

FULL BLAST & FRIENDS

Artist: FULL BLAST & Friends

Title: sketches and ballads

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**FULL BLAST & FRIENDS
SKETCHES AND BALLADS**

MICHAEL WERTMÜLLER

Peter Brötzmann Ken Vandermark Thomas Heberer Marino Pliakas Dirk Rothbrust Michael Wertmüller

PETER BRÖTZMANN – tenor sax + tárogató
KEN VANDERMARK – baritone sax + clarinet
THOMAS HEBERER – trumpet
MARINO PLIAKAS – e-bass
DIRK ROTHBRUST – percussion + timpani
MICHAEL WERTMÜLLER – drums + composition

Recording:

recorded live at the Donaueschinger Musiktage, 16.10.2010, recorded by SWR
sound engineer – Alfred Habelitz
recording engineer – Wolfgang Bachner
mixing engineer – Manfred Seiler
producer – Michael Wertmüller
SWR producer – Reinhard Kager,
SWR2 Redaktion Neue Musik/Jazz
composition by order of SWR
frontcover/art – Brötzmann
design – Klaus Untiet, Brötzmann

Tracklisting:

1. sketches and ballads (36:10:52)

<http://www.michaelwertmueller.com>

<http://www.peterbroetzmann.com/>

<http://www.kenvandermark.com/>

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Notes to Michael Wertmüllers „sketches and ballads“

If you know the score, you might actually think of the piece's title as a bit of an understatement. After all it is made of 50 densely written pages, which might cause some interpreters to lose track of sight. For Michael Wertmüller's composition „sketches and ballads“ is full of seemingly unplayable rhythms, which hail from his extensive experience as a percussionist: complex 256th parts and 512th parts are no exception in Wertmüller's work. Even the visual appearance of it shows much of the dynamic and ferocity of his music. And these notations are really just „sketches“?

The piece was originally composed for the SWR to be played at the NOWJazz sessions of the Donaueschinger music days in 2010. The title's true meaning becomes apparent when Michael Wertmüller himself talks about his work. As it turns out the term „sketch“ is actually a reference to Miles Davis' „Sketches of Spain“. Especially because Wertmüller is very impressed by the density of Gil Evans' composition for Davis. Still, there is a deeper level as well. Although the score of „sketches and ballads“ is written out in detail, it only fully unfolds its beauty and real meaning when the single particles are connected by free improvisation. This is one of the reasons why „sketches and ballads“ clearly is a jazz piece. The other reason being that the composed parts are really vibrating with a jazzy groove due to the free work of the musicians with the material and their jazz-like phrasing.

The piece was performed by a sextet in October 2010 in Donaueschingen for the first time. The musicians were fronted by the trio „Full Blast“ – a critically acclaimed group consisting of Peter Brötzmann (saxophone), Marino Pliakas (e-bass) and Michael Wertmüller himself on drums. For the realization of „sketches and ballads“ some friends joined the threesome for the performance. American saxophonist Ken Vandermark has often been linked to „Full Blast“ recently and adds some special timbre to the baritone saxophone and the clarinet. German trumpeter Thomas Heberer is one of the most creative and versatile musicians in New York's Downtown scene; percussionist Dirk Rothbrust plays a wonderfully headstrong timbal.

Although there are two percussionists involved, „sketches and ballads“ only works with a few, very well placed passages in fortissimo. The composed parts are strongly influenced by Wertmüller's highly sophisticated understanding of time (actually, the piece was even supposed to be called „sketches and ballads of the well tempered time“). At the same time there are also temptingly tender parts: the ballads which are almost tailor-made for Peter Brötzmann. The German saxophonist, internationally well known for his distinctively raw sound on saxophone, clarinet and tárogató (a Hungarian woodwind), developed a seemingly more melancholic side in the past few years. It was largely unknown in his „wild years“ that Brötzmann already played ballads at that time. Brötzmann's touching sound acts as a counterpart to Wertmüller's fast-paced composition.

Michael Wertmüller accomplishes a lot with his piece „sketches and ballads“: he provides the proliferating free jazz with certain compositional structures without holding back. Eventually the formally structured „neo free jazz“ – also incorporating intense rock elements – still has the same core theme it used to have in the 1960ies: criticizing the political state of affairs and social injustice that leave the masses paralyzed. The piece can be interpreted as a cry to raise awareness for the possibility of a world without poverty, starvation and repression – it is desirable that this musical warning achieves to stir up our lethargic society.

Reinhard Kager