

Misha Mengelberg & ICP Orchestra – Japan Japon (2002)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 19 October 2009 16:36 - Last Updated Saturday, 14 February 2015 20:07

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1. *Salute to Fujisawa Shukoh* (2'47) *Kwela*: - 2. *Hap* (3'24) - 3. *Boodshappen* (7'00) - 4. *Welkom* (1'52) - 5. *Briefkaart* (3'43) - 6. *Maurits* (2'18) 7. *Habanera* (6'58) 8. *Carnaval* (*Horsthuis*) (4'13) 9. *Japan Japon* (7'11) 10. *Zing Zang Zaterdag* (3'08) 11. *Brozziman#* (11'37) 12. *Caravan** (*Ellington, Tizol, Mills*) (7'05) *total time: 59'26* ICP ORCHESTRA
Misha Mengelberg: piano, voice Han Bennink: drums, etc. Peter Brötzmann: alto, tenor & baritone saxophones, voice Keshavan Maslak: alto & tenor saxophones, voice Michael Moore: alto saxophone, clarinet Wolter Wierbos: trombone Joep Maassen: trombone Larry Fishkind: tuba Maurice Horsthuis: viola Toshinori Kondo: trumpet, voice

For an orchestra to play its best music as a duo is not extravagant flattery by any means. If the duo in question is pianist Misha Mengelberg and drummer Han Bennink, then there is understandably the problem that it is hard with a team as brilliant as that for additional musicians such as a horn section to interact on such a consistently inspired level. This isn't always the case with the ICP Orchestra, and it is easy to see that the material featured on this live recording was no doubt part of a concert that was overall quite entertaining. Some of what happens doesn't come across so well on vinyl, one of the problems being a dynamic range that is so broad that listeners will be scrambling to turn down the volume during full ensemble parts, then wondering what happened to the music a few moments later. There is always a relationship in Mengelberg's projects between his written themes and the anarchistic leanings of the performers he involves. These two factors are interdependent, thriving off each other, when the group is at its best. But on this album the themes seem to come along like a sign for a missing hotel, although the listener may not be as pleased as a weary traveler might be in this circumstance. Soloists are featured in a kind of showy manner, neither creating a grand disruption nor propelled by any kind of moving band support. Moments such as a duet involving a clarinet and the pianist go on too long, and just aren't that interesting. Which, in the end, leaves the brilliant opening by the pianist and his longtime percussion partner and a few other highlights such as whenever even a hint of swing develops in the rhythm section. Perhaps a performance such as this is the result when a group doesn't have to try too hard -- adored as these players are in Japan, they probably didn't have to do much more than walk into the hall before they had already gotten an ovation. ---Eugene Chadbourne, Rovi

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