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FRANCOIS INGOLD TRIO

Song Garden
Altrisuoni Records

By Tom Ineck

“Song Garden,” the recent debut by 30-year-old Swiss pianist Francois Ingold, further extends the impressionist keyboard school founded by Bill Evans and later developed by Keith Jarrett, Fred Hersch, Ivan Paduart, Brad Mehldau and others. It is poetry in motion, truly a “garden” of colorful musical delights.

Like the others mentioned above, Ingold excels in the trio format, here with bassist Diego Imbert and drummer Fred Bintner. Recorded last year in France and mastered in Switzerland, “Song Garden” reverberates with European romanticism, especially on the gentle “Children’s Song (To Denis)” and “Love Song.”

Even “Premiere Dent,” with its pulsing Latin rhythm and brief drum solo, maintains its stateliness in Ingold’s flowing lines and Imbert’s subtle accompaniment. The bassist steps out a bit more on the lyrical “Il n’y a pas de’amour heureux,” by Georges Brassens, a popular French singer-songwriter who died in 1981. Imbert provides a beautiful bass counterpoint to Ingold’s keyboard flights.

Ingold composed five of the eight tracks. “Black Trombone” is a haunting tune by French composer and cult figure Serge Gainsbourg. But, undoubtedly, the oddest choice here is “A Forest,” a 1980 hit by the British rockers The Cure. Like Mehldau, Ingold is capable of provocatively transforming a familiar pop tune while remaining true to its spirit. He repeatedly states the theme and creates dark variations, with Bintner eventually escalating to some rock drumming pyrotechnics.

The apt closer, “Hymne au Revoir,” is a gorgeous ballad of farewell that again places Ingold solidly in the romantic camp of Evans and his spiritual descendants. We hope the Francois Ingold Trio does not stay away too long.

Actually, “Hymne” is not the end of “Song Garden,” which after a couple minutes of silence contains a hidden track with the most animated playing on the entire recording. It has a Monkish flavor and features some very uninhibited drumming by Bintner.