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EMLER TCHAMITCHIAN ECHAMPARD

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Andy Emler's trio work is more sophisticated than his (brilliant and spectacular) MegaOctet ensemble, which features the same ace rhythm section. The trio definitely has its own instantly recognizable sound and unique aesthetic approach. Its music could be described as a sort of "chamber jazz" where usual distinctions between genres - contemporary, experimental and/or avant-garde - are blurred to the point of invisibility : structures are kept to the essential, allowing for maximum freedom, yet what disturbances occur in the music are firmly controlled, as if to preserve a certain rigor in these "open forms".

Much has been written on the art of the trio, but rarely have musical partners made their voices heard so equally within this format. This is particularly true of double bass player Claude Tchamitchian, who at last shows his real worth with a captivating, oddly thrilling performance.

This is music of remarkable fluidity and hypnotic quality, right from the brief opening piece "Musiciens Miniatures" but increasingly so on the epic, 15-minute "Quelque-Chose A Dire", which explores its title's implications to its ultimate dead-end.

Vast and open landscapes are sketched roughly in the listener's imagination; a vigorously poetic path is marked out by superb moments of open improvisation, in between intense accelerations carried forward by Eric Echampard's controlled, muscular drumming (e.g. "Voyage en Comptine") and Emler's falsely impressionistic piano playing, which exudes an insistent sweetness.

The trio's highly charged lyrical excursions (short pieces are few and far between) add up to an hour of dense, generous music, whose layers of sound stretch out with such strength that everything is swept aside until the finale, where all is resolved in a whisper.

The listener is taken on an endless, loosely defined journey that plunges him a state of grace. That approach is taken even further in the trio's concerts, which is why it truly deserves to be heard in a live setting. Whether they are booked in a concert hall near you is another matter, but a word to the wise is enough...

Sophie Chambon | www.jazzbreak.com