



## Joelle Leandre: The Art of the Duo

By John Eyles

Although she also plays in larger ensembles, Joelle Leandre concentrates on solo, duo and trio situations, with duos particularly prevalent. Her duos with the likes of saxophonist Steve Lacy, guitarist Derek Bailey and bassist William Parker (to name but a few) are among her best works, as well as being exemplars of duo playing. These two recent releases--which record meetings from 2005 and 2006, respectively--continue that tradition. Throughout, she displays the challenging, questing attitude that the quote above reveals, her instrument speaking as eloquently as she herself does.

Joelle Leandre & Pascal Contet | Freeway | Clean Feed | 2007

The pairing of Leandre's bass with Pascal Contet's accordion is an inspired one (previously recorded once before, in 1994). Both instruments--and, more importantly, both players--are able to switch effortlessly between support and lead roles, fulfilling but also challenging their traditional roles. Both are adept at providing a background drone, a drone that should be background but actually demands attention. So, on "Freeway 2", Leandre employs a low, bowed rumble that is felt as much as heard, to which Contet adds snatches of melody.

Just as notably, the album is rich in melody, particularly but not solely from Contet. On "Freeway 4," the accordion picks out a beautiful, slowly-evolving melody, again over a low bass drone. Not much happens, but it doesn't need to: when something is this beautiful, why gild the lily? At six minutes, this piece feels short; it could have been sustained for far longer.

On "Freeway 8," notions of background/foreground disappear as bass and accordion go head-to-head, both vying for attention, producing not a cacophony but an exhilarating, accelerating drama that contrasts with some of the earlier tranquillity. Fine stuff. By way of further contrast, "Freeway 10" features Leandre's breathless vocalising leading into a soaring soprano section.

Overall, a great success, the only grumble being that some pieces end too soon--itself a sign of their success. More please; let's not wait another twelve years!