Erik Truffaz - Saloua (2005)



1. Saloua 2. Big wheel 3. Whispering 4. Vabous 5. Gedech 6. Dubophone 7. Ines 8. Tantrik 9. Ghost drummer 10. Le soteil d`eline 11. Spirale 12. Et la vie continue Erik Truffaz – Trumpet, Electronics, Melodica Manu Codjia - Electronics, Guitar Michel Benita - Bass, Bass Instrument, Sampling Phillippe Pipon Garcia - Drums, Sampling Nya – Vocals Mounir Troudi - Bendir, Vocals

Jazz is by nature an act of continual fusion, the conflation of disparate styles, instrumentation and techniques into one dynamic whole. Nevertheless, one small subgenre—specifically the blending of rock and jazz—is most often applied with the "fusion" label; and though Miles Davis' name isn't exactly synonymous with the term, on the strength of his pioneering efforts In a Silent Way and Bitches Brew, the two have become inseparable.

French trumpeter Erik Truffaz, it seems, has aimed to better Davis (and therefore perhaps escape the incessant comparisons stemming from Miles' immense influence on his playing) by pressing toward the creation of the fusion album par excellence. With Saloua, he continues to pursue the exoticism and electronica of Mantis (2002) and The Walk of the Giant Turtle (2003) while keeping his scope wide enough to encompass ever more hip-hop, reggae, Arabic music, and psychedelic rock, often in as undiluted a form as possible. Tunisian singer Mounir Troudi and Swiss rapper Nya rejoin him along with his longtime Electric Ladyland Quartet: bassist Michel Benita, guitarist Manu Codjia, and drummer Philippe Garcia, all of whom dabble in samples, loops, and electronics as required.

Truffaz's designs here are admirable but inexcusably flawed in execution. Saloua is a watery broth masquerading as a hearty stew, and arguably a step backward for Truffaz, whose musical progress has always had something retrograde about it. The disc is utterly awash in electronics, as though gratuitous use of digital effects were a substitute for substance and musical

innovation. The title track, featuring Troudi, has all manner of echoes and amplifications and moody rattles and creaks, but none of this ever quite meshes with the raw emotiveness of the vocalist. Stripped of some of these superfluities, the song might then be on a par with contemporary Arabic music. Which begs the question: Are Truffaz and his band actually broadening jazz, or are they simply trying their collective hand at a different genre?

The question follows them on to "Big Wheel," on which Nya gives a stilted and hackneyed rap over a lazy reggae rhythm, heavy, as one might expect, on the dub. It amounts to reggae for the non-reggae crowd. Tracks like "Saloua," "Big Wheel," and "Yabous" (another Troudi vocal and Nya rap) are proof that it is possible to leap the permeable borders of jazz and land nose-deep in another genre's mediocrity. "Gedech" partially succeeds in uniting rock, funk, and Troudi's wailing vocals, but even this ends up feeling shallow and contrived.

Half the time Truffaz sounds as if he can barely stand upright and clutch his instrument, let alone sustain a note. Is this fatigued, impotent style of playing deliberate? The lifeless ballad "Whispering"—made more lifeless by Truffaz's performance—is appalling in this respect. On "Tantrik," the best of the Troudi tracks, Truffaz's solo is like a wheezing asthmatic trying to inflate a balloon. It's an apt simile for the whole of Saloua: strong on general ideas but weak in every other conceivable way. ---Eric J. Ianelli, allaboutjazz.com

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