



Brooklyn DNA

Joe McPhee/Ingebrigt Håker Flaten (Clean Feed)
First Duet Live

Remi Alvarez/Ingebrigt Håker Flaten (JaZt TAPES)
The Hymn Project

Ingebrigt Håker Flaten/Dennis González (Daagnim)
by Stuart Broomer

Ingebrigt Håker Flaten has rapidly become one of the most prominent bassists in free jazz, in part due to his openness to varied musical situations, but much more so for the sheer power of his playing. First achieving a significant European profile in the late '90s with Bugge Wesseltoft's New Conception of Jazz, the first major ambassadors of Nu Jazz, Håker Flaten has since brought his ferocious drive to a host of prominent bands, often in company with the drummer Paal Nilssen-Love (The Thing, Atomic, Ken Vandermark's School Days and Frode Gjerstad's stellar improvising big band Circulacione Totale Orchestra) while showing off his softer side in duo with countryman saxophonist Håkon Kornstad. He's now a significant musical presence in Chicago and Austin - where he resides - as well as Europe. These recent CDs track some of Håker Flaten's American passages, all close to the beating heart of a fundamentalist free jazz.

Joe McPhee has been a frequent guest with The Thing and the senior saxophonist/trumpeter has previously recorded in duo with Håker Flaten (*Chicago Blues*, *Not Two*), so there's clearly developed musical chemistry on *Brooklyn DNA*. The duets hinge on the special musical character of Brooklyn, with pieces invoking various individuals and scenes prominent in its musical history. The two musicians craft a compelling vision of community. Håker Flaten's playing is both empathetic and prodding as he sometimes maintains very fast tempos while expanding his own expressive range. "Crossing the Bridge", dedicated to Sonny Rollins, suggests compound points of view, with McPhee's honking alto recalling Albert Ayler, until Håker Flaten enters and the piece assumes the Caribbean lilt of "St. Thomas" and Rollins' roots. There are fine invocations of Brooklyn visits by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and homages to residents like the late saxophonist Dewey Redman, but the most arresting music is also the most radical: "Enoragt Maeckt Haght", named for the Brooklyn motto of "Unity Makes Strength", is a probing exploration of bowed bass and airy pocket trumpet that represents the borough as terra incognita.

Remi Alvarez is a Mexico City-based tenor saxophonist whose work, like McPhee's, has a direct expressiveness that's immediately compelling. *First Duet Live* chronicles an Austin performance by the two musicians. On the 22-minute "First Duet", Alvarez reveals himself as an incantatory tenor player and one hears his work as testimony, whether it's creating a song-like stream, worrying a motif into new shapes and meanings or suddenly erupting into multiphonic cries and wails. Håker Flaten roots this discourse in time, surrounding, encouraging, framing and driving it forward. On "Second Duet", the bassist comes to the

fore with some wonderful bowed playing. Alvarez has a strong sense of voice, but he can touch on very different moods and different areas of his horn. There are moments when he finds a new effect in a series of high register yips or, alternately, wisps of sound, ably matched by Håker Flaten's sudden flights into upper-register harmonics.

Håker Flaten's aesthetic includes a kind of brutalist spirituality, certainly evident in his work with The Thing, but there's a far subtler take on the legacy of Albert Ayler and other energy players embodied in *The Hymn Project* with the great Texas trumpeter Dennis González, his sons, bassist Aaron and percussionist Stefan Gonzalez, and cellist Henna Chou. The CD opens with the hyper-resonant sound of Stefan Gonzalez' balafon and one eventually has a sense of this resonance echoing globally, touching spirits of Håker Flaten's native Norway and the Gonzalez family's Latin American heritage. There's a sense of continuous melody here, a stream of sound running from instrument to instrument. It's a chance for Håker Flaten's lyricism to emerge and it does so in guitar-like lines and subtle pitch-bends, dovetailing with the other strings, the percussion and Dennis Gonzalez' own inspired, soulful trumpet. Highlights abound, from the pensive mix of instrumental voices on "Doxology" to the rising tension of "Sweet Hour of Prayer" with Håker Flaten's spare and intense solo. But it's the cumulative power of the whole program, imbued as it is with an exalted musical nobility, that stays in memory.

For more information, visit cleanfeed-records.com, ingebrigtflaten.com and dennisgonzalez.com. Flaten is at *Roulette Jun. 13th* with The Thing and Joe McPhee as part of *Vision Festival*. See *Calendar*.

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