

Crystal Magnets Piano Duo • Bio Release

Andy Milne & Benoît Delbecq

Crystal Magnets, the piano duo from two masters of contemporary improvisation, reunites Canadian Andy Milne and Frenchman Benoît Delbecq. They became friends in 1990 while studying with saxophonist Steve Coleman at The Banff Centre Jazz Workshop. Both keyboardists took Coleman's teachings to heart, exploring distinctly different approaches to expressing their experiences through music. In 2007, they received The French-America Jazz Exchange and were commissioned by Chamber Music America to develop and record "Where is Pannonica?" [Songlines – 2009]. Milne and Delbecq returned to The Banff Centre in January 2008 to undertake this project. The scope of it grew to include extensive collaboration with Banff Centre audio engineers throughout the compositional, recording and mixing phases. Using the sonic landscape of the 5.0 surround sound format for inspiration, the music was composed in part to exploit the unique potential for placing specific compositional elements in distinct regions of the mix. The engineers created an acoustic array within each piano and analyzed the natural acoustics to define a larger array within the room, enabling Milne and Delbecq to compose for the medium and perform in harmony with their environment. The **New York Times** lauded the recording as a "strangely beautiful new album" from two "resourcefully contemporary pianists, both drawn to quixotic interrogations of harmony and timbre."

Although Milne and Delbecq have both created music for electronic and computer-based instruments, Crystal Magnets is primarily an acoustic piano duo, equally influenced by both pianists' ever-expanding experiences and passions. As an innovator in improvised prepared-piano performance, Delbecq has synthesized sounds and concepts from Ligeti and Steve Lacy to Aka Pygmy music. Milne's long association with Steve Coleman inspired his unique integration of rhythmic concepts from Cuba, Ghana, American jazz, funk and hip-hop.

Their shared respect and understanding for each other's approach to the piano and to improvisation, helped connect them in a profound, almost seamless thought process throughout their collaboration. While interpreting each other's compositions and collaboratively developing pieces, Milne and Delbecq discovered this synchronicity and used it with great care to develop complex rhythmic, melodic and harmonic relationships involving timbre and texture, room acoustics, space, and time. In doing so, they have extended the scope of the piano duo within the jazz world.

Andy Milne is considered one of the most distinctive voices at the heart of New York's creative jazz scene, performing throughout the world in a range of settings, including collaborations with: Steve Coleman, Ravi Coltrane, Carlos Ward, Carla Cook, Sekou Sundiata, Avery Brooks, Ralph Alessi, Cassandra Wilson, and Sonny Greenwich. Milne's genre-breaking band Dapp Theory is helping to redraw and extend the boundaries of jazz.

Described by **The New York Times** as "brilliant and unconventional," Benoît Delbecq is acclaimed as one of France's indispensable pianists. He has been involved in numerous collaborations with French musicians, visual artists and poets, and with North American, European and African musicians. He has forged a personal style by

drawing from jazz, ambient, contemporary classical and non-western music. **Jazz Times** calls him "one of the avatars of prepared piano" for the way he creates unusual harmonies, colours and phrases. He leads several projects, (including Kartet, Delbecq 5, The Recyclers, Ambitronix, PianoBook) which perform throughout Europe and North America.

The duo has performed in festivals and concerts in Canada, the US and France and will be touring North American in February 2010. They recently participated in "Seven Strands of Sound", a project commissioned by the Ottawa Jazz Festival to bring together seven composer/performers for three days to create a new extended work.

▪ **Andy Milne**

Toronto native Andy Milne draws inspiration from various forms of music, politics, philosophy, comedy, and science fiction. After completing a BFA in music at York University in 1990, Milne studied at The Banff Centre with saxophonist Steve Coleman, who then encouraged Milne to move to New York to join his group Five Elements in 1991. After gaining experience with Coleman’s projects, Milne stepped out on his own, forming Dapp Theory in 1998. After two independent releases, Concord Records released Dapp Theory’s *Y’all Just Don’t Know* in 2003, an ambitious hip-hop/folk-rock collaboration with Bruce Cockburn.

Milne released two unique piano recordings in 2007. *Dreams and False Alarms* [SongLines] features deeply considered re-workings of long-remembered pop/rock/folk/reggae classics, reaffirming and expanding Milne’s creative process as a jazz improviser, while *Scenarios* [Obliqsound], an intimate duo with harmonica virtuoso Grégoire Maret, presents him in a more textural, almost cinematic series of encounters – complementary expressions of a questing musical personality.

Milne premiered *Finding Synesthesia*, a recent collaborated with tap dancer/choreographer Heather Cornell, at the London Jazz Festival in November 2007 which **The Guardian** described as “remarkable ... a ride through shifting aural landscapes.” In 2008 Dapp Theory released *Layers of Chance*, praised by **AllAboutJazz.Com** as a “stellar recording”. In addition to his multiple projects, Milne tours with Ralph Alessi and is an adjunct professor at New York University, The New School University and The Banff Centre.

▪ **Benoît Delbecq**

Born in 1966 near Paris, a dreamer and adventurer, Benoît Delbecq helped revitalize Paris' new music scene in the 1990s. A former student of Muhal Richard Abrams, Steve Coleman, and Dave Holland at The Banff Centre (Canada 1987 and 1990), he is a founding member of the Hask Collective (1992-2004), and of numerous international groups including his quintets Delbecq 5 and Delbecq Unit, Ambitronix, PianoBook, Kartet, the Recyclers, and les Amants de Juliette. A long-term accomplice of drummer/producer Steve Argüelles since 1990, Delbecq has collaborated and/or recorded with many other accomplished international contemporary jazz artists including: Steve Lacy, Evan Parker, Julian Argüelles, Michael Moore, Jean- Jacques Avenel, Marc Ducret, Noël Akchoté, Tony Coe, Gianni Gebbia, François Houle, Mark Helias, Arve Henriksen, Mark Turner and the collective Los Incontrolados, where he shares pianos with Tony Hymas.

Delbecq toured Central Africa in 1994 and tours international festivals in Northern and Western Europe, Canada, Japan and South America. In 2001, he was awarded a Prix Villa Medicis Hors les Murs for his first piano solo project *Nu-Turn*, [Songlines 2002]. Delbecq also composes for film, dance, theater and radio, and has regular collaborations with French poet Olivier Cadiot, actress Irène Jacob and singer Ashley Slater.

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