



JAZZIZ / Auditions / Bergman / Spring 2010

Borah Bergman

Live at Tortona

(Mutable)

One More Time

(Silta)

To the casual observer of the jazz scene, Borah Bergman may be a more obscure figure than many of the artists with whom he's recorded, mostly in duo settings, for the past two decades. The 77-year old pianist, an iconic figure in the small but resilient free jazz movement, has produced sessions with a long list of notable collaborators, focusing mostly on such saxophonists as Evan Parker, Oliver Lake, Roscoe Mitchell, Anthony Braxton, Peter Brotzmann and Thomas Chapin. On two recent duo dates, however, Bergman abandoned his sax obsession for fruitful associations with two Italian musicians, violinist Stefano Pastor and bassist Giorgio Dini. Bergman's stylistic trademark, thanks to being totally ambidextrous, is that he has liberated his left hand from its customary comping role. It's not surprising that at times his performances sound like the work of two pianists, as if a cyclone and hailstorm had collided, scattering a flurry of notes far and wide, or he was translating through the keyboard the aural essence of a Jackson Pollock canvass.

Live at Tortona offers a wide range of sonic options. Pastor elicits all of the sounds and effects a violin can produce, from high pitched screeches and lower register growls to swooping glissandi and percussive snaps and pops. His dialogue with Bergman is more than predictable call-and-response sequences. At times he superimposes his own theme over Bergman's kinetic musings. The pianist, meanwhile, is quite disarming when he slips into a reflective space, as he does on the serene "When Autumn Comes."

With Dini on *One More Time*, Bergman once again displays a uncustomary subdued approach on "Enough for his keep," a delightfully constructed conversation between the pianist and his bassist foil. The two trade short, overlapping phrases that sometimes involve little more than a sustained dissonant chord voiced against a clutch of fast-fingered bass notes. "A patter of footsteps" is a more elaborately developed melody that seems to beg for more attention before it ends after barely 90 seconds on a melancholy last note from Dini. The brevity of the piece and its approachable melody may surprise many of Bergman's fans, but, after all, the element of surprise has always been one of the pianist's most effective techniques.

-- Mark Holston