

Nguyen Le Trio - Bakida (2000)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Dding Dek (Nguyễn Lê)* 05:22
02. *Madal (Nguyễn Lê)* 06:51
03. *Encanto (Nguyễn Lê)* 05:45
04. *Bakida (Nguyễn Lê)* 04:41
05. *Chinoir (Nguyễn Lê)* 05:10
06. *Noche y Luz (Nguyễn Lê)* 04:35
07. *Feel Feliz (Fons)* 04:59
08. *Heaven (Borker)* 05:20
09. *Lü (Nguyễn Lê)* 06:10
10. *Romanichel (Nguyễn Lê)* 05:03

Nguyễn Lê (electric, acoustic and electroacoustic guitars, computer editing, programmed synths, mandolin and bendir on "Lê")

Renaud Garcia-Fons (acoustic 5-string bass)

Tino di Geraldo (drums, pandeiros, tablas, cajon, palmas)

One look at the liner notes to the Nguyễn Lê Trio's latest disc and you know that Bakida is not going to be your typical jazz record. While Vietnamese guitarist Lê, who now lives in France, has dabbled in a variety of styles with a penchant towards the fusion side of the camp, his international flavour is what truly defines who he is. With a trio that includes Spaniards Renaud Garcia-Fons on acoustic five-string bass and Tino di Geraldo on drums and a variety of percussion, he is already mixing cultures. But check the guest list, which includes artists from the US, Norway, Algeria, Italy and Turkey, and you know this is going to be an affair that blends music from a variety of cultures, often within the confines of a single composition.

Take the opening track, "Dding Dek." With its tuned gongs, ney flute, marimba and tabla, there

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is already a blend of Middle Eastern and Oriental culture by the time Lê enters with a theme doubled by Garcia-Fons. But as quickly as a cosmopolitan ambience is established Geraldo switches to kit and Lê develops a solo that's equally rooted in rock and blues. Returning to the naive theme of the introduction, Le builds into an ascending chordal passage that is reminiscent of tunes like "Hope" and "Resolution" from John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra classic, Birds of Fire. And that's only the first track and, while it says a lot about Lê, it hardly tells all.

Lê has an uncanny way of blending ethnic themes with more Western-sounding harmonies. He demonstrates the link between Persia and the Celts with the theme to "Madal"; the tune ultimately settles into a funk workout where Lê solos with a clean Stratocaster-like tone before segueing into a more up-tempo but no less groove-centric workout for saxophonist Chris Potter, proving with his characteristically energetic solo that he can be more than merely a strong in-the-tradition player, ultimately building to a climactic motif that becomes a fitting coda to the piece.

Lê's style is an interesting amalgam of the usual fusion culprits, yet over the course of the past ten years he has emerged with a style that, by blending Eastern and Western sonorities, is unmistakably his own. And while there's a certain energy to his playing that might tie him to the fusion genre, his reach is far broader, avoiding its more bombastic trappings. "Romanichel" is a gorgeous trio with Lê (on acoustic guitar), bassist Garcia-Fons, and Norwegian pianist Jon Balke, last heard on his own magnificent Diverted Travels , demonstrating Lê's more spacious, impressionistic side. And the title track is a moody piece with a lengthy melody that leads into a solo where Lê tastefully combines rich chordal concepts with a restrained use of his whammy bar.

Bakida , recorded in '99 but only recently seeing North American release, is another fine record from an artist who truly defines the concept of world music, perfectly blending music from diverse cultures into a personal, contemporary mix.---John Kelman, allaboutjazz.com

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