

Lauer Large - "Konstanz Suite"

Liner Notes by Wolf Kampmann

Does music need rules or not? Musicologists, composers, and musicians for once agree that music in every culture and every genre is subject to fixed rules, and has been throughout history. But music is, and always was, at its most interesting when this principle is both observed and disregarded at the same time. The Norwegian composer Arne Nordheim recently postulated that "what counts in music is the unheard." If only more composers and musicians followed this basic tenet, we would surely have to suffer only a fraction of the sound miscellanies constantly surrounding us these days. And having never before been heard, what music did remain for our delectation would be all the more powerful and long lasting. But it takes musicians of great willpower and format to produce previously unheard of music.

Johannes Lauer is far more than a trombonist, composer, and band leader; he also collects ideas and thinks outside the box. Questioning the innovative traditions of the twentieth century with great respect, he adapts them to fit his own style and transcends them for the future. He has explored jazz from every conceivable angle; as a student, as a participant in workshops and competitions, as a member of big name experimental big bands on the one hand and smaller groups on the other, in the European diaspora, on tour all over the world, and not least during his personal retreat into solitude. All these diverse exploits, constellations, and worlds subtly culminate in his "Konstanz Suite." Lauer is lucky enough to belong to a generation which sees no need for Europe and all things European to be compared with America. The two Americans in his band, which is otherwise composed of Central European musicians, have been as closely involved in their globetrotting leader's career as all the other members. Lauer knows exactly what he wants to express and with whom, and needs no external justification for his actions.

Lauer Large is not the sum total of its individual members' talents; it is a homogenous entity. In terms of line-up it is a big band, yet Lauer shatters all expectations regarding what is probably the most conventional jazz combo. Seldom has a large jazz group seemed so intimate, so much the product of an almost symbiotic conspiracy among its members. Lauer is a psychologist of sound who plays not only with his fellow musicians' voices, but also with their energy as people. When bass and sax dreamily swirl around each other in the opening number, encircled at a distance by the rest of the band, they open up areas of warmth and anticipatory energy that demand to be

conquered anew with each piece to come. The pressure to justify oneself that is so widespread in the jazz world seems completely foreign to Lauer. He provokes the listener's ear, wresting it from the lethargy induced by satiated expectations and returning it to its primordial soul, freed from all prejudice. Provocation is a means of purification with which to sharpen the senses rather than a revolutionary end in itself. The "Konstanz Suite" presents the dynamic departure of a 26-year-old musician into a cosmos packed with a seemingly limitless wealth of shapes and colors, traditions and future perspectives. Lauer chronicles what is possible rather than tying himself down. He regards jazz as a means rather than an end. His music oscillates between the extremes of complete abstraction on the one hand and everyday life on the other. Just as composition and improvisation are delicately intertwined, there is such an organic interdependence between what has been casually picked up and what has been abstractly devised that separating the two would be all but impossible. Lauer makes it very clear that he is searching for something and his determination to find what he is looking for is unmistakable. Three extremes collide in his personality: the dreamy romantic, the rational planner, and the impetuous innovator. As a result the "Konstanz Suite" is full of collisions and contrasts, just like life itself.

Lauer makes no pretenses to jazz soap. He is master of the rare art of connecting the banal with the spiritual – not only inside his own personal sound world, but also by synchronizing his perceptions and transformations with what the listener experiences. Lauer Large makes unheard music heard, but does so without permanently drawing attention to its own innovativeness.