



Yves Léveillé Steps Out With “Phare”

PHARE / LÉVEILLÉ: Phare. Sang-Froid. Gestation. Centaure.* Toujours est-il. Eau Trouble. La Lune dans sa Bulle. Gratitude / Yves Léveillé, pno; Yannick Rieu, s-sax/*a-sax; Jacques Kuba Ségui, tpt; Guy Boisvert, bs; Kevin Warren, dm / Effendi FND155

This album by French Canadian pianist Yves Léveillé and his quintet is unusual to say the least. Many of the tracks here start out as if they were “ambient jazz,” a genre I detest, yet most of them quickly begin to morph into something else—more modern, more individual, more interesting. In part, this is due to Léveillé’s unusual harmonic changes, but also due to his unique sense of musical construction. Each of these pieces is a real composition that evolves, like flowers, from their musical buds. Bassist Guy Boisvert, for instance, uses his instrument more like a ground bass in a Baroque ensemble, moving the harmony up and down with his well-chosen notes as the music progresses. The solos, Léveillé’s included, are well spaced out in note choices and make musical sense. To reiterate: these are real compositions, not just a jam session.

Moreover, as one can hear on the opener, Phare, Léveillé scores his works with taste and precision. Not a note or phrase is wasted; everything falls into place, and the soloists listen to one another and build on the evolving musical structure. Even trumpeter Yannick Rieu’s rather extroverted solo never gets so far out of hand that you can’t hear how it fits into the surrounding material.

Sang-Froid is a more aggressive-sounding piece even from the outset, the opening theme played in out of tempo before moving into a sort of broken boogie woogie on the piano. The effective use of backbeats in the percussion with forward movement in the top-line instruments makes an effective contrast, and during the

piano solo Boisvert plays single-note fills that complement the ongoing improvisation rather than just supporting it with rhythmic thumps. Trumpet and soprano sax play an atonal lick in thirds, then the tempo decreases almost to a standstill. The drums play quiet rolls and cymbal washes as Rieu plays his solo, then the tempo returns to normal as Ségui plays counterpoint to him on the trumpet. In Gestation Léveillé returns to a soft opening on piano, playing a sparse four-note rising motif in the right hand. Bass, drums and soprano sax enter in a sort of slow, rolling 3 with the drums fairly aggressive in the background. Just before the three-minute mark the whole piece seems to fall apart; the tempo slow down to a crawl while Boisvert plays a bass solo and the others fill in around him. Much of Léveillé's music put me in mind of the more experimental 1950s and early '60s jazz, only in slow motion. I like it!

One could easily provide such detailed descriptions of every track on this CD, but to what purpose? The listening experience supersedes anything I could put in words anyway. Besides which, the verbal descriptions can't convey the emotional impression of this music and, besides, they may actual spoil your sense of discovery and enjoyment. With that being said, I must also praise Léveillé for his very effective programming. He contrasts moods well, for instance following the rather upbeat Centaure with the strange, ominous-sounding Toujours est-il. In Eau Trouble, he builds the piece around a couple of five-note licks in the bass line played 5 against 4. There are so many little variables like this in the album that I'd rather you discovered them for yourself; you'll appreciate them all the more.

Phare is, quite, simply, a remarkable album of jazz compositions skillfully arranged and expertly played. You really should check it out!

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