

Vernerer Pohjola & Black Motor □ – Rubidium (2013)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Waltz* 07:21 2 *Song Of India* 09:08 3 *Vainila* 05:17 4 *Alma* 08:22 5 *Rubidium* 11:39 6 *Old Papa's Blues* 09:21 7 *Sax-O-Phun* 02:58 8 *Kynnyspuulla* 13:02 9 *The Last Janitsar* 04:13
Double Bass – Ville Rauhala Drums – Simo Laihonen Tenor Saxophone, Soprano Saxophone – Sami Sippola Trumpet – Vernerer Pohjola

Just going by the name, for those unfamiliar with the thriving Scandinavian jazz scene, a group calling itself Black Motor might be mistaken for a heavy metal rock band—a smash-and-crash set of drums, a blasting three-chord guitar and a wall-shaking bass wrapped around bellowed lyrics. But the real Black Motor, a drums/bass/saxophone outfit—joined on Rubidium by trumpeter Vernerer Pohjola—is a Finish improvising jazz unit of the first order.

When a quartet consisting of two horns, bass and drums, with no chording instrument, is mentioned, comparisons with alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman's groundbreaking groups of the late fifties and early sixties are inevitable. Coleman pioneered free jazz. Black Motor, with the guest trumpeter, take the Coleman approach and give it quite an original twist. The opening "Waltz" bles into existence with some loose, almost drunken blowing from Pohjola and tenor saxophonist Sami Sippola. Pohjola has a laidback, lyrical, folk music-like approach to melody that contrasts nicely with Sippola's gruffness, rough edges and sheer power. For those more familiar with American free jazz, they sound something like a meeting between tenor saxophonist Rich Halley and trumpeter Ron Miles, blowing in front of the elastic and often tempestuous rhythm supplied by bassist Ville Rauhala and Simo Laihonen.

"Song of India," from the pen of Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, begins as a gentle lullaby with some sedate two-horn harmony. Then Sippola steps out front, his saxophone's initially robust tone gathering to a scream like that of a bandsaw ripping through a sheet of galvanized steel, giving way to trumpeter Pohjola's restrained, no-wasted-notes beauty.

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The music, all seventy minutes of it, proves riveting, but the title tune has to be singled out as a highlight. Rubidium is a rare, silver-white metal that burns when it comes into contact with water. "Rubidium," the song, begins at a low, controlled burn, with a Pohjola solo that has a pinched tight intensity of Don Cherry's pocket trumpet forays on Coleman's classic discs. Then Sippola's saxophone turns things into a conflagration, as black clouds roil up from the Rauhala/Laihonen rhythm team. And somewhere in there, low in the mix, sort of like pianist Keith Jarrett's singing—after a trumpet/saxophone cyclone—someone gives voice to a wordless shout of unabashed and justifiable exuberance at what's just gone down.

And here's an unabashed and justifiable shout-out to a great seventy-plus minutes of improvised jazz from Finland. ---Dan McClenaghan, allaboutjazz.com

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