

Tolvan Big Band: Plays the Music of Helge Albin

By

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While one still hears on occasion that the big bands are dead — and in this country, at least, many are on life support — Sweden, whose population is less than New York City's, has today roughly 500 active big bands. Although it should be noted that the greater number of them are local amateur groups, the country boasts some world-class ensembles as well, one of which is the well-seasoned and finely tuned Tolvan Big Band from the area around Malmö. Tolvan has been in existence since the late '60s and led since 1979 by alto saxophonist/composer Helge Albin whose forward-leaning compositions are the centerpiece of the band's recent recording on the mid-price Naxos label.

Besides writing for and leading the ensemble, Albin renders handsome solos on "The Game," "One Minute for Myself" and "Nice and Easy" (his own composition, not the one usually associated with Frank Sinatra). While Albin's charts aren't imitative, for the sake of comparison think of Gil Evans, Maria Schneider, Jim McNeely, late-period Bob Brookmeyer or perhaps Bill Holman. Some are up-tempo, but none could reasonably be described as a flag-waver. Rather than employing a series of brassy sonic booms, Albin's intricate charts come at the listener in layers, each one well-textured and requiring one's wholehearted consideration. That's not to say they don't swing; they do, but not in the manner of Basie or Herman. The opening selection, "The Game," moves nicely along at a rapid pace with splendid solos by Albin and trumpeter Peter Asplund. Cennet Jönsson's soprano is the solo voice on the polyrhythmic "Mysterious No. 7," Albin has the ballad "One Minute for Myself" to himself, and pianist Jörgen Emborg shows his formidable chops on another elaborate piece, "Connections." Asplund's warm flugel surfaces on the leisurely "Samba Canção," and he's heard again on trumpet with Albin on "Nice and Easy" before tenor Inge Petersson and trombonist Vincent Nilsson square off on the medium-tempo closer, "First Line." This isn't for everyone, but those who appreciate a modern big band with plenty of meat on its bones should find it appetizing. Track listing: The Game; The Mysterious No. 7; One Minute for Myself; Connections; Samba Canção; Nice and Easy; First Line (56:41).

Personnel:

Helge Albin, leader, alto sax, flute; Per B

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