by Phil Freeman

Bassist Stephan Crump is joined by trumpeter Adam O’Farrill, tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin and drummer Tyshawn Sorey for a set of compositions dedicated to his late brother Patrick. Crump’s tone is uniquely resonant, whether with Vijay Iyer’s trio, his own all-string Rosetta Trio or any of the other contexts in which he’s regularly heard – his instrument thrums like it’s strung with coils of ship’s rope, booms like a whale’s heart, drones like a tree moaning in the wind. Sorey’s drums, meanwhile, are mixed to clatter and thump like a funk or rock player’s kit. Atop the constantly shifting yet still solid foundation these two men set, O’Farrill and Eskelin dance and sing.

A few celebratory moments (“Skippaningam”, “Esquima Dream”) aside, *Rhombal* has a mournful, dark-brown feel for much of its hour-long running time. The disc begins with Crump alone, setting up a simple blues groove on “No D for Nelson”, which virtually demands that the listener snap his fingers in rhythm. O’Farrill and Eskelin enter almost cautiously, playing softly at first then gradually growing louder as though the instruments’ tubes have to inflate before they can be properly heard. Eskelin’s first solo sounds

like a man dancing down an unlit hallway, joy tempered with caution. Trumpet and saxophone line up for unison melodies and slow-intermingling harmonies throughout the album and when Sorey picks up brushes on “How Close are You”, the feeling is akin to the work of the similarly structured quartet Hush Point. The paradigmatic “chordless quartet” is, of course, Ornette Coleman’s 1959-61 group and it would be easy to expect these players to head in that direction – sprinting outbursts, abstract blues ruminations, squeaking dialogue. But they really only do that on “Skippaningam”, the second-shortest track, and, even then, it still feels like an organic extrapolation of what they were doing on other tracks; it’s not like they’re trying on hats. But this has been a gigging band since early 2015, so the fact that they’ve developed a coherent shared language is no surprise.

For more information, visit stephancrump.com. This project is at The Jazz Gallery Sep. 17th. See Calendar.



Quiver
Ralph Alessi (ECM)
by Terrell Holmes

Quiver embraces impressionism and defies convention. First-call trumpeter Ralph Alessi, pianist Gary Versace, bassist Drew Gress and drummer Nasheet Waits render this evocative music with the kind of anticipation and interaction that comes with playing together for an extended period of time (Versace joined only recently in place of Jason Moran but steps in flawlessly nonetheless).

Versace’s contemplative arpeggios, Waits’ simmering and Alessi’s opulent harmonies on “Here Tomorrow” serve as a kind of a prelude to the measured synergy defining the record. Songs develop gradually, perhaps even tentatively, but soon find their footing. For example, Alessi’s approach seems uncertain at the beginning of the reflective “Window Goodbyes” but when he sheds his reticence, harmonic invention soars. “Smooth Descent” is airy and understated with a slightly mischievous aura around the edges; Alessi builds harmonies here like an architect designing a skyscraper, creating themes and working off of those to create more intricate ones without losing coherence, Versace and Gress following him as adeptly as foremen on a construction crew.

Alessi expands the musical palette by using Harmon mute briefly on “Gone Today, Here Tomorrow”, then removes it to engage Waits briefly in a duet so relaxed it sounds like playful slap boxing. Versace echoes Bill Evans on the melancholy, pensive and somewhat unpredictable ballad “I to I”. With Alessi’s scampering plungered horn and Gress and Versace exchanging spirited ostinato, “Shush” is the closest thing to a straight-ahead tune on the album, “Scratch” is upbeat and light-hearted and the title track searches for its mark, hits its stride, then ends abruptly, sounding unfinished. “Do Over”, the last and shortest song, might actually be the most satisfying. It has heft and drive, is on sure ground from start to finish and ends the album with a bang...kind of.

With *Quiver*, Alessi takes a standout work from the so-called fringes of jazz and folds it expertly into the mainstream.

For more information, visit ecmrecords.com. Alessi is at Threes Brewing Sep. 19th with Wing Walker Orchestra as part of FONT Music. See Calendar.

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