



NEW JAZZ AND AUDIOPHILE RELEASES

US/Canada release: October 12, 2010

Benoît Delbecq
Circles and Calligrams
SGL 1583-2

Benoît Delbecq, piano

Benoît Delbecq Trio
The Sixth Jump
SGL 1585-2

Benoît Delbecq, piano
Jean-Jacques Avenel, bass
Emile Biayenda, drums, percussion

Genre: avant jazz/new music
(CD + high-res downloads at HD Tracks and Qobuz)

“Luminous harmony, intellectual rigor, and modernist piano technique...a forward-thinking musician...” – Ethan Iverson, *All About Jazz* New York

For Benoit Delbecq’s 9th and 10th releases on Songlines (counting collaborations and the co-led groups Kartet and Poolplayers), the Paris-based pianist has recorded two slightly overlapping programs of his compositions, some new, some revisited. Returning to the solo piano following a remarkable piano duo with Andy Milne (*Where is Pannonica?*, 2009) and his initial solo disc *Nu-turn* (2003), and at the same time presenting his first trio release, Delbecq is offering a career summary of sorts while continuing to advance and refine his particular approach. Celebrated in France, and called “one of the avatars of the prepared piano” by *Jazz Times*, his groups and collaborations include jazz and improv greats from both Europe and North America (Mark Helias, Mark Turner, Michael Moore, François Houle, and Arve Henriksen to name a few), and he has performed regularly in Canada and the US in recent years, yet he’s still far too little known here.

No doubt part of the reason is that to really ‘get’ his music requires a certain focus, an openness to sonic experimentation, and an appreciation for formal complexity and even a degree of abstraction (though not for their own sake). Given that, the pleasures are many: a fantastic array of prepared sounds, turning hammers and strings into a percussion orchestra while not neglecting the conventional resources of a beautiful-sounding 92-key Bosendorfer; intense yet supple polyrhythmic improvisations built up in interlocking layers and cycles, which in the trio are woven together with the bass and drums; and a distinctive melodic/tonal sense that balances consonance and dissonance with the timbral shifts of the preparations in many intriguing ways. His work shows a deep connection with both the modern jazz piano lineage (Monk, Waldron, Ibrahim etc.) and elements of the classical avant-garde (particularly Cage, Messiaen and Ligeti), and combines these influences and others such as pygmy polyphony into a truly unique style. This is music that readily communicates on a physical and often an emotional level but reveals ever more subtle aspects as you get to know it.

A few words about Benoît’s collaborators here, almost all of them long-time associates and friends. Jean-Jacques Avenel was of course Steve Lacy’s preferred bassist for some 20 years (the brief “Flakes” on *Circles* is a Lacy tune, an unadorned tribute to one of Benoît’s mentors). He performed in the Delbecq 5 (*Pursuit*, 2000); he is also a kora player, a passionate advocate of traditional Manding music, and for many years led his own West African group in Paris (*Waraba*, 2004, produced by Delbecq). Avenel and the Paris-based Congolese drummer Emile Biayenda, who Benoit first performed and recorded with on a tour to Central Africa in 1994, set up wonderfully unpredictable grooves here, and continuously co-create the music with total involvement. The three of them mesh not just rhythmically but timbrally, as Benoît explains:

“Emile and Jean-Jacques both have a magnificent sound, they are masters, a source of inspiration.

During the rehearsals I had the feeling of simply diving, as one would dive into a sea about which we'd heard and which turns out to be completely incredible, a water of particular density, particular temperature. Also what I love in the alchemy created by Emile and Jean-Jacques is their relation in the hierarchy of cycles, it is very free, very intuitive – they come to complete at an equal level my 'flexible rigor' so to speak. The timbres create other cycles, subterranean cycles, the effect obtained is mysterious." In this trio Biayenda uses two snare drums and two gourds, and a small spherical bell (a bracelet used by the drummers in his group Les tambours de Brazza) is attached to the bass drum.

Another notable feature of both records are the remixes, which present quite different sonic perspectives on the music-making. Benoît and drummer/electronics wizard Steve Argüelles have been developing their artistic complicity for 20 years, in groups such as the Recyclers and Delbecq 5 – and for the last 13 years their duo Ambitronix, recently expanded into a new improvisational trio, Manasonics, with the addition of Nicolas Becker. Argüelles' remixes of material from the trio multi-tracks examine the three instruments individually in a kind of improvisational spirit; Benoît calls them "rather cinema-like, these sorts of elliptical narrations." Becker is in fact a Foley artist/sound supervisor/sound designer and composer for films – he and Benoît recently collaborated on the score of the Israeli-French co-production *Lebanon*, and Benoît calls his quietly spooky "Mille Nandie" remix "a trip of mental images that brings my music closer to film music. Every sound you hear comes from my piano itself, there is no other source added...it is a 'bio' remix so to speak."

And the record titles? The Sixth Jump refers to a "radical storm" in his personal life, at the end of the sixth cycle of seven years (i.e. around his 42nd birthday), when he also had to compose music for his newly formed trio – the tune "Le sixième saut" reflects this period of "emotional rape, which I needed to transform into a very quiet piece while remaining a little tragic – it is loaded with 7 years of my life." Circles and Calligrams are the visual patterns that Benoît sketches with pen and paper at a certain stage in the conception of a new piece ("I am still in a sound dream-state") – designs that help visualize ways of superimposing forms and building up 'fabrics' of various motifs. The solo record was in fact crafted as a performance set during a fellowship residency at the Civitella Ranieri Centre near Perugia. "These six weeks in Italy, alone in my studio at the top of a hill, were an important step in my life. About half the pieces are new. I couldn't possibly produce a whole new set of tunes – the time that's necessary to assimilate the concepts is very long, I'm very slow when it comes to learning new combinations even if they're mine. So I also spent a lot of time revisiting older compositions – the idea being to arrive at the recording studio and forget myself in the playing." Both records are beautifully engineered and mixed by Etienne Bultingaire, "whose ears delight me – he has a way of recording the piano which perfectly reveals the details, space and depth of the instrument."

For more information: delbecq.net, myspace.com/emilebiayenda, myspace.com/lestamboursdebrazza, myspace.com/stevearguelles. The interview with Benoît is at songlines.com/interviews/trio-solo.html.

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