
¡En Seguida! – Reviews



By Jack Bowers

On ¡En Seguida!, its third album as a unit, French guitarist Didier Verna's astutely-named @-Quartet is lyrically clever and charming, rhythmically sharp and strong, and never banal or boring. One reason for this is the many bright and pleasing sounds Verna coaxes from his guitars (regular and fretless), guitar synth and sitar; a second is his remarkably keen ear for melodies that linger in the ear and invite repeated listening. Besides leading the ensemble, Verna, a professor of computer science by day, wrote every one of the album's thirteen handsome and hummable tunes.

Third, and no less indispensable, is the quartet's superlative rhythm section, which works tirelessly to breathe life into Verna's irrepressible themes and make them dance. Bassist Yoni Zelnik is rock-solid, drummer David Georgelet alert and enterprising, pianist Laurent Epstein a splendid accompanist and spellbinding wizard with his right hand in the spirit of Hank Jones, Barry Harris or Tommy Flanagan — so eloquent and tasteful that his solos are eagerly anticipated and warmly received. Never one to be outpaced, Verna is a similarly sharp and engaging improviser, no matter which instrument he chooses (and that is not always easy to pin down).

The quartet adds fresh color on four numbers via the wordless vocals of Solange Vergara and Guillaume Kervel's ringing steel drums. Vergara sings on "Un Sueno", Kervel thrums on "La Deuxieme Valse", and both perform on "Pacific Kesa", and the closing "Spring". Good as everyone is, it is Verna's exquisite melodies that raise the session beyond satisfying to superb. From "Lost Highway" to "Stair Blues", "November" to "Recuerdos de Abril", and everything in between, their buoyancy and charm are blissful and beguiling. Verna has dedicated ¡En Seguida! (in English, "Right Away!") to the memory of Thierry Lalo, founder and leader of the Voice Messengers, a vocal jazz big band of which Verna was a member. It is hard to envision a more earnest or compassionate tribute.