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CHRONIC

FRANÇOIS HOULE GENERA SEXTET IN MEMORIAM



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FRANÇOIS HOULE GENERA SEXTET

IN MEMORIAM

François Houle (cl), Marco von Orelli (cnt, tp), Samuel Blaser (tb), Benoît Delbecq (p), Michael Bates (b), Harris Eisenstadt (dm)

Label / Distribution: Clean Feed

What freshness, friends! This is the record that many inventive musicians would like to have under their belt, as the ideas circulating there are so innovative.

François Houle dedicates this album to the memory of a person with whom he moved to Vancouver in 1990, Ken Pickering. The nine compositions are the culmination of a skillfully constructed narrative, the musical concept that emerges is of flawless harmonic richness. The shock suffered by François Houle with the sudden disappearance of his friend does not result in a dark record but rather an album filled with various emotional facets, some of which do not exclude humor. Hope is present there.

The casting of In Memoriam is brilliant: more than guests, it is above all friendships that are united around the clarinetist. Everyone is at the service of a score which gives them the opportunity to express themselves. The easily identifiable piano of Benoît Delbecq establishes lunar climates which allow Marco von Orelli to soar with ease in "Deep River", a nugget with the resemblance of a mini big band. Samuel Blaser expresses all his passion in "Requiem for KP" and "Gish Gallop": his abstract ideas allow the rhythmic pair composed of Michael Bates and Harris Eisenstadt to shine.

François Houle's clarinet brings sunny nuances necessary to the development of the themes; he strongly recalls Perry Robinson, who illuminated the first Liberation Music Orchestra with his grace. The breadth of the writing of this album also refers at times to the writing of Charlie Haden as well as Sylvain Kassap and his sextets. In Memoriam makes its contribution to this sincere continuum.

“Scarlet” also offers an African foray where the ghosts of Duke Ellington and Tricky Sam Nanton come to hover, while “Ekphrasis” nonchalantly stretches out its slender notes, calling for a soothing end to the day.

François Houle's sextet is the incarnation of what confounding beauty is: everything is sumptuous. As the builder of this unique work, this Canadian musician deserves more recognition.

by Mario Borroni // Published on September 10, 2023