



All About Jazz **Tom Prehn Quartet (1967)**

By AAJ STAFF
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Not generally known as a hotbed for free jazz, the tiny country of Denmark has actually spawned some great music. The single biggest Danish star of modern jazz, alto saxophonist John Tchicai, recorded in a variety of settings with influential American and European improvisers. And the city of Copenhagen hosted some of the most epochal early '60s documents of the free jazz era (eg. Cecil Taylor's *Nefertiti*.) In 1967, Danish pianist Tom Prehn entered a Copenhagen studio to create the only extant recording of his working group, the self-titled *Tom Prehn Quartet*. Originally released in a limited vinyl pressing on the obscure V58 label, the *Tom Prehn Quartet* finally resurfaces in digital form in 2001, courtesy of Atavistic's Unheard Music Series. The sonics of this recording are surprisingly well-balanced and clear, given the inherent limits of the technology involved.



The ordering of the tunes on this disc allow the listener to gradually step up to the high intensity free energy Prehn's group is capable of releasing. The quartet engages in quick, punchy, jumpy exaltations on the opener, "F. Eks." Each player pounces like a hungry animal on isolated, disjointed shards of sound. Then, on "Modus Vivendi," Prehn delivers simple repeated treble piano clusters which periodically drop off the cliff into a single dissonant bass bomb — leaving the rest of the group to pick up the pieces. Later tunes explore open-ended group improvisation over an extremely wide dynamic range. *Tom Prehn Quartet* offers a great deal of explosive, surging energy; as well as a handful of spacious, introspective moments.

Tenor player Fritz Krogh often has his hand on the pulse... and when he unleashes the full blistering energy of his instrument, the rest of the group generally follows with crashing, boiling accompaniment. When he lays out or lays back, the other players utilize the opportunity to explore subtler dimensions of melody, tone, and density. The centerpiece of the record, "Forloeb," sounds like an exposition of schizophrenic dual personality: after a initially violent thunderstorm of activity, the clouds subside just long enough for Prehn to proffer a tender, pianissimo piano solo — and then it's back to the pounding, thrusting, and punching all over again.

Prehn's distinctive piano style relies on harmonically dense clusters at every turn. He rarely plays a simple melody line; instead, he harmonizes almost everything at densities that push the limits of tonality. An exceptionally lyrical theme on "L'Homme Armé" offers proof that Prehn can "sing" in the conventional sense, but generally he strays far off the beaten path. And unlike other cluster/energy players, Prehn duly respects a direct, if somewhat irregular, rhythmic organization.

The disc *Tom Prehn Quartet* has much to offer both as an important historical document as well as a generous demonstration of imaginative, open-ended improvisation. Be warned that the dynamic range on this record is sufficiently broad that in order to hear the details of its most subdued moments, you'll end up blasting holes in the wall when the band goes full-throttle.

[All About Jazz: Tom Prehn Quartet \(1967\)](#)





All About Jazz
Tom Prehn Quartet (1967)

