

- 1 Act of Love 101 10:16
- 2 Act of Love 102 5:17
- 3 Act of Love 103 3:56
- 4 Act of Love 104 4:50
- 5 Act of Love 105 4:17
- 6 Act of Love 106 2:56
- 7 Act of Love 107 2:22
- 8 Act of Love 108 2:28
- 9 Act of Love 109 2:39
- 10 Act of Love 110 3:07

Total Time 43:11

BORAH BERGMAN, PIANO

LOL COXHILL, SOPRANO SAXOPHONE

PAUL HESSION, DRUMS



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Bergman / Coxhill / Hession
ACTS of LOVE

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Borah

BERGMAN COXHILL HESSION

Lol

Paul

ACTS of LOVE

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Two men. How you picture them may well influence how you understand their music. How you hear them will tell you a lot about who they are. Picture the pianist, as he suggests himself, digging out rocks with his father. Imagine the saxophonist up on the pedestrian walkway of Hungerford Bridge in London, busking for the passers-by. Old snapshots, faded and cracked, but they tell a great deal, and so do those names: Bergman and Coxhill.

With a unique, two-handed approach that dispenses with the traditional notion of piano playing as competing or interlocking lines, Borah Bergman deals with sound as mass, great chilly bergs or hot flows of magma that change shape as different layers flow against one another, hardening and melting at different rates. By contrast, Lol Coxhill is a singer, a chanticleer on the dunghill of the city or on the rooftop of your house, a head full of old songs and the harmonic codes to transform them. The simplest difference may be that Coxhill comes from a jazz tradition, never more communicative than when playing changes and subverting a saccharine show-tune, while Bergman, for all his deep understanding of blues, boogie-woogie, swing (lessons from Teddy Wilson), bebop (a revelatory glimpse of Bud Powell), comes from somewhere else, classical, cantorial, exclamatory, De profundis clamavi . . .

What unites them, though, even beyond the astonishing lingua franca of improvisation, is the idea of music as a kind of labour. Both seem to inhabit an old European ideal, anti-romantic and the toughest creative path there is, that subordinates the idea of works, perfect icons of expression ready for admiring consumption, to the idea of work, a physical, mental and moral effort that has ritual at one



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end of its spectrum and entertainment away at the other. These are hugely enjoyable pieces; they also have an element of ritual to them; but at their core is something much more profound and constantly evolving.

The evolution of music of this kind depends on a very particular sense of time. Like some of the finest British "free" percussionists – Eddie Prevost, the late John Stevens, the younger Mark Sanders – Paul Hession has the ability to impart swing to apparently metreless playing. His virtues are easily overlooked because he seems to blend effortlessly into any background or environment – the classical evolutionary virtue – and one only becomes aware of his importance when he drops out for a measure or two. Such are the ironies of shedding a performing ego.

Coxhill's time on Hungerford Bridge shouldn't be compared to Sonny Rollins' lonely woodshed up among the steelwork of the Williamsburg Bridge in New York. It perversely lacks that element of theatre and brings in an element of simple pragmatism. You busk to make money, waiting for other gigs. You move rocks to make way for trees, or corn, or simply because there is a special dignity in such endeavour. Coxhill was long a favourite MC at British jazz festivals, not just because he had a busker's line in humour, but because he brought a special evenness of attention to the music, whether it was free-form or touching on backbeat pop. He could also play "I Can't Get Started" in any key you liked if one of the advertised acts failed to turn up. Not that Bergman couldn't. Check out how he syncopates, as well.

Uniqueness is a much exaggerated quality. Every rock pulled from the ground is unique; the face and history of every passer-by different to the last; what's important, though, is what you make of them in the collective. Bergman and Coxhill are special and play special music, because they have committed themselves to something larger than individual expression.

Banish schools, categories and pigeonholes, but keep those images and those names in mind as you listen to this . . .

—Brian Morton

