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CINÉMAGIQUE 2.0 / BRENNAN: *Enticing*. Synopsis. *Kissing Joy (as it flies)*. *Suonatina*. *Dance of Kara Ben Nemsí*. *Tupti-Kulai*. * RMX. * PATUMI-THEISSING: *A bout de soufflé*. THEISSING: *Tikkettiakkitakk*. SHILKLOPER-PATUMI: *Alperiduo*. BRENNAN-SHILKLOPER-THEISSING-PATUMI: *Nostalgia*. SATIE: *Entr'acte: Le Tango d'E.S.* (arr. Brennan). SHILKLOPER: *Folk Song*. *Little Big Horn*. BRAHMS: *Aimez-vous Brahms?* (arr. Theissing). BREINSCHMID: *Rasende Gnome / Pago Libre: Arkady Shilkloper, *horn/fl-hn/alphorn/apleridoo/voc*; Tscho Theissing, *vln/voc*; John Wolf Brennan, *pno/arcopiano/melodic/voc*; Daniele Patumi, *bs/voc*; *Georg Breinschmid, *bs* / Leo Records LR863 (*live: Feldkirch Festival, 2004, no specific date provided)**

This disc commemorates the 30th anniversary of Pago Libre, pianist John Wolf Brennan's modern jazz collective, which here presents "soundtracks for an imaginary cinema, filled with fluid sequences, movements, narrative improvisations, colors, and folks songs that parallel the cinema's magic." As an addendum to the studio album, we also get three live tracks from the group's performance at the 2004 Feldkirch Festival

Enticing is a good example of what we have here: a piece in 5/4 with a simple but attractive melody played by the group, after which we hear a pizzicato violin solo by Tscho Theissing with Brennan playing the inside of his piano's strings before moving to the keyboard for some isolated little trills in the upper range. Theissing switches to bowed playing for the rest of his solo, giving us some "outside" phrases as he wends his way along. After a rather sparse piano solo Theissing returns, now playing a chorded solo before Arkady Shilkloper comes in on the French horn.

This moves, with just a brief pause, into *A bout de soufflé*, which has the same vibe as the first piece but a much edgier basic line and more intricate arranging, with all members of the quartet pitching in as it progresses. Shilkloper plays a particularly wild and inventive solo on horn, followed by some piano chords and Theissing again moving in a pizzicato manner on his instrument. Violin and horn play a repeated lick, then it suddenly ends. *Synopsis* is in 4 ½ beats, with the horn playing a rhythmic figure and Theissing singing on his fiddle. Bassist Daniele Patumi gets a nice solo here against the violin strumming. Brennan plays some abstract piano runs while the band settles back into its swinging 4 ½ beat groove

Indeed, much of the album is like this: a collection of tunes that almost sound reasonably “regular” but are not, the closest thing to a melody that could become popular being *Kissing Joy (as it flies)*, a jazz waltz (in a slowish 6/8) that sounds eerily similar to some of the Turtle Island Quartet’s music. Someone (Theissing, Brennan or Patumi) vocalizes along with Shilkloper’s horn solo here. The notes indicate that this tune was inspired by Oliver Nelson’s *Blues & the Abstract Truth* “with beautiful voicings by Bill Evans.” Brennan’s piano solo is indeed very Evans-like.

Tikkettitakkittakk opens with violin and horn playing little motifs with a piano sprinkle, after which Theissing plays *a cappella* for a while in no specific rhythm. The music moves along at a nice clip in yet another irregular meter, and at one point three of the band members sing a rhythmic lick on the syllables “dee-mo-tockity-tock,” whatever that may mean in Lombardic, the language credited here.

Alperidoo is described thus in the notes: “Sometimes you meet Aboriginal didgeridoo players living happily far away from Australia, in this case unscrewing the top part of the Swiss national icon [the Alphorn] and transforming the lower half into a kind of original ‘Alperidoo.’” Weird is the word for the way it sounds, and Shilkloper plays a bizarre solo on it. *Nostalgia* opens with the horn playing against a strange-sounding instrument, the arcopiano. This one also has a Middle Eastern bent, with Theissing playing Arabic-styled licks on his violin and no really set rhythm despite the occasional interjections of Patumi’s bass.

