



African Bass Solo Concert : Willisau Jazz Festival 1978
Johnny Mbizo Dyani (Sing a Song Fighter)
 by Pierre Crépon and Olivier Ledure

"I love you, you don't have to love me." It is with this formula, traditional for members of The Blue Notes, that this archival release opens, the first fully solo recording of South African bassist Johnny Dyani, who died 32 years ago this month at 40. This double-LP (played at 45 rpm), contains the complete concert given at the 1978 Willisau Jazz Festival, not too far in Switzerland from where The Blue Notes first took residence when entering their exile away from South African Apartheid. The next day, Dyani would play with David Murray and Andrew Cyrille, a concert issued by hatHUT. Dyani sings, plays piano and gives an extended demonstration of bass mastery. His piano brings to mind a kinship with Don Cherry, also on the Willisau bill that year and with whom Dyani had started to work in 1969. 'Name dropping' usually brings presuppositions of unidirectional influence, but with Cherry and the South Africans, mutual enrichment seems quite certain.

The core of the release is to be found on sides B and C. Half an hour of solo bass, on which Dyani at times accompanies himself vocally. "Afrikan Blues" and "Le Ngo-Ma" offer a clear reminder of the unique union between avant garde and rhythmical playing

Dyani had perfected. Recorded during a particularly prolific period, this album manages to occupy a space of its own, acting as a link between Dyani's work with Murray on Marge and the music taped with Clifford Jarvis in 1979. A short piano and voice version of the Murray LP title track concludes the Willisau concert.

The sound quality of the source tape is excellent. An open microphone feel adds immediacy, capturing the audience, Dyani moving around the stage and the full sound of his bass. Swedish label Sing a Song Fighter's craftsmanship is notable. Impressive cover art is provided by graphic artist and founder of the Willisau Festival Niklaus Troxler and detailed notes by Francis Gooding accompany the music.

As the concert ends, Dyani repeats his opening statement. One may not have to love this music, but there are certainly many reasons to do so.

For more information, visit singasongfighter.tictail.com



Tender Music
Joëlle Léandre/Elisabeth Harnik (Trost)
 by Stuart Broomer

While French bassist Joëlle Léandre is among the most celebrated of improvising musicians, her duo partner here, pianist Elisabeth Harnik, isn't as well known. She has, however, distinguished herself in her native Austria in groups like Barcode and Plasmic and has strong associations with notable Chicagoans: she's recorded a brilliant trio session with Dave Rempis and Michael Zerang (*Wistfully*, Aerophonic) and plays in the DEK Trio with Ken Vandermark, who contributed liner notes to this CD. Harnik is a gifted improviser, combining technical resource and intuition in rare balance.

There are six pieces, each entitled "Ear Area" and each a study in transformation. "Ear Area 1" shifts rapidly from an exchange of gestures to joyous movement. There are a few phrases from Léandre, then a swirl of plucked strings from Harnik before the two find propulsion, with a tonal abstraction allied to a sense of swing that suggests Jimmy Blanton and Duke Ellington trying to cheer up Anton Webern; a few minutes later there's an abstract reverie in which the quietest upper register piano tones gradually emerge from bowed bass harmonics, the two then moving to full flight.

Léandre has a gift for spontaneous melody, for lines that are at once strongly defined yet mobile, gradually shifting identity through whim and context, mutating into sonic play. Harnik is almost an inside-out improviser, at times exploring strongly tonal materials (there's a repeating phrase that echoes "Swanee River"), at other times unleashing a sudden chromatic extravaganza. Even at slow tempos the two can create music of confounding delicacy and complexity. "Ear Area 2" is at times effectively a quartet, with Léandre singing gently in French and plucking an erratic rhythm while Harnik finds tonal colors both on the strings and on the keyboard, the whole moving in multiple directions at once.

Each piece grows from individual impulses and gestures to become spontaneous collective composition—sometimes tender, sometimes witty, often both—and does so to a memorable degree.

For more information, visit trost.at. Harnik is at Austrian Cultural Forum Oct. 2nd, Saint Peter's Church Oct. 4th and Ibeam Brooklyn Oct. 5th. Léandre is at Teatro Latea Oct. 8th. See Calendar.



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