

Gutfleisch / Schurmann / Frey featuring Hendrik Meurkens – Roundabout

by Tim Larsen | Jun 15, 2023 | Album Reviews, International



Jazz is an improvisers game and Gutfleisch, Schurmann, Frey, plus Meurkens, are masters at it.

Suisa Records

Hendrik Meurkens – Chromatic harmonica, vibraphone; Christian Gutfleisch – piano; Dominik Schurmann – Bass; Elmar Frey – drums

When I first heard ROUNDABOUT I thought it sounded like the Modern Jazz Quartet. Gutfleisch, Schurmann, Frey are a trio but with guest vibraphone player Hendrik Meurkens you've got the classic MJQ lineup. Meurkens is a 2 mallet player just like Milt Jackson. But when Hendrik drops his mallets and pulls out his harmonica you've got something else indeed.

Meurkens majored in vibraphone at the Berkeley School of music. He taught himself how to play the chromatic harmonica after hearing Toots Thielemans. Harmonica players are common in the blues but not so much in jazz. Before Meurkens Toots Thielemans was the most well known. Benny Goodman picked up Thielemans in 1949 and he played with George Shearing through most of the fifties.

I'm amazed at how many emotions Meurkens harmonica can conjure up. On 'Maybe May' it's mournful. Besides reminding me of an accordion player on the streets of Paris on 'The End Of A Bug Affair' it's an upbeat playfulness. 'Miriam's Bale-Ade' is slow and serious. On 'Ramba Samba' it's swinging joyfulness.

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Most European and Scandinavian pianists start as classical music students but Christian Gutfleisch started his musical career at the Swiss Jazz School in Bern. Gutfleisch is much in the jazz tradition. You can hear elements of Teddy Willson and some Errol Garner in his playing. All three members said they started the trio because they loved swing, hardbop, and modern jazz.



ROUNDABOUT is a collection of twelve original jazz compositions. They're all over the place; from ballads, up tempo numbers, to Latin and Brazilian tunes.

'Ramba Samba' is uptempo with a heavy Brazilian groove. Drummer Elmer Frey doesn't solo a lot on the album but his drum dialogue on this is simply riveting.

'A Better World' is a showcase for Gutfleisch. He makes playing the piano sound so easy. It's beautiful.

The title track, 'Roundabout', has a lot of playful energy. Four different musical voices sound like they're having fun speaking as one. Jazz is an improvisers game and Gutfleisch, Schurmann, Frey, plus Meurkens, are masters at it.

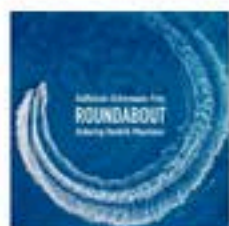
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