

Prague Big Band & Milan Svoboda – Reminiscences (1980)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Blues For The PBB* [play](#)
2. *Barefooted Adela*
3. *Stewed Plums*
4. *Proclamation*
5. *Reminiscence On An Old Choral*

Prague Big Band

Saxophones:

Zdenek Hostek - alto, soprano
Jaroslav Solc - alto, flute
Svatobor Macak - tenor
Rudolf Tichacek - tenor
Pavel Komzak - baritone

Trumpets:

Zdenek Zahalka
Ivan Umaceny
Michal Gera
Jaroslav Machac

Trombones:

Bohuslav Volf
Karel Stiefel
Vaclav Salbaba
Josef Litos

Tuba:

Pavel Drancak

Keyboards:

Michael Kocab

Guitar:

Zdenek Fiser

Bass and bass guitar:

Ondrej Soukup

Drums:

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Ladislav Malina

Percussion:

Ales Benda

Guest performers:

Jiri Tomek - conga (4)

Jana Koubkova and ' & Š Vocal (5)

Conducted by Milan Svoboda

Milan Svoboda founded his first jazz big band during his studies at the Prague Conservatory in 1974. The ensemble was called The Prague Big Band and quickly made its name among the best Czech jazz groups and gained renown abroad as well. In the beginning the Orchestra drew inspiration from the big bands of Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Buddy Rich and Don Ellis. But soon original compositions completely took over the repertoire. During the first decade the ensemble featured Jiří Stivín, Michael Kocáb, Ondřej Soukup, Zdeněk Šedivý, Rudolf Ticháček, Michal Gera and others. The modern sound of the Prague Big Band brought fresh air to the Czechoslovakian jazz scene in the late 1970s. The group regularly won polls as the Best Jazz Orchestra and frequently received high ratings also in European jazz magazines. This period was recorded on albums Portrait, Reminiscences and Poste Restante. The first album itself received a top review and four and a half stars in the Down Beat Magazine.

In 1983 Svoboda reduced the lineup to thirteen members and the group performed for a while as the New Prague Big Band. The ensemble now included Emil Viklický, František Kop, Štěpán Markovič as well as vocalist Mirka Křivánková. Like the Vienna Art Orchestra, the New Prague Big Band now played more avant-garde music. The group's performances at big European international festivals such as Vienne in France, Brosella Jazz in Belgium or Leverkusener Jazz Days in Germany left long-lasting impressions. In 1984 Milan Svoboda spent eight months in the USA, partly on a scholarship in Boston at the Berklee College of Music. There he collaborated with Phil Wilson's and Herb Pomeroy's big bands. For his feature concert at the Berklee Performance Center he put together an Orchestra of Berklee's professors and students. Among them were Greg Hopkins, Paul Fontaine, Ken Pulling, Greg Badolato, Gordon Brisker and Aaron Scott. A recording of this concert with Svoboda's major composition called Gemini was published on an album entitled The Boston Concert. Svoboda then spent some time as a guest in Sonny Constanzo's big band. Among the highlights of his American stay were several meetings with his great idol and influence Gil Evans in New York.

On his return from the USA Milan Svoboda was commissioned to assemble an international

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Czech-Polish Big Band consisting of important jazz personalities of both nations. The lineup featured among others Jan Ptaszyn Wroblewski, Zbigniew Namysłowski, Tomasz Szukalski, Jarek Smietana, Jiří Stivín, Karel Růžička, Michal Gera and Svatopluk Košvanec. The orchestra played successfully for two years on the European jazz scene, appeared at numerous festivals and recorded an album entitled Interjazz 5. At the end of the 1980s Svoboda's orchestra witnessed a fundamental change. Another new generation of jazz musicians joined in. A new name Contraband Jazz Orchestra was taken and the group gradually came into being during summer jazz workshops at which Svoboda appeared as a professor. After successful performances at the international Karlovy Vary 1988 festival (Grand Prix prize) and at the big band festival in Dortmund the following year (first prize), the Contraband Orchestra convincingly proved itself on the Czech and international musical scene. The group's concerts presented as theater and jazz-rock shows earned great success. Great and memorable performances followed at festivals in Germany (Ost-West Nürnberg, Viersen, Mannheim, Heilbronn, Göttingen, Saarbrücken, Ingolstadt, Trier, Regensburg), Austria (Vienna, Wiesen, St. Ingbert), France (Mulhouse, Pau, Metz), Switzerland (Olten), Poland (Krakow, Wroclaw) and all important festivals in Czech. At times the Orchestra features guests such as James Moody, Victor Mendoza, Tony Lakatos and Sigi Finkel.

Several concerts were broadcast by television companies (EBU, WDR, BR 3, T). The lineup, which Milan Svoboda chooses to extend to a full big band on occasion, gradually changed and stabilized itself. The result is a group of eminent jazz musicians including Kryštof Marek, Martin Kumžák, Pavel Pivarči, Radek Krampf, Milan Krajíc, Marcel Bárta, Přemysl Tomšíček, Ivan Audes and others. Albums from this period include Keep it Up, Christmas Songs and Carols, Live at Viersen, Foam of the Days, Family and Contraband Goes to Town. Milan Svoboda characteristically determines the Orchestra's sound as a composer and arranger. His compositions have always formed the main part of the group's repertoire. Svoboda also appears as an author and visiting conductor with other orchestras and frequently teaches international big band workshops. The Milan Svoboda Jazz Orchestra is a top-notch, modern, creative big band, among the best on Europe's contemporary musical scene.

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