

Variations on the Alto Sax

Any alto saxophonist who does not wish to sound like a trivial echo of the past has to find his or her own way through the instrument's variations. Eberhard's dedication to the alto sax is reflected in these two elaborate and unique homages to her musical ancestors. Her skill lies in her ability to transform the burden of history into a celebration of the present...

In 2010 Eberhard took one of these variations on her predecessors' work a step further. In what can only be described as a unique encyclopedic opus, she rearranged the entirety of Eric Dolphy's composition for the wind quartet and transformed it into a performance lasting more than ninety minutes. A hint of his precocious perfectionism has always wisped about her music, but how could we expect such opulent, painstakingly researched, delightful, and highly disciplined veneration in the face of genius itself....

Eberhard also carries this sense of openness over into a number of side projects, such as the duos in which she performs together with Günter "Baby" Sommer or Dave Burrell, in Ulrich Gumpert's organ quartet, in the Croomp quintet together with the Austrian trombonist Petra Krumphuber, the Portuguese percussionist Rui Faustino's quartet, or the Scottish trio NeWt. All of these projects are playgrounds for great musical adventures.

Among all of these ensembles, however, Being – Eberhard's trio with the bassist Jan Roder and drummer Kay Lübke – is at the center of her musical activity. This is Eberhard's chosen format when it comes to her own music – a music that is abstract yet still manages to swing with the signs of the times. Roder and Lübke provide the rock-steady foundation. And they do it with a great deal of finesse that is enormously resonant, even though (or perhaps precisely because) Roder plays without any amplification whatsoever in these twelve numbers. The pair provide a perfect demonstration of how a contemporary jazz ensemble has to consist of much more than just a couple of emancipated slaves to rhythm. They take all necessary license; they ground, support, and drive forward these twelve pieces, meeting in wonderful duets full of both power and subtlety. It is precisely these two words that mark the trio's second CD, whose title draws upon Kurt Schwitters's onomatopoeic use of language to express the beauty of Being. This is reflected in a furious yet sophisticated triangular back and forth that is packed with energy and imagination – and a great deal of improvisational ideas. The band's history since its debut in 2008 (Jazzwerkstatt 027) is marked by a high degree of consistency, the joy of discovery, and aplomb. Nothing is lost in the group's spontaneity. On this CD, Eberhard plays only the alto saxophone – an instrument from the 1940s – with which she draws upon the sounds of her predecessors all the way back to Johnny Hodges before coming full circle. "There still remains a great deal to be said," Eberhard says. And this balanced, fast-paced music is certainly proof that she remains one of the most important voices in contemporary German jazz.

Ulrich Steinmetzger (Liner Notes: What a beauty Being)