

Horn Knox – Liner Notes

Whatever radiates this strange, but very comfortable tinge to the music of this album? An accordion? ...Organ? ... Horn section? This sound, almost unidentifiable, flexible and kind of romantic, being part of a jazz group needs detailed explanation: It is an instrument of German origin personifying the name of its inventor Mr. Heinrich Band and hence is called "Bandoneon". Music connoisseurs will recall the fact, that in Argentina the Bandoneon is heralded as the national instrument (yes, the Tango!). However, in spite of Astor Piazzolla, the late master of modern application of this instrument to the tango (Tango Nuevo!), the protagonists of this album pursue a completely different direction. "Horn Knox", a Swiss jazz group, reveals a distinctive and easily recognizable sound by a rather unorthodox but very efficient use of this neo-exotic non-accordion – called bandoneon. Horn Knox? – is by the way a witty name to be left to the discerning listener for correct detection of its significance. The main stem of the group consists of tenor- and soprano saxophonist Klaus Widmer and keyboard-specialist / pianist Michael Beck, both of them from Berne, Switzerland. Their musical collaboration stretches way back into the late eighties, but in 1991 they decided to form a group. Shortly after, their collaboration was interrupted by serious pursuits of music studies. Whereas Widmer decided to stay home and study at the Swiss Jazz School in Berne, Beck left for Boston and studied for three years at the renowned Berklee College of Music, followed by two years of playing in and around New York. 1998 found both of them back in their hometown. They teamed up for good and performed a bit here and there, continuously searching for the suitable rhythm section – the decisive element of any good group in jazz. They finally stumbled over another tightly knitted twosome, Greek bassist Giorgos Antoniou and Swiss drummer Daniel "Buxie" Aebi, the rhythm team to actually be in perfect sync with both Widmer's and Beck's demands and ideas. Antoniou and Aebi proved to be ready and willing to successfully deal with any future rhythmical problems occurring in this newly found collaboration. The quartet recorded their first CD entitled "The song is you", an album to receive far more than just honorable mentions throughout the Swiss media.

Comes 2001 to effectuate yet another addition to the band: Young Michael Zisman, a newly discovered wizard of the above described bandoneon, also born in Berne, but dividing his time and studies between Switzerland and Argentina, brings his broad understanding of today's music to the group, enlarging and enhancing the group's musical spectrum as well as their sound. But, like in all bands, sound is as well a personal perception as one of an entire ensemble. Saxophonist and co-leader Klaus Widmer will be noted for his warm, smooth tone, his phrasing, faintly reminiscing the late Stanley Turrentine, as well as for three of the compositions. Keyboarder Michael Beck's treatment of both piano and Fender Rhodes truly reflects ultimate tastefulness and sense of time, his musical understanding being the result of having worked and paying dues in New York. His two compositions represent further highlights of the album. Antoniou's bass playing adds the fundamental basis to all harmonic and rhythmical developments and Daniel Aebi acts as both the dependable and attentive drummer and creative percussionist.

The group obviously had more in mind than to just play a number of straight ahead standards and do away with them in a hurry. All five members have contributed

valuable compositions to the track list of this album and some of them truly stand out as extensive personal messages to the listener. Widmer's opener "beans, peas & lentils" is based on a steady bolero rhythm to give the tune an exotic flavor. Zisman's "Intuitivo", which includes a lengthy and brilliant opening cadenza, reflects a deeply felt tribute towards his mentor and idol Astor Piazzolla. The composition itself is built on a more loosely stylized samba rhythm, making the title a rather exclusive South American affair. Beck's "First tooth" contains a kind of Monkish ostinato, but also reveals a distinct exotic approach as it proceeds. Antoniou's three-part suite explores several rhythmical and melodic possibilities without losing coherence. There are also some very touchy moments of ballad playing, a musical element without which no album is complete. Especially the intense interplay all through the album deserves special mention, it points directly at the fact, that Horn Knox performs as a band, not as a group of musicians brought together on a spur of the moment intention. They project the main ingredient of jazz: team spirit and activities, creating by far the most valid results in this area of today's music. A lot more of these "knoxisms" are urgently needed.