By DEREK TAYLOR
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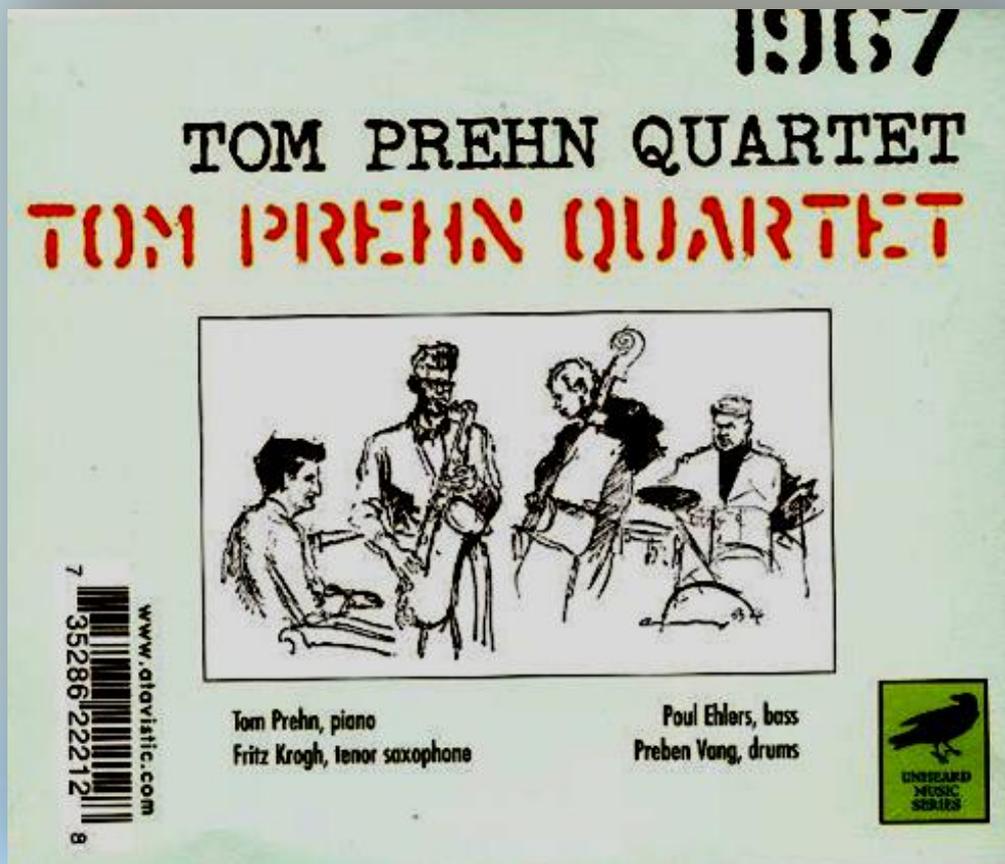
If there were elections for most influential figure in creative improvised music outside the performing sphere, John Corbett would be a shoo-in in my book for reaping the most ballots. Though he also wears the hat of musician, it's as a concert/festival producer, radio jock, writer and general voice box for the Chicago and European scenes that he drums up the most publicity and support for the music and its practitioners. In early 2000 he added role of label producer to his resume and it's in this capacity that he's been able to affect an even farther-reaching good. Acting in concert with the Atavistic imprint to manage the Unheard Music Series, Corbett curates a reissue line targeting long out of print and previously unreleased recordings culled from both his own massive collection and those of his colleagues. This reissue of a hopelessly obscure platter from a Danish quartet, almost completely unknown outside its homeland, is a perfect example of the type of priceless artifacts that the label routinely refurbishes under its aegis.

According to Corbett's sleeve notes Prehn and crew originally organized in 1963, recording sporadically, but performing frequently and eventually honing their sound into the advanced music heard here. Hearing this later stage in their development leads to all sorts of intriguing questions regarding their evolution and influences. The music is compellingly akin to the other European improvisers and is strikingly modern in both its conception and execution. Prehn's Classical training shows in the closely-knit structures that often arise amongst the calculated interplay. His touch at the keys, moving from dark dissonance and heavy use of repetition as on the rhythmically askew "Modus Vivendi" to the piercing pitched clusters of "The Armed Man," recalls Paul Bley's early work with the likes of Jimmy Giuffre and for ECM. Vang's percussory sense is similarly versed, particularly on the former track where a rising waves of cymbal noise wash emphatically over the stabbing notes of Krogh and Prehn. Krogh sounds very much like a youthful Evan Parker, taking such post-Coltrane traits as overtones and multiphonics in highly personalized directions. His unaccompanied cloudbursts on the closing free improvisation "It Was Sunday Morning" explode outward with near atomic force. Ehlers is more than up to the technical challenge posed by his peers tugging and wrestling with his strings on tracks like "Progress" and aforementioned "The Armed Man," and in the end emerging victorious from a maze of complex harmonic patterns.

