



Donso n'goni
Christer Bothén (Black Truffle)
Rörane

Quagmire & Christer Bothén (Relative Pitch)
Serpentine

Christer Bothén, Oren Ambarchi, Johan Berthling,
Andreas Werliin (Black Truffle)
by Bill Meyer

In 1971, a hunting community in southern Mali faced an existential crisis: should they adhere to tradition and keep the music they played on a harp-like instrument called the donso n'goni exclusive to their own kind – or should they teach their old songs to a visiting Swedish musician? The opinion that prevailed was that if the visitor learned their music, he might spread the news of their community's existence. Their gamble paid off. Christer Bothén took his donso n'goni back to Sweden, where he started playing this hitherto unheard music on radio and TV. A year later, he opened his door one morning to find Don Cherry on his doorstep, ready to learn the instrument and ultimately procure his own.

The Malians could not have picked a more effective ambassador if they had tried. Bothén (who turns 85 this month) would play with Cherry throughout the '70s before going on to work as a leader and featured sideman, primarily on bass and contrabass clarinets. His career has followed a gradually ascending arc in which the last decade has been his most productive. The records under consideration here include a rare solo excursion and, demonstrating Bothén's musical adaptability, two

collaborations with established ensembles.

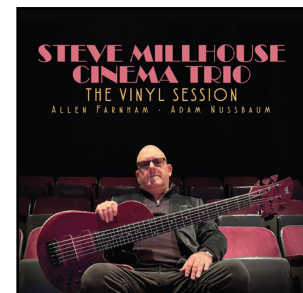
Donso n'goni reveals his conceptual solidity. It is his only recording devoted exclusively to the instrument, which he plays in a personal style that combines Malian tradition with his own unhurried, melodic sensibility. Bothén departs from tradition in that he doesn't use the instrument to accompany praise songs; his phrases are wordless, but they nonetheless convey a strong sense of narrative. While deep bass patterns impart momentum, more intermittent, higher pitches tilt the music's vista upwards, inviting listeners to lose themselves in his highly individual sound world.

Rörane pairs Bothén with Quagmire, which comprises Karin Johansson (piano), Nina de Heney (bass) and Henrik Wartel (drums). It looks like a standard piano trio, but it subverts conventional instrumental hierarchies and vocabularies. On each of the album's five tracks, the four musicians improvise a zone of sound or mode of interaction and then explore it with parsimonious purpose. Johansson gravitates more to her instrument's potential as a zither in a sonorous box than its familiar role as a keyboard, while Wartel and de Heney engage in enough frictional activity to kick up a cloud of rosin dust. Bothén fits right into their dynamic, sometimes probing, other times threading long, texturally rich strands of pitch with his low reeds.

Culturally, Sweden is not that big a place. Andreas Werliin, who recorded *Rörane*, is also the drummer of the band now known as the Ghosted Trio. His partners in that endeavor: Johann Berthling (bass) and Oren Ambarchi (guitar) – the latter who plays through a signal chain that very effectively filters out any evidence that his sounds originated from a plank with six strings. Ambarchi's swirling output on *Serpentine* sounds like it came from a Hammond organ or, on "Antigorite", a music box that's hit a gusher, shooting refracted plucks

into the atmosphere nurtured by his associates' rhythmic grid. Most of the time, Berthling plays an unchanging ostinato around which Werliin constructs an elaborate, constantly mutating, rhythmic superstructure. Bothén appeared as a guest on the trio's first album, but here he is an equal partner, using his donso n'goni to add gravity to their grooves and his bass clarinet to loft gradually unfurling cries over the music's pulsing surfaces.

For more info visit blacktrufflerecords.com and relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com



The Vinyl Session
Steve Millhouse Cinema Trio (SteepleChase)
by Andrew Schinder

The movies have always been fertile ground for exploration by jazz musicians. Even forgettable films have spawned some of the genre's most revered standards. Contrabass guitarist Steve Millhouse's Cinema Trio continues this tradition of mining film music for inspiration, drawing on soundtracks both obscure and beloved.

On his group's latest album, *The Vinyl Session* (intended for listening on vinyl, though also available on CD and as a digital download), the Cinema Trio

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