

COLIN VALLON TRIO - *AILLEURS*

HatOLOGY 636

Over the past decade, Hatology has been home to a robust roster of inventive and enterprising pianists. Players like Ran Blake, Marc Copland and Russ Lossing continue to produce projects with strong ties to the jazz tradition, sometimes to the chagrin of certain backward-looking factions of the Hat audience. Newcomer Colin Vallon shows himself worthy of inclusion in the established company with *Allieurs*, his debut for the label and an album that tinkers with the tactile conventions of the piano trio to create a body of music both familiar and strange. From the opening Vallon-scripted "Le Paradis Pedu" the album exudes a strong ECM aura, somber and awash in tonal grays and whites. Listening to the disc in my car after a recent snowfall, I found the music a perfect aural correlative to the ashen skies and icy exteriors of a Minnesota winter. Splashes of primary color arise on up-tempo pieces like the vivacious street band anthem "Mardi", but the ensemble palette stays comparatively muted much of the time.

Vallon's naturalistic voicings remind me of a curious admixture of Keith Jarrett and Bobo Stenson, with the occasional inclusion of subtle piano preparations like dampened keys and struck strings. Bassist Pat Moret and drummer Samuel Rohrer also rely on calculated manipulations of their instruments, the latter bowing cymbals and the former torquing his strings to create plinging overtones. Rohrer is especially difficult to pin down. One moment he's dealing in delicate dry brush strokes as on the closing reverie "Elle", at another in syncopated snare and kick drum rhythms that delay and decay like dub beats on the vaguely Klezmerish "Babylone." An incessant rock-inflected backbeat and press rolls on "Zombie" work in surprisingly effective collusion with Vallon's more ornate chords. That percussive adaptability jibes closely with the variable fingerings of Moret, who slips easily from periphery to prominence with patterns that rely on warmly rounded curves. His sturdy solo preface to the trio's reading of "Swing Low" sets up the lush ensemble interplay that follows. Likewise, the elegant "Je Ne Sais Pas" benefits from his sparsely placed harmonic accents and Rohrer's quieter side.

With a dozen tracks rendered in less than an hour, several are little more than fragments. The bright bouncy rhythms of "Souris" and cyclic machinations of "Robots" practically beg for extra elucidation while the scraped harmonics of "Sous-Marin" feel more like filler than a feasible fountainhead for something further. Freer elements occur sparingly and

the overall accessibility of the performance once again makes ECM comparisons handy and apposite. Listeners who already wince at the more approachable side of the Hat catalog probably won't be won over by what's here, but others with less obdurate tastes will likely find a musical friend in Vallon. I did.

~ Derek Taylor