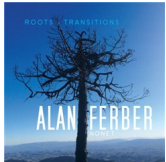


Alan Ferber Nonet - Roots & Transitions (2016)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 17 August 2016 14:41 -

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01. *Quiet Confidence* 8:02 02. *Hourglass* 1:02 03. *Clocks* 9:49 04. *Wayfarer* 7:39 05. *Flow* 9:20 06. *Perspective* 8:25 07. *Echo Calling* 3:10 08. *Cycles* 9:53 Alan Ferber - trombone
Scott Wendholt - trumpet (1, 2, 4-7) Shane Endsley - trumpet (3,8) Jon Gordon - alto sax John Ellis - tenor sax Charles Pillow - bass clarinet Nate Radley - guitar Bryn Roberts - piano Matt Clohesy - bass Mark Ferber – drums

The first thing that ought to be said about trombonist/composer/bandleader Alan Ferber's latest recording, *Roots & Transitions*, for his long-standing nonet is that the music holds up very well regardless of whether one knows the circumstances that surrounded its creation.

However, this release marks an important milestone in Ferber's life—the birth of his first child in 2013. Now, Ferber is not the first husband to find his entire attitude toward life completely change with the arrival of a child. But this very special happening was followed by the 2014 Grammy Nomination for Best Large Jazz Ensemble for *March Sublime*, and then, to top it off, Ferber got a grant from Chamber Music America to create a 60-minute original piece.

Ferber was now faced with the need to provide stability to his new family as well as to continue to be creative in the decidedly unstable music world, plus to come through with the new piece required by the grant. He made the decision to write for his nonet with which he has a ten-year history: *Scenes From An Exit Row* (2005), *The Compass* (2008) and *Chamber Songs* (2010).

Furthermore, Ferber made the decision to write using the trombone instead of the piano in order to save time in the long run. The result of using the single-line instrument was to create simpler and more personal ideas that would become the kernels out of which the pieces would develop.

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The notes mention a central melodic motif that is the seed from which the entire piece grows, but this is admittedly hard to hear. However, it is easy to hear that the pieces are related to each other (somehow) and belong together. The music has a personal sound to it in that it was written by Ferber for the specific members of the nonet and displays his command of the sonorities available for this instrumentation; more than this though, is that in some ineffable way, the music tells the story of Ferber's joy and wonderment which is mixed inevitably with anxiety that comes with change.

The set of pieces, which vary widely in mood, opens with "Quiet Confidence," which is a very apt title, as beautiful sonorities proclaim the sprawling theme leading to a very tasteful solo by pianist Bryn Roberts accompanied by big cymbal splashes from drummer Mark Ferber. The third track, "Clocks" raises the temperature, featuring an insistent piano chord that gradually thickens and gets more and more ominous; Jon Gordon's terrific solo which is perfectly consonant with this rather unsettling piece.

The following track, "Wayfarer" could not be more different in that it has traditional structure and harmony along with an easy, very cool swing. "Flow" is next, and sits somewhere between the previous two tracks in intensity and mood. "Echo Calling" (one of two shorter tracks, along with "Hourglass"), is the modern ballad of the recording, with a very pretty melody which is surrounded by lush harmonies. The closing track, "Cycles," builds in energy, starting with trumpet, sax and drums, then adding piano and guitar, until finally the entire band is playing the theme in various combinations with vigor and panache.

Roots & Transitions is terrific music in its own right, putting Ferber's creativity and expertise on display. There are many details of structure, harmony and voicing and as many fine individual performances to savor. Outstanding. ---Budd Copmann, allaboutjazz.com

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