

DAHLEN BAERENTZEN PROJECT
«Lifelines»

Gateway Music, 2010

Sienna Dahlen (vo), Mads Baerentzen (p, k), Morten Ramsboel (b), Lars Daugaard (dr), Jakob Buchanan (tp), Per Chr. Frost (g), Thomas Ousager (perc), Birgitte Bae-rentzen Pihl (v, viola), Morten Christoffer Moller (viola), Jon Andreskou (c)

International projects are not uncommon for Sienna Dahlen -- they're rather normal, in fact. One of her bands resides in Canada, another in France, and the third, the "Dahlen Baerentzen Project", in Denmark. There's a simple explanation for this: Sienna is not only a vocalist, but also a singer-songwriter/musician who tours actively around the Old and New World and often as a solo act. Just as frequently, however, she connects with fellow musicians along the way and creates lucrative, collaborative projects.

When one hears the same voice on 11 tracks singing in English and French one normally defines the owner of that voice as the leader of the project. In this case, however, (as made evident in the title of the project) there are two leaders-Sienna herself and the Danish piano player, Mads Baerentzen, who is also the co-author of 7 of the songs on the album including excellent pieces such as «Mads'ness» and «Bitter Bliss».

This CD differentiates itself from others on several levels. In regards to the vocals, it is not common to hear a vocalist with a rare and recognizable voice approaching contemporary jazz in this fashion. The majority of female vocalists, if they happen to possess a voice and tone color similar to Sienna's, resort to singing mainstream jazz and in turn, reap the rewards from it. Sienna, in contrast, sings jazz (per se) with a unique ballad technique and rarely opts for scattling. At times, she also makes use of childlike sounds/vocal experimentation and yet is not afraid to linger on sentimental notes that would likely suit pop music more than jazz. Overall, Sienna's minimalist approach to vocalizing leaves much space for interplay with the musicians, which challenges everyone to remain inventive and spontaneous. From one moment to the next, Baerentzen and his colleagues can go from sounding like a straight ahead jazz combo to acquiring the characteristics of a rock band, which, by the way, is accomplished on an upright bass instead of an electric bass and a piano rather than keyboards.

One of Sienna's concert hits, "Stray", sounds especially magnificent here. The arrangement is expressly minimalist and laid back and features a bluesy solo by Per Frost. The group's interpretation of "Riverman" by Nick Drake is another "killer", however, not in a way that pushes external showiness on the listener, but rather, with a tasteful parsimony and emotional depth. And finally, the quite surprising interpretation of "Faust Arp" (by none other than Radiohead). In this

piece, the Dahlen/Baerentzen Project establishes a full out rock/electro soundscape that is embellished by strings and Sienna's gloomy yet beautiful treatment of this song. In addition, we're also greeted by an unexpected major key and the long-awaited, true revelation is born.

«Lifelines» is anything but simple and low-key, as some of Dahlen's earlier albums have been, but it matches a jazz soul like a stone cork in ancient alchemic bottles. It's hard to rate this album after the first listen, as on the surface it may seem rather ordinary. However, after the second and third listening you understand that it would be easier to present your friends with some recognizable masterpiece by Ella Fitzgerald, for example, than give away "Lifelines". Why, because you know that there's not much to question in Ella and meanwhile, there's a lot to question in Sienna, which is awesome.