

POP MATTERS

MOUTIN REUNION QUARTET

Something Like Now

(Nocturne)

Rating: 7

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If the brothers Moutin pay heed to such notices as this, they might be grateful to some of the irritations attendant on the present reviewer's life when he began his attention to their new CD. I am extremely grateful for their having put together a set of performances so wonderfully resolved. Things can work out!



Regardless of any information of a biographical order, explaining why this band is called "Reunion", or the liner notes' reference to the other three guys but with a different pianist, this quartet is incredibly tight after a fashion which raises the phrase *maximum efficiency*. I suppose they could play very well and flawlessly, on a bad night for all of them -- the sort of thing Europeans have heard from a few outstanding ensembles on gigs soon enough after landing to feature jet-lag.

This set was surely performed in more favourable circumstances, for what can happen with the too-recently landed when jet-lag has been sweated out a bit, happens very early here. Especially the bassist co-leader, Francois Moutin, loosens up within the consistent structure of the ensemble, and without any overall element slackening he follows the warm-up chorus by adding things. Dave Holland's quintet gave me my biggest experience of jet-lag management transforming into out-and-out brilliance. It's this sort of waking up the very different Moutin ensemble conjures, waking the listener to hear something really going on.

"Something Like Now -- Part 1" is the opener, composed by the drummer Louis Moutin, the bassist's twin brother. The piano (Pierre de Bethmann) and bass open like they were Siamese twins; in comes the drummer (and the American in the band), Rick Margitza, and it's an ensemble, over a lot of bass work and a piano solo of class. Quite where "Something Like Now -- Part 2" begins is hard to say. I can't be bothered scrolling back; I heard no break and there was more magnificent bass. The tenor comes out of the ensemble, and by the time he's established a forward line against the repeated pattern of the stomping thing the performance has become, the drummer is laying about the cymbals. The internal balance is startling.

The brothers duet on the assemblage of Charlie Parker material which is the second track, and the only one not credited to either of them (though the bassist is credited with arranging this). It stops suddenly and the pianist comes in contrastingly with the drummer's "Take It Easy". Margitza has a softer tone, like some other interesting post-Coltrane non-imitators. Like him, the melodically creative pianist sounds as if he's soloing above a big band. The twins do a lot on bass and drums. Tempo changes are implied, the pianist's move to Fender Rhodes, as the second tenor solo proceeds, enlists him in the formerly two but now three-man semblance of a big band. Nice that he gets to open the track which follows with an unaccompanied section. Bass and drums slip in with support and (for the moment at least) the foregoing turns out to have been an introduction to a plaintive tenor ballad on which passion is tempered by a sense of vulnerability. The ballad voice shifts for a little to the bass, and the tenor resumes, playing harmonics and eventually a delicate cadenza.

Lots of unpredictable things happen during this close to an hour of music. I can't really understand the title "Tomcat". Still, the unison doubling first of a piano line with the tenor, and then piano with bass, is characteristic of *trompe l'oreille* effects which can suddenly dissolve to allow the pianist freedom to solo, shift tempo, be as simple and unflashy as he likes, all with remarkable bass support. Francois Moutin is the one melody instrument player whose does any extended deliberately virtuosic performance, but that very often in providing support. The theme of "Echoing", like the equally unshowy and reflective "Surrendering", comes in late after a prelude, but then Margitza and de Bethmann are allowed remarkable relaxation.

A theme composed by a bassist and entitled "Bottom Line"? Like the other originals here it has a strong, well, line. The tenor doesn't solo but with piano and drum support presents the equivalent of ensemble passages supporting the solo bass feature. This is another two-parter; "Bottom Line -- Part 2" starts where the pianist begins to solo. Subsequently he slides over to Fender Rhodes, to join in a tenor-led miniature big band ensemble ride-out. Fender Rhodes is also used for the tempo or maybe just rhythm change in the closer, with some rock guitar effects. That comes out slightly like a George Russell huge-band boogaloo -- such that old master taped with dozens of Scandinavians, as issued on the Italian Soul Note label. The Moutins do it with quartet. Oui!