

**Matthieu Bordenave**  
**La traversée**  
**Florian Weber, Patrice Moret**

**Matthieu Bordenave:** tenor saxophone; **Florian Weber:** piano; **Patrice Moret:** double bass

ECM 2683

CD 6025 0882928 4

Release: 25. September 2020

French tenor saxophonist Matthieu Bordenave's first leader date for ECM – following on from his contribution to Shinya Fukumori's 2018 release *For 2 Akis* – introduces a new project with German pianist Florian Weber and Swiss bassist Patrice Moret. On *La traversée* - The Crossing - Bordenave explores an area between contemporary chamber music and jazz, subtly influenced by the innovations of the Jimmy Giuffre 3 with Paul Bley and Steve Swallow who “opened new territory that remains relevant for improvisers today. The recording of *La traversée* was guided by this approach to trio playing, in which melodic lines interweave and blossom in the nuances of tones, as each musician follows his intuition.”

Bordenave's writing for the trio emphasizes that this is a music in which space will have an important role to play, a feeling borne out by the austere quality of the improvising. Yet, this is also music that takes some risks, in its quiet way: prior to the recording the musicians played just a couple of concerts as a trio. “It was important to me not to play a lot in the live situation,” says Matthieu. “I did not want to fix and finalize arrangements, but to leave things open to the possibility of change in the studio...”

Ideas, however, had been percolating for a long time. Bordenave and Florian Weber first collaborated five years ago when Matthieu invited the pianist to join him in a programme at Munich's Unterfahrt club, based around music associated with Edith Piaf. “Florian is himself half-French and he knows very well the culture – everything from *chansons* to modern classical music. It was extremely interesting to play with him, and we kept in touch over the years.”

In preparation for the new album, “Florian and I talked a lot about how to incorporate some of the colours of modern composition. I love for instance Messiaen and Dutilleux. I wanted some of that sense of complexity in the chords. Too much complexity, however, can create a prison for improvisers. In some of the pieces, like ‘Archipel’, we take just a small fragment of written material and develop it further and further...”

Patrice Moret, whose deep listening, improvisational imagination, and thoughtful choice of notes had played a significant role in ECM recordings with Colin Vallon, Elina Duni and Nicolas Masson was chosen as bassist for the project. “He has a beautiful tone,” Matthieu says. “Quiet and strong at the same time – very important for this kind of music.”

Quiet and strong, delicate and resolute – the descriptions can apply with equal validity to the contributions of Bordenave and Weber. In this part-composed, part-improvised music, the musicians develop three independent voices, interacting, crossing paths, or developing freely roving counterpoint in a post-Giuffre idiom.

Bordenave's tenor saxophone sound is striking. The way in which he uses the upper range of his instrument, and his phrasing and tone – on this album in particular - may reflect, he suggests, his years spent playing classical music on alto saxophone: “In my head, I think, I transpose registers. And in the trio I'm not always playing saxophone-like lines at all but phrasing, at times, almost more like a cello perhaps...” Among jazz saxophone players, Matthieu admires the achievements of Warne Marsh. “But the most important thing for me is to find a personal sound that is right for the context.”

Florian Weber, also an ECM artist in his own right (refer to his quartet album *Lucent Waters*, and the duo album with Markus Stockhausen, *Alba*), recently won the Belmont Music Prize whose jury declared that “his piano playing is as boundless in its possibilities as it is economical and focused.” The late Lee Konitz referred to Weber as “one of the most creative piano players I have ever played with. He has the feeling the texture, just beautiful.”

In a performer's note in the CD booklet for *La traversée*, Bordenave writes “as in a volume of poetry where a certain atmosphere emanates from the text, the pieces resonate with each other like a mosaic...” Poetry has also provided atmospheric inspiration for the compositions, each of which is titled after lines and images from the work of René Char, who, in addition to being one of the great French writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “a lighthouse for many artists” as Matthieu says, wrote numerous poems steeped in the flavours of Provence. “The melodies were responses to some of the poems, or impressions drawn from them.” The “River” referred to in the opening and closing tracks is La Sorgue, “the river of respect for dreams” as Char put it, which runs through Pernes-les-Fontaines, where the album was made.

*La Traversée* was recorded at Studios La Buissonne in October 2019, and produced by Manfred Eicher.

**For more information:**

Matthieu-Bordenave.com

Florianweber.net

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