

A swinging free affair

The old free jazz-pioneer Hugh Steinmetz takes the listener on a travel in the history of jazz in two melodic suites.

That free jazz in its time won a certain place on the Danish scene is to a very large extent thanks to the trumpet player Hugh Steinmetz. For his work with the ensemble The Contemporary Jazz Quartet/Quintet, who as the first Danes worked with Ornette Coleman's compositions, announced the arrival of the total unlimited improvisational music to "Sokkelund Herred". Since then there has been blown a lot of air through the horns, and free jazz is today an established genre compatible to Dixieland, swing and bop. And if you are hungry for this kind of musical parallel play, that was cultivated in the golden years in the old 'real' Jazz House Montmartre in Store Regnegade, you are not fully satisfied by this last record from Steinmetz, even if the line-up - apart from two members - is identical with his original orchestra.

Well, there are free passages with all due to the trade in the form of impulsive klim-bim and drumming, but first and foremost there is very tight played melodic jazz music in the two suites, which together form 'The Cherry Blossom'. Both works pay tribute to Cherry, who is Steinmetz' great inspirator. And they do it first and foremost by playing in his spirit.

Because even if he was one of the pioneers of the free music, he always maintained the melody in his playing. Which Steinmetz as well do in his trumpet playing, that are functioning extremely well on top of the rhythm group formed by Per Aage Brandt, Lars Juul and Kasper Tagel. Most of the solo playing though is in the hands of the two saxophone players, Karsten Vogel and Niels Harrit, who obviously are comfortable in each others musical company and are playing up to each other in a very distinguished manner.

It is very generous music, that works across the historical development of jazz and freely fantasizing shifts from straight swing-elements over bop and to more spherical worshipping of melancholy coloured sonorous surfaces.

There are passages of great beauty, and when the playing is free, it is only for a short while, until the efforts gather in sing-able themes, that fold out in tight orchestral playing. A real good disc, that shows Steinmetz as a fine composer and skilled orchestral leader.

Henrik Palle in Politiken 2009-08-26.