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The New York Second - Music at Night (and Other Stories) / After the Hours, the Minutes (CD Review)

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When in the late 1940s the first jazz musicians started experimenting with what would later be called bebop, not every jazz lover cheered on this development. And when some two decades later this process repeats itself in what will become free jazz, this is even more so. Since then, then, we have had two types of jazz lovers: those for whom melody should play a role and those for whom it rather gets in the way. And yes, a small group, including myself, likes both. My preference may be for experimental jazz, but the more melodic jazz, if done well, can still appeal to me.

And so, in every way, Harald Walkate and his The New York Second have my support. For this pianist is a more than excellent composer - all pieces on the albums are by him - who really knows how to add something to a genre in which a lot has already happened. He has made four albums so far with this construct, the last two of which I would like to present to you. 'Music at Night (and Other Stories)' he realized with a sextet, 'After the Hours, the Minutes' with a trio. Both appeared on his own label.

Besides the rhythm section, featuring Walkate, regular drummer Max Sergeant and bassist Thomas Pol, we hear four horn players on 'Music at Night (and Other Stories)': trumpeter Teus Nobel, flutist Mark Alban Lotz, saxophonist Jesse Schilderink and trombonist Vincent Veneman. The album took its title from Aldous Huxley's collection of essays of the same name, "Music at Night."

But Walkate shows he is inspired by more things. Thus we begin the party with "These Are the Chosen Words," for which Walkate reached out to Steely Dan. We hear sultry chords from Walkate, then soon the rhythm creeps in. Further beautiful motifs from Walkate, interspersed with Lotz on the alto flute and Nobel in the melody.

And then the beginning of "Him, A Bull? Ha! A Bird," which deals with the friendship between Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemingway. Simply those first notes from Walkate, how he manages to create a complete experience with so little, is just beautiful. Then the horns join in, giving depth to it, and Walkate expands it further: this is what friendship sounds like.

We already knew that Lotz is unsurpassed on the flute, but that solo in "The Bostonian" once again makes clear what he owes his fame to. And indeed they are stories, on this album. Take the compelling 'The Drowned World,' the engaging 'Music at Night' - with wonderful solos by Pol, Lotz and Veneman - and the exciting 'The Keys Ain't the Keys No More,' which includes a wonderful solo by the master himself.

For "After the Hours, the Minutes," Walkate found inspiration in the concept of time, especially the passage of time. We hear Walkate, Sergeant and on the bass Lorenzo Buffa.

We begin with the one-minute-plus "Prelude," which anticipates the final piece of the album "Let's Go Where the Mountain People Go," and then the album really takes off with "Professor Nelson Strikes Again" - the title comes from the writer Richard R. Nelson and his book "The Moon and the

Ghetto" that inspired Walkate for this piece - subdued piano sounds reach us here, nicely embedded in the playing of Sergeant and Buffa. The advantage of a trio album is that we now get an even better image of Walkate's finely crafted playing. Walkate also knows, of course, that the title "Song About Nothing" doesn't mean anything; in fact, this piece is about everything that makes music worthwhile: that pointed melody, that captivating rhythm from Sergeant, it makes it one of the best pieces on this album.

And that feeling you have when something doesn't move along, for example when you're waiting in line, Walkate captures this perfectly in "The Great Wait," with its lingering structure. Another highlight, especially because of the dreamy piano playing, is 'Moon, 2018' for which Walkate found inspiration from a photograph of Ilona Langbroek, which his wife once gave him for his birthday. Also special is that contemplative solo by Buffa in the title piece of this album: 'After the Hours, the Minutes'.

What is striking about this album, and thus about Walkate's playing, is the rhythm. Two fine examples are fairly at the back of the album: "What the Bagelman Saw" and "Now We're Talking. In short, two wonderful albums for lovers of classic, melodic jazz.