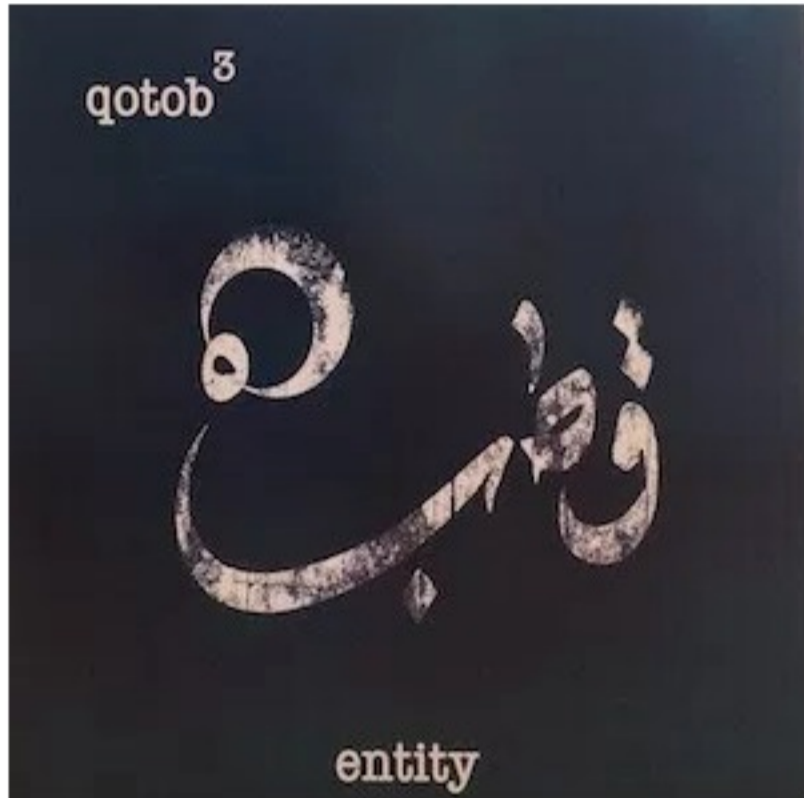


ALBUM REVIEWS

QOTOB TRIO 'ENTITY' CD/DIG (CHOUX DE BRUXELLES) 5/5

🕒 OCTOBER 24, 2017



Brussels-based independent label Choux de Bruxelles comes up with one of the most interesting new releases in recent years and a bona fide ECM sound recording in all but name. The genesis of the album is the encounter between three musicians from disparate and seemingly polar apart traditions and a previous quartet album recorded in Damascus between four young Syrians looking to mentally escape the confines of war. One of these, Syrian cellist Bassel Abou Fakher, left his native land to settle in the Belgian capital and has a strong Middle Eastern classical background. Belgian

pianist Jean-Baptiste Delneuveville is resolutely francophone in outlook and oscillates between classical and jazz. Accordionist Piet Maris comes from the Flemish-speaking community in Belgium, yet stylistically belongs more to the French chanson tradition. Collectively, this is less East meets West than East to West, and the musical balance constantly shifts, including within a given composition, and it is that ingredient that makes the music so enthralling from start to finish. Part improvised, part simple structures, the music has elements of J.S. Bach, early music, Arabic classical, and jazz all ingeniously fused into one.

Beautifully recorded, and of a quality that ECM devotees will doubtlessly appreciate, the music is at once meditative, challenging, and deeply spiritual in character. Hauntingly stark in tone, the mournful, 'Cone', begins with a single and lengthy note held by accordion before the cello enters and it is as if the spontaneity between musicians is akin to that of a practice session, albeit one where the music is carefully thought out. Pianist Delneuveville fills in the gaps.

A genuine contender for the most melodic piece is 'Yara', which has a gorgeous Middle Eastern feel and a sensation of great intimacy with piano and accordion working in tandem. The music unfolds like a fairy tale, with cello resisting the temptation to join in the festivities until late on in the number. Strongest of all, however, is the stunning 'Deconstruction', that ends the album with eleven and a half minutes of sheer brilliance. A floating layered texture emerges from the piece with the strings acting like a synthesizer and minimalist piano serving as a counterfoil to bowed cello. Accordion takes centre stage on 'Al Ruba', and for some additional sounds, voices, while piano and cello plays a merely supportive role. Instrumental breakdowns are a feature of 'Resistors', where the piano repeats a motif and the bowed cello engages in some improvised passages. Musicians double up on trumpet (Delneuveville), guitar (Maris) and voices (Maris again).

Albums like this only come along once in a while and should be savored. Breathtaking in outlook and delivery.

[Tim Stenhouse](#)