Michael Bates - Acrobat (2011)

1. Dance of Death 2. Talking Bird 3. Strong Arm 4. Some Wounds 5. Fugitive Pieces 6. Silent Witness 7. The Given Day 8. Yurodivy 9. Arcangela Personnel: Michael Bates – Bass, compositions Russ Johnson – Trumpet Chris Speed – Clarinet and tenor saxophone Russ Lossing – Piano Tom Rainey – Drums

Avant-garde bassist Michael Bates identifies the connection between the Stravinsky-influenced modern classical music of Shostakovich and his own free jazz tendencies on Acrobat: Music for, and by, Dmitri Shostakovich. Actually, only one track, the leadoff one, "Dance of Death," is a Shostakovich composition, and that piece, as played by a group in which Bates is joined by Russ Johnson (trumpet), Chris Speed (clarinet, saxophone), Russ Lossing (acoustic and Fender Rhodes electric pianos), and Tom Rainey (drums), comes off in the style of Kurt Weill's German period, as if it were a bit of incidental music from the score of The Threepenny Opera. On Bates' compositions written for Shostakovich, the group can be playful, as is Speed's clarinet on "Talking Bird," and it can turn in a straight bebop performance, as it does on "Strong Arm," which pairs Johnson's trumpet with Bates' bass in ascending and descending patterns, then follows with Lossing's electric piano against Rainey's busy drumming. "Some Wounds" is a slow blues with a mournful saxophone solo, while the equally melancholy "Fugitive Pieces" is more melodic and, as its title implies, more of a suite with sections strung together, including an unaccompanied clarinet solo. Later tracks, starting with "Silent Witness," are more typical free works, with every man for himself, the only apparent agreement about how to play concerning tempo. Yet these are experienced musicians capable of giving such music the risky, exciting feeling of free jazz, in which things always seem about to fall apart entirely, but never do. What it all has to do with Shostakovich may be more inspirational than literal, but the composer's reputation is only enhanced by an association with such inspired playing. ---William Ruhlmann, allmusic.com

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