

Hush

François Houle and Joe Sorbara Hat Hut Records ezz-thetics 1035



The versatile and highly prolific Canadian clarinetist François Houle recently sent two new duo recordings, which were released on the Swiss avant-garde label ezz-thetics of Hat Hut Records. I'm discussing one of them now. It is a recording of an entirely improvised concert with percussionist Joe Sorbara, who, in addition to regular drums, also plays 'table percussion', piano strings on a piano frame, and thumb piano. The curious thing about this recording is that all ten songs are practically the same length. This can never happen with a totally improvised set-ting, can it?, I thought to myself. Or would both have always had that length in their heads? Knocked Ambulations begins with icy high-pitched sounds on the clarinet. I write 'sounds' on purpose, because there is not really a recognizable clarinet sound. There are also bird sounds and the piano frame is played by Joe Sorbara. It has become a kind of soundtrack for a tame-scary movie. In Coded whisper we can greet the beautifully full and veiled sound of Houle's clarinet. The idiom is also a lot more accessible here. A quiet, somewhat melancholic piece. Stool Pigeon (also the title of a hit by Kid Creole and his Coconuts in the eighties ...) shows a completely different approach. All kinds of noise sounds (made on a clarinet without a mouthpiece), quarter tones, flattering and nervous fluttering on the clarinet form parts of this piece. In Parallelepiped there seem to be particularly fast slap-tongues being played, which I can't imagine is technically possible. Inquiring with Houle taught me that they are indeed slap-tongues: "practice, practice, practice", he advised me! Travelling by Foot has much of a fairly well-known free jazz song with a large contribution from the drums. In What Next? does the clarinet sound very African in some way. Sorbara also plays beautifully on thumb piano. In terms of sound, this piece really appealed to me. Hold your peace again has those icy high clarinet sounds with which the recording also opened. Houle keeps this consistent, with the exception of the ending, in which he briefly 'descends' to let the clarinet be heard in a lower register. Montgolfière is an inimitable 'fairground' of sounds, of which it is difficult to understand how it came about. In the closing track A Veil Drawn Over there is no clarinet to be heard; it seems to me to be a solo piece by Joe Sorbara. François Houle plays practically only clarinet and has shown himself on that instrument as someone who has developed a huge arsenal of sounds. When I compare this recording with the CD Because she hoped (discussion in DK82), on which he plays a duet with Benoit Delbecq, this last production is a lot less easy to 'digest'. However, for those who are interested in the sound possibilities of the clarinet, it is a recording that one should definitely listen to!

Henk Jansen

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