

Saxophone Alone: Tom Bergeron

One of the most challenging scenarios for a saxophonist is to be on stage with no accompaniment. You have no rhythm section, no chords, and complete exposure. You ARE the band. The ante gets even higher when you include pieces which are intended for solo saxophone, knowing that the notes on the page will only come as alive as you, alone, make them. Keeping that in mind, it is a wonder that anyone is brave enough to create a recording that sticks completely to this formula. Tom Bergeron rises to the occasion in a most incredible fashion. Bergeron is a virtuostic saxophonist, and there are truly few players that I dare even say that about. He is a master of classical, improvisatory, avant garde, and jazz performance, albeit with a trademark Bergeron twist. He is a consummate composer, arranger, teacher and technician, as well as a gifted and intriguing live performer. If it seems like I am going overboard here, you obviously have not experienced his music first hand, as everyone who hears his music has a startlingly similar reaction.

That said, this CD is a good representation of Bergeron's sound, although the range of repertoire is limited. There are precious few instances of his stunning extended techniques, save his flawless altissimo on the contemporary classical pieces on this CD. It seems that the goal of the CD was not to showcase the player, but to showcase the music, which is a novel and beautiful concept, especially from a player who can literally perform *anything*. The format of the CD is essentially composed pieces interspersed with "zenprovisation." Bergeron meditates on melodic and imaginary landscapes, creating some really interesting textures. On closer inspection, one discovers these pieces have immensely complex patterns and structures. Don't be surprised to hear "mutually exclusive triads" or "extrapolated modality" in these snapshots. The composed material consists of some extremely challenging works. **Caprice en forme de valse** by Paul Bonneau could be one of the most difficult pieces ever composed for saxophone. It is certainly one of the most popular unaccompanied sax works ever written. Bergeron executes it flawlessly. Another high point of the composed material is **Recitative and Presto** by John D. White. This introspective and wildly complex work hails from one of America's most intriguing and least heard composers. White's saxophone writing is incredibly idiomatic and textural which is a rare accomplishment for most non-sax-playing composers. Again, Bergeron plays this piece with authority and grace. All saxophonists can learn from the way in which Bergeron incorporates altissimo into his standard range. Notes above F# sound timbrely the same as notes below it.

One of my only complaints about this CD is that there are not more multiphonics passages. Bergeron is a master of this difficult technique, and players everywhere can learn volumes from him on the way he approaches it. Another minor issue with the CD is the acoustic setting. Bergeron chose to record the CD in a performance space at the University where he teaches which does provide a "live" feeling, but I believe the delicate nature of his playing might have been better served in a more intimate or studio setting. All that aside, this is a fantastic CD that saxophonists everywhere should treat themselves to. It caters nicely to jazz *and* classical sensibilities, and will likely become a regular part of your listening rotation.

Saxophone Alone is available by contacting Tom Bergeron at:

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