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Hollmer, Lars: Viandra

A name known to most prog and avant-garde as the leader of Swedish RIO giants, Samla Mammas Manna and their various spin-offs, this is Lars Hollmer's 12th solo album released in his 60th year and recorded over the past 7. Although he plays a wide variety of instruments it is his beloved accordion which is the most prominent feature in this gentle and easily accessible set of traditional and modern compositions, gathering musical pollen from the realms of folk, jazz, pop, film, theatre and dance. Lars is joined by a stellar set of musical talent including Univers Zero's Michael Berkmann contributing some fine bassoon, oboe and horn parts, notably on the third track.



Lars' work is always rhythmically interesting and he is right up front about that with the title track which has a quirky mix of time signatures rattling the framework of a solid folk melody. Pre-war silent cinema could be the setting in "Mirror Objects" whilst "Snabb" is indeed fast, with its theatrical idiom and dense dualled drums supplemented by Morgan Agren. A more pastoral accordion piece rotates the tempo dial dramatically before "Påztema" draws in tenor sax contributions as a juxtaposition to the street-play strains of the accordion. "Moldaviska" is inspired by one of Lars' film scores. Strings provide accompaniment to the next track and in "Merged with friends" Lars combination of organ, piano and accordion offers up a tranquil scene.

We could be at the circus in "Konstig", but it would be a slightly strange and distorted view from the seat we were offered where the jumpy rhythm and off-beat timing bend the traditional theme – I'm reminded very much of Canada's Miriodor here, with whom Lars has collaborated. They share a humorous and optimistic take on life which is a vital part of this piece. Having said that, "Baladeis" is a rather more melancholic arrangement with a sonorous bassoon and English Horn gifting the architecture for the sweeter accordion refrains. "Strutt" does just what it says on the label; its jaunty pace is then contrasted by the lullaby refrains of "Little Bye", the first of

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two pieces to feature the voices of three of Lars' grandchildren. The doomy cello and bass drum of "Första 05" are set off by a violin lament and semitonal accordion in this dirge. More of the children's contributions can be heard in "Alice", a joyful, street-fair march of a song which changes rhythm almost imperceptibly as it develops toward a suggestion of menacing clouds on the horizon, suddenly cleared away by the sunshine accordion figure which started the song off. The tactic is repeated toward the end.

Violin and plucked strings support the reflective oboe in "Överdagö" and the collection is completed by the longest work on the album at over 5 minutes. "Folkdrön Menad" begins in the realms of theatrical tragedy with a weeping violin and long organ chords creating a sombre tone. Orchestra and choral parts are used to exquisite effect as the theme progresses and is a fittingly exotic closing piece in what is a highly personal work exposing the many facets of Lars Hollmer's talents.

Track Listing

1. Viandra
2. Mirror Objects
3. Söb (Seek)
4. Snabb (Fast)
5. Moldaviska
6. Påztema
7. Prozesscirk
8. Merged With Friends
9. Konstig (Strange)
10. Baladeis
11. Strutt (Strut)
12. Lilla Bye (Little Bye)
13. Första 05 (First 05)
14. Alice
15. Överdagö
16. Folkdrön Menad

Added: September 3rd 2008

Reviewer: Richard Barnes

Score: ★★★★★

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