Next up is one of two transmutations of classical pieces, in this case Erik Satie’s *Le Tango*, here renamed *Entr’acte: Le Tango d’E.S.* it has an appropriately odd, Satie-like sound about it, a bit gloomy and mysterious despite its cheerful rhythm, played mostly ensemble. By contrast, Shilkloper’s *Folk Song* combines Celtic and Moldavian music in a fast-paced but odd-sounding piece. It’s mostly ensemble with some solo spots for Theissing and Shilkloper, and a lot of fun to listen to. The second violin solo is the longest such in this piece.

Brennan’s *Suonatina* is described as “A little flirt with the classical sonata form,” though to my ears it sounds like a flirt with cocktail lounge music, though Brennan, who plays solo here in the opening minute and a half, is more adventurous with harmony than most lounge pianists. There’s a change of key in Theissing’s solo that also adds interest, and at 3:08 we suddenly get a faster rhythm and a chromatic-based middle section in 3. Shilkloper also gets a nice horn solo and, in the end, the piece has a nice form after all, though not really a classical one.

Little Big Horn opens, appropriately, with Shilkloper playing *a cappella*, including some neat triple-tonguing and a low chord (achieved by the player humming into the instrument as he plays a different note). At 1:28 the tempo suddenly becomes quicker and jazzier, with Shilkloper playing his own *basso continuo* in the lower range and answering himself with fast lick in the upper before violin, bass and piano come in behind him. *Dance of Kara Ben Nemsi* is Brennan's tribute to little-known novelist Karl May, who described some very imaginative scenes in his books, including "This hilarious horseback ride" in which the tempo shifts from 4/4 to 3/4 and the band sings *a cappella* for the first time. They do indeed sing as the piece fades out.

The last of the studio tracks is *Aimez-vous Brahms?*, a transformation of the composer's famous *Lullaby*, a piece I'm sure he regretted having written (as Beethoven did with *Für Elise*, though he thankfully didn't live long enough to hear it used widely as a ringtone on cell phones). Here it's transformed by slowing down the tempo and introducing an irregular beat.

We then move into the three live tracks from 2004, in which Georg Breinschmid is on bass instead of Patumi. I was taken aback at first by the reverberant sound around the band, as if they were playing in a subway tunnel, but the music is excellent. *Tupti-Kulai* seems to be in 7/4, but they play it so jauntily and with so much brio that you don't mind the irregular meter. This is played as an ensemble through its first half, with spot solos as it goes along. At 4:21 the rhythm becomes more aggressive and the playing somewhat wackier, but still fun.

Brennan's *RMX* stands for "Reduce to the Max" which was the original inspiration for it. Here, the 12.8 pulse is divided into 7 and 5, followed by 9/8. Pretty neat, huh? According to the notes, "The final hymnical paraphrases Stravinsky's *Firebird*." Yet somehow it all sounds very Middle Eastern once again, leaning heavily on Theissing's violin, sharply attacked chords by Brennan, and a nice running bass line by Breinschmid. Later on, Shilkloper enters with a particularly dazzling horn solo. John Graas was an excellent jazz horn player in the 1950s, but he'd have a hard time keeping up with the kind of things that Shilkloper can do technically.

The finale, *Rasende Gnome*, is an uptempo piece that sounds like a fast Eastern European dance on acid. Strange but *very* entertaining, described in the notes as almost like "Monty Python's Flying Circus visiting Vienna." At the end, Shilkloper plays the theme from Strauss' *Till Eulenspiegel*.

This is an absolutely splendid disc of very interesting *and* enjoyable music, skillfully yet thoughtfully played by a quartet with a ton of talent. Highly recommended!

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