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Anmeldelse 2021:

Tom Prehn's Quartet

Centrifuga & Solhverv

(Corbett Vs. Dempsey CD, Centrifuga vinyl)



Denmark is inextricably woven into the early history of free jazz. Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor and Albert Ayler all made important recordings at Copenhagen's Café Montmartre in the early 1960s, which was a time when most of the USA outside of a couple major cities would have mistaken the words "free jazz" for a marketing pitch, not a stylistic descriptor. It turns out that Danes weren't just listening, they were playing. The Tom Prehn Quartet pursued a determined course of musical exploration during the mid-1960s, albeit one that was barely known about outside of Denmark until decades after the fact, since the combo only produced one commercially available record.

Centrifuga & Solhverv is not that record. It compiles the contents of two reel-to-reel tapes, neither of which was properly released. *Centrifuga* was recorded in 1964 at a summer cottage where the quartet played privately. They made copies to facilitate their own self-evaluation, and shared one with pianist Lars Werner. A year later, they made another under similar circumstances, and another one came into Werner's hands; both of his copies ended up in the Swedish Jazz Archive. In 2001, the Quartet's self-titled album was reissued on CD by Atavistic Records, and 14 years later, a 1963 recording that never made it past the test pressing stage was issued by Corbett Vs. Dempsey. In 2021, the Danish Centrifuga label issued a vinyl edition of the first tape, and Corbett Vs. Dempsey has put both tapes on a CD.

It's not hard to see why this music was not considered for release at the time. No one was putting out 44-minute-long continuous performances of totally improvised music by anyone, let alone young musicians from Denmark. Heard now, it triggers associations that are very much of its time. The careening, continuous invention brings to mind Cecil Taylor's music at the Café Montmartre, although Prehn is a more linear pianist than Taylor. The recording quality suggests any number of first wave ESP-Disk releases. But, perhaps because Prehn was a conservatory student learning about the European classical avant garde as well as a jazz pianist, the music moves outside of anything related to contemporary jazz. There are moments when the piano's strings seem to be prepared, not necessarily as painstakingly as John Cage's piano music, but enough to set the combo apart from its contemporaries. On the second tape, saxophonist Fritz Krogh contributes further to the music's singularity, playing a percussion duet with drummer using his keypads and later blowing from underneath the piano.

While the Quartet continued, in one form or another, until about 1990, it did not make any records in subsequent decades. And given that by 1970, Prehn was involved in straighter scenes, both teaching at the conservatory and crafting MOR arrangements for the pop singer Birgit Lystager, one wonders how far later editions of the quartet might have backed off from the radical sounds heard on *Centrifuga & Solhverv*. Heard now, this disc's sounds are less alien than they were when they were committed to tape. But given their time-stamp, this document is a welcome complication of one's sense of jazz history.

Bill Meyer