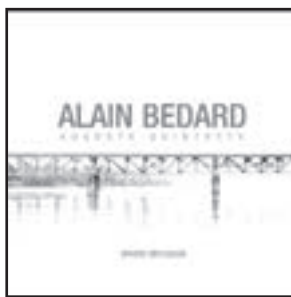


Nouvel Orchestra  
François Richard  
(Effendi)



Sphere Reflexion  
Alain Bédard Auguste  
(Effendi)

by Martin Longley

The Montreal label Effendi has been operating for nearly a decade, founded by the bassist and composer Alain Bédard and singer Carole Therrien. During May and June, it became the focus of a very successful Monday night Québec Jazz New York sequence at Dizzy's Club. The second of these four shows featured flutist François Richard with his Nouvel Orchestra. Their eponymously named disc employs a central concept of horns set beside a string section, Richard's flute joined by Yannick Rieu's saxophones and Jocelyn Veilleux' French horn, sweeping over the top of a piano-bass-drums rhythm division. A sophisticated tonal coloration is the main compositional result, with a defined Francophone feel that suggests an imaginary movie soundtrack for some lost '60s Parisian caper. The horns are lightly pointillistic in their themes, outgoing, ebullient and refreshingly optimistic in their drive. Even when soloing, they come across as a democratic part of the entire sonic confection. This unlikely horn section makes its stippling remarks, performing a courtship dance with the six-piece string wing. An easy-going breeziness pervades, though its disadvantage is a cumulative sense of sameness as the disc progresses. It's the last two tracks that make a departure, with "Écarlate" breaking up into semi-improvised abstraction and "Vitres De Son" introducing a slightly mordant feel, the strings exploring a somewhat darker zone.

The Dizzy's series had a running theme of collaboration with New York players. This was a winning move throughout, with violinist Mark Feldman stepping into an honorary soloing role with the Richard Orchestra. As is often the case, a live performance exaggerated certain aspects of the album, intensifying some of the contrasts. Feldman rejected the amplification employed by the rest of the strings, but his citrusy acoustic tones were perfectly captured by a traditionally-placed microphone and his showcase solos drew open smiles of pleasure from the regular section-colleagues, as well as strong applause from the crowd. Richard's flute solos were imbued with a deliberately soft flutter, forming another

contrast, this time with the controlled burring of saxophonist Alexandre Côte, who provided a welcome degree of friction to the ensemble. The highly propulsive qualities of Richard's music were more in evidence live, when set beside the pleasant free-wheeling of the album.

A fortnight later, label head Bédard himself brought out his Auguste Quintette, playing to another packed house at Dizzy's. His Sphere Reflexion album is ostensibly inspired by the music of Monk, but in its often bluesy sleaziness it's equally redolent of Mingus in its compositional stance. Well, 'sleazy' is going too far, but there is a slurred, zig-zagging jauntiness to the proceedings, slightly tipsy rather than completely hammered. For example, "Marée Basse" has a slogging, reeling emphasis to its theme that lends a kind of urbane wildness, forceful but with sensitive tonal interplay between the reeds of Michel Côte and Frank Lozano. Bédard favors a taut twang to his strings, giving his solos a robust snap. "Motel Carole" has a stalking, dramatic undercurrent, with Pierre Tanguay's ride cymbal suspending time, while Bédard walks purposefully.

The axis was subtly shifted during the live show, with a guesting Ted Nash taking on the Côte role. Nash tended to be a more forceful soloist, unbalancing the equality of the horns. This was no bad thing, but it lessened the tonal colorations of the album's themes, pushing Nash into a featured role. Somehow, this made for a more mainline jazz experience, dismantling some of the intricacies of the compositions. Bédard, too, made an impressive stand during several bass solos, increasing his presence in the onstage environment.

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