

# FRANÇOIS HOULE & BENOÎT DELBECQ || SAFA

«Poise»

AFTERDAY AUDIO

«Deedar Yar»

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Canadian, Vancouver-based clarinetist François Houle and French, Paris-based pianist Benoît Delbecq have been working together since the mid-nineties as a duo, in Houle and Delbecq bands and with other, like-minded and innovative free improvisers like Evan Parker and Joëlle Léandre. *Poise* is their fourth duo album and it was recorded at PlushSpace/Bureau de Son Paris in June 2023, released on Houle's label, Adterday Audio, and dedicated to the children of Houle and Delbecq «who teach us poise, wisdom, and new ways to look at the world». Houle plays her on Basset clarinet in Bb and Delbecq plays Steinway B, New York, 1879, piano.

*Poise* is a five-movement intimate, lyrical and introspective suite that surprisingly, was freely improvised. Houle mentions that he and Delbecq did not try to

formulate premeditated structures, or to ever adopt a traditional call and response, solo/accompaniment thing. But they know perfectly well each other's language and sound world, including Houle's extended breathing and percussive techniques and Delbecq's percussive playing inside the piano, trust their instincts and obviously, know the importance of deep listening and how to work symbiotically within totally free dynamics. Houle imagined before their work to embroidery, where he and Delbecq painstakingly pay attention to the kind of fabric they wanted to create. Like on the previous sonic fabrics they draw on John Cage, György Ligeti, African timbres and polyrhythms, Evan Parker and Steve Lacy, and are characterized by unexpected juxtapositions and patterns and continuous reinvention of the sonic palettes of the clarinet and the piano. This most beautiful suite proves that there are still so many poetic mysteries that these gifted improvisers can explore, even after thirty years of working closely together.

Safa is a Canadian trio that explores elements of Persian music with Western classical music and free improvisation. The trio was founded in 1999 by clarinetist Houle and Tehran-born, tar and setar string instruments player and vocalist Amir Kousshkani and released its debut album *Alight* (Songlines, 2002) with fellow Puerto Rico-born percussionist Sal Ferreras. Safa means inner purity, sincerity, or sincere affection in Farsi. The sophomore album of SAFA *Deedar Yar* was recorded twenty years later at Monarch Studio in Vancouver, with percussionist Hamin Honari, who was born in Zahedan, Baluchistan, and plays the Persian tombak (and is known from Gordon Grdina's Haram and The Marrow bands as well as his work with Israeli-born guitarist-pianist Itamar Erez).

*Deedar Yar* offers ten original compositions that incorporate the strong personal voices of Houle, Kousshkani and Honari. They sound like dancing passionately around each other, letting themselves drift back and forth between a liberal interpretation of Safa's strong, traditional Persian roots, and contemporary music with healthy doses of improvisation. Safa suggests a musical vision of an open and inclusive world where all ancient cultures interact and melt into one. SAFA's music, true to the trio's name, radiates deep and sensual emotions, intensified by the innocent and unassuming vocal delivery of Kousshkani, and like in *Alight*, it nourishes and heals the soul.

**Eyal Hareuveni**

*François Houle (clarinet, bass clarinet), Benoît Delbecq (piano), Amir Koushkani (tar, setar, vocals), Hamin Honari (tumbak)*