



FRANÇOIS HOULE GENERA SEXTET - IN MEMORIAM

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Personnel - François Houle: clarinet; Marco von Orelli: cornet, trumpet; Samuel Blaser: trombone; Benoit Delbecq: piano; Michael Bates: bass; Harris Eisenstadt: drums.



Canadian clarinetist François Houle, whose keen arrangements and musical execution can be seen in every nook and cranny of his discography, is joined by a solid combo recommended by the late Ken Pickering. **In Memoriam** pays tribute to the latter, who was a mentor, a friend, and the artistic director of the Vancouver Jazz Festival for 32 years, a fact that binds even more these musicians together. Houle's Genera Sextet made its debut in 2012, and appears here with one single alteration: Swiss trumpeter and cornetist Marco von Orelli replaces Taylor Ho Bynum.

An introductory short piece called “**Stand By**” opens up the curtain, almost in a thoughtful symphonic way and with an epic sentiment of confidence that runs between the lines. It leads to “**Requiem for KP**”, the only track that, passing the 10-minute mark, rolls out with staccato actions that deliberately interfere with the rhythmic flux, and quiet moments with assorted circular motifs on the move. Bassist Michael Bates delivers a pensive solo over the irregular if scintillating drum flow of Harris Eisenstadt. Then, the pianist Benoit Delbecq goes for a swinging walk with the horn section of Houle, Orelli and trombonist Samuel Blaser filling spaces in unison. The latter dishes out an improvisation laced with exclamations, and the bandleader concludes the improvisations with strong articulation and unpredictability. By the end, the sympathetic happy swing that had been put up for the solos winds back to the mournful tones of the first stage.

“**Ekphrasis**” emphasizes the collective work with repetition of every 20-beat cycle, whereas “**Gish Gallop**” develops with a contemplative feel, exposing amiable tones and often masking the tempo with meticulous harmonic accentuations. Distinct from any other tune, “**Scarlet**” lives in a kind of Afro-Latin exuberance masterfully created by Delbecq’s prepared piano. Eisenstadt’s colorful drumming and Bate’s dancing bass groove in seven reinforce this effect.

The group presses forward on “**This Tune...**”, opting for a certain angularity in the melody without feeling too off. Houle’s loose clarinetism is sometimes joined by the rest of the pack for a phrase conclusion. Yet, “**Deep River**” is more prone to mood and rhythmic shifts, efficiently melding avant-garde jazz, rock, and post-bop elements.

In Memoriam is a requiem that doesn't necessarily sound doleful. For the sake of the music, there's also celebration, nostalgia, love, joy, and gratitude packed into the same bag.

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