

Miroslav Vitous - Remembering Weather Report (2009)

Written by bluesever
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1 *Variations On W. Shorter* 5:13 2 *Variations On Lonely Woman* 7:27 3 *Semina (In Three Parts)* 13:31 4 *Surfing With Michel* 5:48 5 *When Dvořák Meets Miles* 10:57 6 *Blues Report* 4:48
Bass Clarinet – Michel Portal Double Bass – Miroslav Vitous Drums – Gerald Cleaver
Producer, Engineer – Miroslav Vitous Tenor Saxophone – Gary Campbell Trumpet – Franco Ambrosetti

On the surface, *Remembering Weather Report* possesses little in common with the fusion supergroup that Czech bassist Miroslav Vitous co-founded in the early '70s with keyboardist Joe Zawinul and saxophonist Wayne Shorter, before being summarily removed on the cusp of greater commercial success. *Weather Report* was a decidedly electric group; Vitous' is unapologetically acoustic, and doesn't really resemble, musically, early albums including WR's remarkable self-titled, 1971 debut and '72 follow-up, *I Sing the Body Electric*, both on Columbia. But scratch beneath the surface and there's an intrepid spirit there that pays greater homage than more direct tributes.

Weather Report's early "everybody solos, nobody solos" ethos was a democratic dictum, asserting complete equality and independence. No conventional timekeeping rhythm section—at least in its early years—and that's the real link between two groups distanced by nearly 40 years. With a core quartet featuring Italian trumpeter Franco Ambrosetti, tenor saxophonist Gary Campbell and drummer Gerald Cleaver—the latter two back from the bassist's award-winning *Universal Syncopations II* (ECM, 2007)—with the superb Michel Portal guesting on bass clarinet on three tracks, Vitous has assembled a truly egalitarian ensemble—though his strong voice, especially on arco, does tend to dominate much of the proceedings. Still, with a distinctive, fleet-fingered approach and lyrical bent with a bow that rivals Swedish bassist Anders Jormin's similar ability to make his instrument sing, Vitous has never sounded so distinctive, or so good.

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Opening with a tribute to Shorter, Vitous references the saxophonist's enduring "Nefertiti," but only loosely. His relationship with the intuitive Cleaver is kinetic, as the horns wrap around both Shorter's theme and Vitous' alternating arco and pizzicato, creating an increasingly turbulent setting that's all about interaction and nothing about overt virtuosity, even though there's no denying the mastery of every player. "Variations on Lonely Woman" is more faithful to Ornette Coleman's classic, with multiple cued segments acting as rallying points for the group, as its exploration creates some especially wonderful sonic combinations, especially when arco bass, tenor sax, trumpet and clarinet orbit around and, finally, coalesce into its iconic melody.

Vitous also pays tribute to Zawinul on "Semina" by referencing the recently departed keyboardist's European classicism—a characteristic that has continued to imbue Vitous' music throughout his career, but which Zawinul deserted early on, in favor of funkier and, later, world music-informed writing. A duet with Portal, "Surfing With Michel," is a high point of Remembering Weather Report if only because, stripped down to two largely linear instruments (though Vitous strums chords throughout), it vividly exposes their endearing qualities, with Vitous managing to keep time and deliver free flights of fancy in direct response to Portal's equally unfettered ideation.

Those looking for more direct reference to its titular inspiration may be disappointed, but for those who remember its original spirit and premise, Remembering Weather Report is an album that takes Weather Report's original premise and places it firmly in a 21st Century context of spirited contemporary improvisation and empathic interplay. ---John Kelman, allaboutjazz.com

Miroslav Vitous was the founding bassist in Weather Report, a band that by its end, had traveled very far from its roots. But it is indeed that band's musical foundation that interests Vitous here on his tribute to that musical, freedom-seeking egalitarian spirit that was evidenced so profoundly on its 1971 debut album and *I Sing the Body Electric*. With trumpeter Franco Ambrosetti, tenor saxophonist Gary Campbell, drummer Gerald Cleaver, and a guest appearance by Michel Portal on bass clarinet on three tracks, Vitous, following his return to ECM in 2003, sets about not only rediscovering the original vision that guided him during his stay with WR, but ultimately demanding it in his brief liner essay that is indeed born out by the music here. "This album is a reminder that the way of playing discovered at this time pointed toward a future music yet to be fully realized. Now it is time for it to come upfront: there is no other way to go, if you wasn't to progress towards musical freedom and a universal concept of equal sharing." Indeed, where WR was, in the beginning of the collective mind that "everybody solos/nobody solos" aesthetic, so it is with this excellent unit, grounded as it is in that self-same

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principle. "Variations on Wayne Shorter" takes Vitous' former bandmate's composition "Nefertiti" and uses its phrases sparingly, ultimately creating a new improvisational and lyrical theme for its frame. "Variations on Lonely Woman" does indeed invoke Ornette Coleman's composition while using Antonin Dvorák's largo from the 9th Symphony. Vitous' bowing is impeccable and indeed the equal of anyone currently out there, including ECM's other great arco player, Anders Jormin. Likewise his "When Dvorak Meets Miles" is a very loose evocation on the former composer's motifs as adapted to Miles Davis' more rhythmically savvy, open-ended modes. There is also an excellent duo improvisation called "Surfing with Michel," and a stellar new composition by Vitous entitled "Semina," that is dedicated to the "nobler aspirations of Joe Zawinul." (To be fair, Vitous seems to conveniently forget his own jazz fusion days when he wore a coat of pure sheepskin on record covers and evoked the cosmos and funk fuzak on his own records -- perhaps it his own nobler aspirations he is referring to as well. You could at least dance to Zawinul's tunes.) Here, the sparse notational music that allows for each instrument to play an intensely, exquisitely balanced role in creating a mass of not only sound, but something that can only be called "song" is truly inspiring -- Cleaver's cymbal work, and the lower-end arco playing of Vitous put the rhythm section in the moment of creation instead of merely holding it down for the horns. This is an excellent set; proof that modern jazz that recognizes improvisation as a direct result of form, and indeed inspires it further, is a case in point for a modern jazz where anything at all still is possible. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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