Transfers are from obvious vinyl sources and the traces of surface needle static are audible in the edges of the individual tracks. The disc's running time conforms to the length of the original album leaving any possible outtakes or additional material from the session frustratingly absent. But don't let the brevity be a deterrent toward shelling out the appropriate green for acquisition. The rarified music on hand is well worth the price and guaranteed to open many ears.

[All About Jazz: Tom Prehn Kwartet](#)





TOM PREHN QUARTET
Atavistic Unheard Music Series UMS/ALP221CD

DAN WARBURTON
November 2001

Originally released on the tiny Danish V 58 label in 1967, "Tom Prehns Kvartet" is one of those rare gems of European free music that was scandalously overlooked at the time and subsequently forgotten until John Corbett and his bloodhounds from Atavistic sniffed it out. And what a find! Tom Prehn (born in 1938) reveals himself to be a singularly original pianist who consciously chose to swim against the current that directly and indirectly charted the course of European free music for years to come - meaning Cecil Taylor, whose playing, in Prehn's words, was "so strong I had to avoid it." (He did, however, meet Albert Ayler and John Tchicai, and readily acknowledged the enormous liberating force of their and Taylor's music on the Danish scene - CT enjoyed a long residence at Copenhagen's Café Montmartre in the early sixties). Prehn came at jazz from another direction - contemporary classical music. Steeped in traditional theory and musicology (it was only through his half-brother that he discovered more popular musics), his piano stylings owe as much to the Darmstadt avant-garde and the New York School as they do to jazz. In 1967, the year he recorded this album,



Prehn also studied composition with Earle Brown and Witold Lutoslawski, so it seems fair to assume he was familiar with the bold graphic scores of the former (and one imagines, with pianist David Tudor's interpretation thereof - both Prehn and Tudor participated in an all-night happening in 1968) and the flexible "aleatory counterpoint" of the latter (Lutoslawski invited Prehn's group to the prestigious and highly influential Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1970).

Prehn's playing partners were equally open-minded musically. Tenorman Fritz Krogh can handle both wild, expressionistic blowing (check out the 41 seconds of "Herfra til Marathon") and intricate pitch-sensitive composition (his "Xenia" is based on a twelve-tone row). Bassist Poul Ehlers and drummer Preben Vang are a revelation, easily as strong and innovative a rhythm section as Maarten Altena and Han Bennink (who cut another pioneering European free album that same year, "Porto Novo" with Marion Brown). The fragmented noises of Ehlers' "F.eks" ("for instance") have nothing at all to do with free jazz à la Ayler or Taylor; instead they seem to anticipate with uncanny precision the music of a later generation of European free players (blind test an improv fan with this and they'll likely as not say it's on Incus, Emanem or FMP), whereas Prehn's "Modus Vivendi", with its superimposed rhythmic strata, extreme registers and piano clusters, sounds like it could have been written by Penderecki (forget his turgid neo-classical recent stuff: back then Penderecki was really far out). You can't get more European than "L'homme armé", which, like Masses by the celebrated early Renaissance composers Guillaume Dufay and Josquin, uses the well-known French medieval song as basic compositional material. "L'homme armé" itself appears unadorned after two and a half minutes, but pay attention and you can hear it orbiting Ehlers' later bass solo. Next time you listen, you'll be able to hear how Prehn used it to generate his own theme, and also the rhythmic cells that open and close the piece. The final "Det var en Sondag Morgen" is closest in spirit to the volcanic energy of free jazz, and for my money rivals the best of Evan Parker's early work with Alex von Schlippenbach, or Brötzmann's legendary trio with Fred Van Hove and Han Bennink. John Corbett is on the one when he describes this as "original free music of the highest calibre" - and unless you happened to be in or around Copenhagen at the end of the sixties, you won't have heard this music before, though I guarantee you'll want to hear it again and again.

[Paris Trans Atlantic: Tom Prehn Quartet](#)

