

To Jean-Philippe Allard (1957-2024)

The history of jazz is littered with famous piano duos: from Albert Ammons & Pete Johnson to Joachim Kühn & Michael Wollny, not to mention Earl Hines & Jaki Byard, Martial Solal & Hampton Hawes, Chick Corea & Herbie Hancock, Tommy Flanagan & Kenny Barron, Kenny Barron & Mulgrew Miller. Of those who cultivate dialog and completeness rather than logorrhea or piling on. It's as difficult as it is demanding to combine two identical soundboards, as if two orchestras of the same geometry had to occupy the same space in a kind of fratricidal competition.

But add to this tandem, so strong and fragile at the same time, two connoisseurs of the Fender Rhodes - the electric piano born in the mind of Harold Rhodes during the Second World War and later seducing Leo Fender, famous for his guitars and amplifiers - and the horizon suddenly widens. The bundle of constraints is loosened and a new palette of colors, materials and rhythms emerges. Possibilities that the billboard offers, both on its own and in Bill Evans' *From Left to Right* (MGM, 1970), in which the pianist touches both acoustic and electric instruments simultaneously and from one channel to the other in a skillful setting composed by Michael Leonard.

With Pianoforte, Pierre de Bethmann, Bojan Z, Eric Legnini and Baptiste Trotignon go one step further, happily squaring a circle that has never really been drawn. Equally at ease on both instruments and, to put it bluntly, with temperaments and characters that are compatible and even complementary, to the point of being able to play all positions, arranger included, these virtuosos - for they are real, experienced and renowned musicians - clearly had the space of this magic square.

On stage, first of all, because that's where the project was born, under the impulse of Reno Di Matteo, the show producer who will put our four keyboardists in front of the public at the Tourcoing Jazz Festival in 2019. A group of piano musketeers with whom he has had a long relationship and who already know each other well enough to feel an almost immediate complicity and shared desires. Their repertoire begins with standards - bop, bop, Duke Ellington, Brazilian - and then a handful of original compositions, a playful choreography takes shape, with its combinatorics, its more or less furtive retorts and digressions, always circumscribed on other stages, under other big tops. The Philharmonie or the Seine Musicale in Paris, the Chapiteau in Marciac, the Cinq Continents in Marseille, Le Rocher de Palmer in the Bordeaux region and even the Jarasum Jazz Festival in South Korea have seen the personalities of these eight joyful wandering hands.

Jean-Philippe Allard, another producer who has accompanied Randy Weston, Hank Jones, Rodney Kendrick Rodney Kendrick, Alain Jean-Marie and Kenny Barron in some of the best performances of their respective discographies, is no stranger to the piano. With Reno Di Matteo, he even organized *Pianomania Pianomania*, a festival devoted entirely to the eighty-eight keys of the instrument, with some fifteen pianists performing from morning to night at the austere Bouffes du Nord in Paris. The originality and effectiveness of Pianoforte the label's release schedule. Artwork. A release that Jean-Philippe Allard will unfortunately not see, as he will leave this earth on May 18, 2024. But he will have had the time to complete the album, which is in every way in accordance with his own wishes and those of

the musicians with whom he has always worked, whom he has always enlightened, encouraged and guided to excellence.

For the studio program that constitutes the phonographic trace of what has already enchanted Pianoforte audiences has indeed followed this path. The experience of listening to these eleven tracks rewritten on the basis of themes inaugurated by Bud Powell, Tom Jobim, Keith Jarrett, Joe Zawinul, Horace Silver, Billy Strayhorn, Ahmad Jamal, Herbie Hancock, Lyle Mays and Egberto Gismonti.

Originality, of course, because it's hard to believe that such a corpus exists in the discography, organized in this way and with such a rigorous yet playful formal approach. playful. Of crackling intelligence, too, in all the dynamics involved, far from the "shallot race" to which a bewildered public often reduces jazz: "a dark history of rivalry and domination," to quote Francis Marmande. But also in the obvious, dazzling, even delicate pleasure of each of the anticipations and other reflections of these four great musicians in total sympathy with each other. Themes, choruses, rhythms: everything comes alive, everything lives, everything vibrates, but everything is in its place, neat, precise, incisive, precise and incisive.

Pianoforte will amaze you. Just as the music born from its four times ten fingers has astonished so many audiences already familiar with the remarkable pianism. A sign that the ambition contained even in the name of this enchanting quadrilateral - which invites, from piano to forte, all the nuances of life from piano to forte.

Bruno Guermonprez
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