

STEPHAN CRUMP / STEVE LEHMAN

KALEIDOSCOPE & COLLAGE

Steve Lehman Alto Saxophone
Stephan Crump Acoustic Bass

1. **Terroir** 22:22
2. **Voyages** 16:40

All music by Stephan Crump and Steve Lehman, © 2011 Crumbletones Music BMI & Density Music BMI. Produced by Stephan Crump, Steve Lehman (a Papillon Sounds production) and Intakt Records, Patrik Landolt. Published by Intakt Records. Recorded February 25, April 11, May 19, 2008 and April 27, December 14, 2009 at the Butler Plaza, Brooklyn, NY by Stephan Crump. Mixed January 2010 by Stephan Crump at the Butler Plaza. Mastered February 2010 by Liberty Ellman at 4D Studios. Cover art and graphic design: Jonas Schoder. Liner notes: David Adler. Photo: Gus Powell.

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It's a given that creative musicians work long and hard to master their instruments and develop an individual sound. But there's another thing that separates the technically gifted player from the transcendent one. It's what we might call the collaborative ear, that vital sixth sense that enables improvisers to bring out the best in each other and fashion meaningful stories, even while embracing the hazard of playing without a set script.

Bassist Stephan Crump and alto saxophonist Steve Lehman imbue all their work with that sense of trust and openness. On *KALEIDOSCOPE & COLLAGE*, their thinking takes on a unique clarity, one that perhaps only a duo project could have revealed.

Crump has earned considerable acclaim as a member of Vijay Iyer's trio and quartet. His most recent disc, an improvised duo with pianist James Carney, is called *ECHO RUN PRY* (Clean Feed). As leader of Rosetta Trio, with two guitars and bass, he has given us *ROSETTA* (2006) and *RECLAMATION* (2010). His winning collaborations as bassist, producer and engineer with singer-songwriter Jen Chapin (his wife) include *OPEN WIDE*, *LINGER*, *READY*, *LIGHT OF MINE* and *REVISIONS: SONGS OF STEVIE WONDER*. Also a prized sideman, Stephan has worked in varied settings with Joel Harrison, Rez Abbasi, Jim Campilongo, the Mahavishnu Project, Bobby Previte and more. In addition to composing for numerous film scores, he has two fine earlier quartet discs to his credit, *TUCKAHOE* (2001) and *POEMS AND OTHER THINGS* (1997).

Lehman's résumé is just as impressive and trans-idiomatic: projects with the likes of Anthony Braxton, Dave Burrell and Meshell Ndegeocello; co-leader of the groups Fieldwork (with Vijay Iyer and Tyshawn Sorey) and Dual Identity

(with fellow altoist Rudresh Mahanthappa); leader of his own quintet and octet, with engaging releases such as *ARTIFICIAL LIGHT*, *ON MEANING* and *TRAVAIL*, *TRANSFORMATION*, and *FLOW* under his belt. Steve has also immersed himself in electro-acoustic music and computer-driven improvisation in a solo format. His pieces for orchestra and chamber ensembles have been performed internationally by renowned new music entities such as the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), So Percussion, Kammerensemble Neue Musik Berlin, the JACK String Quartet, members of the Argento and Wet Ink Ensembles, and by the pianist Marilyn Nonken.

"Steve and I had circled one another for years in various colleagues' ensembles," notes Stephan. The two finally had a chance to work together under the leadership of guitarist Liberty Ellman. *OPHIUCHUS BUTTERFLY*, Ellman's absorbing 2005 release on the Pi label, was the result. Although there were six musicians involved, Crump and Lehman "clicked" in a way that was hard for either of them to ignore, even in the earliest rehearsals. "Whenever a moment broke through where Steve and I found ourselves interacting directly," Stephan says, "I felt a distinct polarity to our music that demanded further investigation."

Despite their busy schedules, they made time over the course of two years to connect for open-ended duo sessions every few months, recording the results at Stephan's home studio. "We could have released what happened that first day," Crump enthuses. "I couldn't stop listening to it. We were so clearly riding the edge and pushing each other into new territory."

After listening back to their works in progress, the two began to meet up "for some sifting, culling and gold-mining," as Crump puts it. "We extracted pieces of various lengths, from five seconds to eight or nine minutes, and organized

them into one of ten or so categories we invented to help structure all this in our minds. Then we started mapping out a possible shape and direction, even narrative, to the album, while welcoming the idea that the work might take some control of its own destiny at any point."

That destiny is now clear: on *KALEIDOSCOPE & COLLAGE* we hear two extended pieces, "Terroir" and "Voyages," both executed with great authority and sensitivity. The dynamic and timbral range is broad; the communication between Steve and Stephan sharp-witted and alive.

"We both tend to favor a clear sense of structure, even in the domain of open improvisation," says Lehman. "Everything on the album is completely improvised, but we found a lot of ways to create spatial/compositional structures together. And another kind of creative tension, just below the surface, came from the fact that the music was placed into a collage and 'curated' and mixed in a very meticulous way."

Knowing this makes the seamless quality of *KALEIDOSCOPE & COLLAGE* all the more striking. There are tightly wound rhythmic cycles with a funky, undulating pulse, either implied or explicit; there are abstract, gradually evolving soundscapes brought forth by Stephan's oceanic arco passages and Steve's furtive, pianissimo legato musings; there are dramatic, even suspenseful episodes, as when Stephan commences drumming on the body of the bass roughly ten minutes into "Terroir." The transitions are never random, though they can be extremely sudden, as with Steve's lightning-fast forte outburst at the two-minute mark of "Voyages."

"Both of us integrate a fairly wide repertory of extended/experimental playing techniques," Lehman observes. "But it almost always happens within the context and confines of an ad-hoc compositional structure. We're free improvising,

we're playing in odd meters, we're using extended techniques, we're playing songs, and we're doing it, in many cases, all at the same time."

Crump recorded and mixed the session at home, and how fitting that Liberty Ellman, who helped birth the Crump/Lehman duo in the first place, was recruited to master it. (A capable and sought-after sound engineer, Ellman is also a member of Crump's Rosetta Trio.) "The collage was just as pliable as it was stubborn at times," says Stephan, "and all along we reveled in the process of making this album in a way neither of us ever had before." Which leaves us, the listeners, to complete the process and drink in what these two venturesome, compatible spirits have wrought.

David R. Adler
New York, October 2010

