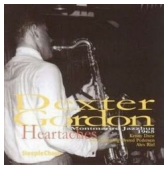
Dexter Gordon Quartet - Heartaches (1965)



1. Heartaches 14:15 2. Devilette 12:26 3. You've Changed 10:20 4. So What? 9:44
Personnel: Dexter Gordon - tenor saxophone Kenny Drew - piano Niels Pedersen - bass Alex Riel – drums

Steeplechase takes its Dexter Gordon stewardship seriously. Last year occasioned the label's release of a box set covering the saxophonist's Complete Quartet and Trio Studio Sessions. In the months since that monumental release, air-shots from concerts at the Montmarte Jazz Haus circa summer 1965 have made their way into circulation. This latest entry finds Dex fronting a familiar rhythm section comprised of fellow expatriate Kenny Drew on piano and Danes Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen on bass and Alex Riel on trap kit, respectively. With the sometime substitution of Tete Montoliu at the ivories, they were Gordon's working European ensemble for much of the later '60s and early '70s. The band can also be heard on a modest trove of other albums, such as The Squirrel (Blue Note) and the Swiss Nights series (also on Steeplechase).

The music feels representative of a typical night for the combo, with the contents of a single set represented by four tunes and a brief spoken introduction before an up-tempo reading of Miles' "So What." After an audible count-off, the band commences with "Heartaches," built on the bulwark of Pedersen's plump, trotting bass and Riel's brittle snare tattoos. Fidelity is a bit tinny with Drew recessed in the mix and Gordon's horn sounding ruffled around the edges, but the recording is still quite faithful to the after-hours ambiance of the club. After a robust, chorus-devouring solo laced with some title-worthy crying asides, Dex lays out and leaves Drew to a jovial solo fortified with light stride syncopations. Riel's snare muscles in a bit too heavily in its accompaniment, but Pedersen holds as stalwart harmonic anchor. The bassist's ensuing improvisation elicits enthusiastic encouragement from the audience, punctuated by the casual clink of glassware. Gordon takes the piece out at a trumpeting gallop.

"Devilette," an obscure tune from the quill of bassist Ben Tucker, comes next, once again forwarded on the punchy thwack of Pedersen's athletic bass. Drew lays out a bluesy staccato vamp, leaving Dex free to wail through a chain of florid choruses peppered with trills and switchbacks. The ballad "You've Changed" ices down the heat with Gordon turning tender, tempering his tone to a dusky purr. Drew responds with a resplendent cushion of enveloping chords, presaging an epic unaccompanied cadenza on tenor.

While this is an enjoyable snapshot from the saxophonist's fecund middle period as an expatriate jazz icon enjoying all the amenities commensurate with his status, there isn't much to push this album beyond the body of song already available. Dex addicts will no doubt sprint to the record shop bins to procure a copy, but more casual fans might be just as satisfied revisiting platinum-standard Blue Note fare like Our Man in Paris and A Swingin' Affair. The true boon of this release, and what are likely to be continuing volumes in the series, is less tangible. Coupled with the recent "complete" box set on Prestige, it argues convincingly that torch of Gordon's legacy remains healthy and a long way from snuffing out. ---Derek Taylor, allaboutjazz.com

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