



BILLY DRUMMOND & FREEDOM OF IDEAS - VALSE SINISTRE

August 3, 2022

Label: Cellar Music Group, 2022

Personnel - Dayna Stephens: tenor and soprano saxophone; Micah Thomas: piano; Dezron Douglas: bass; Billy Drummond: drums.

The excellent musical career of drummer and composer Bill Drummond has been forged more as a sideman than as a leader. Over the years, the experienced in-demand musician was heard in projects by Lee Konitz, Archie Shepp, Carla Bley, Eddie Henderson, Andrew Hill, and Chris Potter. His newest body of work, *Valse Sinistre*, marks his first appearance at the helm of an ensemble since 1996, the year he released the quartet album **Dubai** on the Criss Cross label. Drummond also leads a quartet here, a multi-generational one, with saxophonist Dayna Stephens in the frontline and a rhythm section complemented by Micah Thomas on piano and Dezron Douglas on bass.

The well-rounded repertoire brings jazz tradition infused to the core, starting off with Jackie McLean's supercharged "*Little Melonae*", whose boldly etched theme, frantic tempo, and indelible spirit is reinforced with smoke-filled solos that nurture an adventurous streak. The top-tier arrangement is by Douglas, and Drummond is particularly impressive as he keeps up the technically and physically demanding pulse.

The title track was composed by Carla Bley and originally included in her 1981 album **Social Studies**. This reworking of the tune has a piano intro that already bubbles with mystery in the

chords. It feels like eccentric circus music, intertwining the bizarre and the burlesque. The bandleader's variations behind the kit are remarkably tuneful here, and also on Grachan Moncur's "**Frankenstein**", whose marvelously intriguing aura makes a good company to the other tune.

"**Changes for Trane & Monk**" is the sole Drummond original, homaging the chord changes of Coltrane and the hooky melodies of Monk, whereas "**Clara's Room**", an unfussy post-bop waltz by the late pianist Frank Kimbrough, marks another dedication to that wonderful musician. This latter piece belongs to a group of gently molded compositions that go well together, namely "**Never Ends**", a composition by Thomas delivered with a focused soprano saxophone, crisp bass notes, and with a final vamp triggering snare drum activity; and David Raskin's standard "**Laura**", painted with cymbal legato and refined brush technique. True to form, the bandleader never shies away from a good swinging groove, and Stanley Cowell's "**Reconfirmed**" dives headfirst into a Parker-ish demeanor developed in the piano-bass-drums format.

With a knack for playing old and new pieces in a subtly dynamic fashion, Drummond reappears strong as the leader of this resilient quartet.



Favorite Tracks:

01 - Little Melonae ► 03 - Valse Sinistre ► 05 - Frankenstein