



December 20, 2009

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OLIVIER MANCHON'S "ORCHESTRE DE CHAMBRE MINIATURE – VOLUME 1" RELEASES ON OBLIQSOUND FEBRUARY 9

NEW YORK - The music of Olivier Manchon is best reserved for very early in the morning or very late at night, in those quiet moments when the air is still. It is a medley of opposites: all at once light and delicate, and murky and deep, filled with the dramatics of a major orchestra, but in fact, quite the opposite. With "Orchestre de Chambre Miniature – Volume 1," which releases February 9 on ObliqSound, the French composer presents his miniature orchestra of five musicians – rather, an orchestra for a very tiny room or chamber. Manchon creates a cinematic narrative of jazz and classical music performed on strings and woodwinds, written especially for a select group of friends culled from the best of the jazz, indie rock, and classical realms.

On first listen, the orchestra may be hard to file and classify, both for the diverse influences heard in the music and also because it is in reality, a variation on a string quartet. After all, with Manchon, things are not quite what they appear. An acoustic bass replaces the second violin of a standard string quartet, and each song also features one woodwind instrument, transforming the sound.

The choice of the ensemble cast says a lot in itself. Manchon selected Hiroko Taguchi, a true Juilliard prodigy on viola, for her understanding of the rigor and precision required by classical chamber music, which she has frequently proven by playing for everyone from Harry Connick, Jr., to U2 to **the** Dixie Chicks. Alan Hampton, the jazz bass player who has played "with everyone in the jazz universe," as Manchon puts it, was also essential for the updated quartet. Christopher Hoffman, a cellist who has played with assorted masters of their craft from Henry Threadgill, Marianne Faithful, Devotchka and Ryan Adams, was perfect, "for moments where I wanted the music to seem written but be improvised," said Manchon. Straight from the vibrant world of jazz, John Ellis, on saxophone and clarinet, brought a special tone, sense of time and personal phrasing, complemented by Hideaki Aomori, whose exceptional sound on clarinet was so different from Ellis's that it didn't matter that they shared the same instrument. Last, but not least, close friend Gregoire Maret, the jazz harmonica phenom most known for his work with Herbie Hancock and Pat Metheny, flits in to provide just the right delicate touch for a single song. In brief, it is an accomplished team whose unpredictable commonalities and differences lend an exciting, indefinable sound.

Although he comes from Chantilly in France, Manchon and his music seem to come from everywhere. As a child, he studied both classical and jazz masters. He arrived in the United States in January 1999 without knowing exactly in which box he fit, effortlessly bouncing around between styles. Manchon has built diversity in a way that most string players never do. He studied at Berklee College of Music in Boston, moved to Los Angeles and then to New York, where he found a welcoming spot in Ditmas Park, Brooklyn. For almost three years, he made his way on Broadway, playing violin and guitar in the orchestra pit of the Tony and Grammy-winning musical *Spring Awakening*. He lent his violin skills to the string section of visionary indie rockers My Brightest Diamond; arranged beautiful string music for Sufjan Stevens's "Run Rabbit Run" album, performed with his OSSO project, and on his next album "The BQE." Primarily, though, Manchon spent the most time concocting orchestral pop recipes with his wife Clare in the indie band Clare and the Reasons. Their first album "The Movie" hit in 2007, and their new album "Arrow," released this past fall to great critical acclaim. In between all of these building blocks, Manchon found his own personal project, creating a combination of contemporary jazz and classical chamber music in small venues like Brooklyn's Barbes, where the Mini Orchestra was born. Even if you don't know Manchon's name yet, you soon will.

Manchon's Orchestre de Chambre Miniature evokes the fantastic. Just imagine a masquerade wherein a violin, a viola, a cello and a bass dance in a circle around a twirling soloist, suspended in an open void. The piece "Just A Second" glimmers with the dark tension of a fatal dance, well-tempered

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with audacity – and features Ellis losing his temper on the bass clarinet. “Memoires” is a sway of strings, a song on which Grégoire Maret dedicates whispered poems on harmonica.

This hybrid of jazz and classical sounds came naturally to Manchon, who as he describes “just always loved the violin.” Manchon loves the endless repertoire that classical music presents, be it for soloists, symphonies or chamber groups. Jazz was a second love: “I love the spontaneity, the excitement of the improvisation. It is a different medium with which to channel music but it’s just as valid and important.”

Manchon arrived at this musical intersection after learning not just violin, but also guitar, piano, recorder and even the musical saw. His influences include violinist David Oistrakh, Ravel, Debussy, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and melancholic summer melodies; a swath of the weird and wonderful – everything from contemporary songwriters like Sufjan Stevens to Swedish band Loney, Dear and traditional tunes from Japan; Grizzly Bear, The Beatles, Harry Nilsson, the Beach Boys and simply: silence.

There’s a sense of whimsy in the music that characterizes Manchon as a person. It is even present in such ordinary things as song titles. Instead of a classical Opus or Movement, Manchon opts for song names such as “Breakfast Queen,” “Just A Second,” and “Feline Leukemia.” “I usually give silly names to my music because I don’t want to sound pretentious or corny,” he says. “But for songs like Feline Leukemia, I really just love cats of all sorts. ‘Feline Leukemia’ really is a sad song – one of my friends had lost her cat after adopting it because of the disease, so I named it for her.” Manchon’s sense of wonder even shows through on the album’s packaging: the hand drawing by French artist Maud Guely depicts a mini city, encased in clouds, with a cat on the perimeter.

“Orchestre de Chambre Miniature – Volume 1” is an orchestra so profoundly intimate, captivating and alive, the music will linger in your mind long after the last note plays.

For more info:

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