

Manu Katche - Third Round (2010)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Swing Piece* (04:55)
02. *Keep on Trippin* (05:34)
03. *Senses* (04:13)
04. *Being Ben* (04:23)
05. *Une Larme Dans Ton Sourire* (02:27)
06. *Springtime Dancing* (04:10)
07. *Out Take Number 9* (02:09)
08. *Shine and Blue* (04:53)
09. *Stay with You* (04:31)
10. *Flower Skin* (04:23)
11. *Urban Shadow* (02:58)

Personnel:

Manu Katché: drums

Tore Brunborg: saxophones

Jason Rebello: piano, fender rhodes

Pino Palladino: bass

Jacob Young: guitars

Kami Lyle: voice, trumpet

It would be beyond cute to suggest that Manu Katché marches to the beat of his own drummer. Still, in a career spanning three decades and regularly crossing over between pop, jazz and world music, the French kit-meister has demonstrated a unique propensity for groove and a distinct (and refreshing) avoidance of the "look at me" pyrotechnics so often encountered with drummers this talented. Since releasing his first album as a leader for ECM in 2005, Katché has consistently surrounded himself with fine improvisers, including trumpeter Tomasz Stanko and saxophonist Jan Garbarek on *Neighbourhood* (2005), and the younger, but no less distinctive Norwegians, saxophonist Trygve Seim and trumpeter Mathias Eick for *Playground* (2007). In

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both cases, however, while there was plenty of solo space for the front line—as well as fellow rhythm section mates, pianist Marcin Wasilewski and bassist Slawomir Kurkiewicz—Katché's concise writing focused on memorable melodies and compelling grooves, resulting in two of ECM's most eminently accessible and stylistically cross-over albums ever.

If anything, Third Round capitalizes on the strengths of its predecessors while honing, even further, Katché's keen sense of economy. With an entirely revamped lineup this time around, only one of the album's eleven tracks breaks the five-minute mark, and only seven exceed four minutes. In performance—and Katché is on a lengthy world tour in support of the album, though with a different touring group than heard here—it's a certainty that he'll let the music stretch out a bit more. But on the album, Katché's intuitive sense of never overstepping the boundaries of what makes a song memorable—and these are songs, with a pop-like sense of construction, despite pianist Jason Rebello (Jeff Beck, Sting, Peter Gabriel) bringing a far more sophisticated harmonic language to the date—is as acute as it's ever been.

Sure, "Outtake Number 9" seems to fade out just as it's getting started, with über-session bassist Pino Palladino (Jeff Beck, Paul Simon, John Mayer) lithely combining deep, in-the-gut root notes with more delicate harmonics, and Katché as upfront as he gets on the disc (and that's not much). But with ECM's ever-strong instincts in sequencing, it acts almost as a palate cleanser between the light and appropriately titled "Springtime Dancing" and ultimately even more buoyant "Shine and Blue," where Tore Brunborg's tenor doubles with Rebello's acoustic piano for a singable, equally dancing melody, following a rubato intro completely dependent on its performers' ability to listen...and respond.

2010 may well be an overdue breakout time for Brunborg, who has already appeared on two other ECM discs this year, both by Norwegian pianists—Tord Gustavsen's Restored, Returned and Ketil Bjornstad's Remembrance. Here, however, he's as succinct as he's ever been, with a tone approaching that of Garbarek's, but a little less tart, a lot less dry, in particular on the dark ballad, "Senses." Katché also recruits another Norwegian label regular of recent years, Jacob Young, who contributes some warm, electric guitar work on the bright, backbeat-driven "Keep on Trippin,'" as well as some refined and tasteful acoustic work on the elegant "Flower Skin," which also features guest trumpeter Kami Lyle and, in its harmonic ambiguity, the same deeper-level reference to pianist Herbie Hancock that has, at times, imbued all three of his ECM discs.

Lyle also sings on the unexpected vocal track, "Stay With You," which she co-wrote with Katché. A slightly countrified ballad, but more Norah Jones than Hank Williams, Lyle's sweet, somewhat fragile voice fits perfectly with the delicate structures that Katché creates here and

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throughout the disc; his playing and tone always beyond assured, but his rhythms somehow constructed in ways that would almost certainly fall apart in the hands of a less capable drummer.

Despite writing music that rarely shines a direct spotlight on his playing, it's impossible to ignore Katché's inherent charisma. Even when he's doing little more than creating a soft pulse with but a single stick on a lone cymbal, there's little mistaking who's behind it, and when he simmers with polyrhythmic intensity beneath Rebello's arpeggiated pianism on "Spring Dance," he doesn't need to solo to demonstrate his full capabilities.

Third Round features another first for Katché; on the dark, late night closer "Urban Shadow," he sits out completely, letting his evolving voice as a writer speak for itself, with Young's reverb-drenched, volume pedal-driven guitar setting a smoky context for Rebello, Brunborg's spare but evocative tenor and Palladino's equally simple but note-perfect support. It's a serene close to an album that's accessible and groove-driven enough to attract some of the contemporary/smooth crowd, but with more than enough compositional richness and improvisational depth—despite its inherent restraint—to appeal to those who need more meat on the bones. ---John Kelman, allaboutjazz.com

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