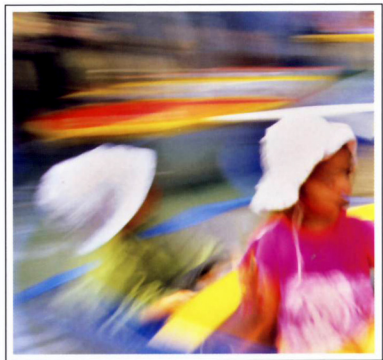




The Definition of a Toy

MICHAEL MOORE

BRAD TURNER

MARK HELIAS

ACHIM KAUFMANN

DYLAN VAN DER SCHYFF

The Definition of a Toy, this extraordinary new project initiated by Dylan van der Schyff, might have come with a schematic tucked inside. Something simple – a set of lines, perhaps, a sequence of arrows, something clear and concrete showing the many musical connections living within this group. ○

That way no one would ever wonder why a date with two Vancouverites (van der Schyff and Brad Turner), two Amsterdammers (Michael Moore, the American, and Achim Kaufmann, the German) and a New Yorker (Mark Helias) made sense right from the start. ○

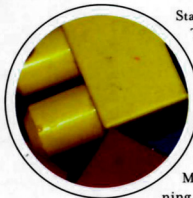
Yet a diagram wouldn't quite do. Some sleek design could never explain what a marvelous melting pot of ideas *The Definition of a Toy* really is. This time, anyone who listens with their eyes is bound to miss out. ○

On what is remarkably the first recording under his name, van der Schyff has taken four leaders (and four composers) and created an entirely cooperative event. Plotted out for the better part of a year, this collaboration actually took place over a matter of days in June 2003. ○

"I didn't know what it would sound like," the 33-year-old drummer admits, "but I knew there was a pretty good chance that things would work out well." ○

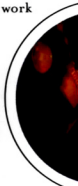
Together, he imagined, they would have a great deal in common. "We all seem to enjoy similar things about playing – about playing structures and about stretching those boundaries and intertwining them. We all share a very strong jazz background as well." ○

Then there's that little schematic to consider; different combinations within this quintet are stuffed with history. ○



Start with van der Schyff and Brad Turner, both at the heart of Canada's West Coast scene. They've been close since the early 1990s, linking up most famously in the Peggy Lee Band and the trumpeter's own, self-named quartet. ○

Van der Schyff's relationship with Michael Moore is much newer, beginning, as it did, with an improvised set (with Peggy Lee) at the 2000 Vancouver International Jazz Festival, captured on the CD *Floating 1...2...3* (Spool). Later, they worked together in Achim Kaufmann's quartet, where Moore's voice has been a central ingredient on both of the pianist's critically admired recordings, *guedeledoupe* (Red



Toucan, 2001) and *Double Exposure* (Leo, 1998). Van der Schyff was recently added on two brief European tours. ○



But the quintet's longest relationship is between Moore and Mark Helias. They met in 1978 and have recorded together off and on for over 15 years, beginning with Moore's *Home Game* (Ramboy, 1988) and including Helias's *Attack the Future* (Enja, 1990). ○

Still, in spite of these deep ties, *The Definition of a Toy* began nearly out of the blue. Who could have known van der Schyff would run into Helias at Chicago's Empty Bottle in the fall of 2001. ○

"We were talking about a gig we'd done in Vancouver a few years back with Paul Plimley and François Houle and we were both saying it would be nice to play again. But we kind of left it at that," van der Schyff remembers. ○

"Then on the plane coming home all these connections started coming into my head. You know, you go over your trip, you think of the things that happened, and I was thinking of Mark. Then I started thinking of the beautiful records he had done with Michael, and the connection between Michael and Achim, and I began to realize what a good group that would be. Then Brad came to mind." Van der Schyff had already been looking for the

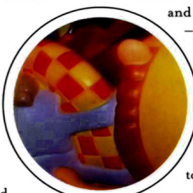
right moment to introduce Turner to Kaufmann and Moore. "I thought they would really enjoy playing together because they share this jazz background and a certain kind of musical curiosity, especially around the different ways music can be formed. I thought it would really work. But when I ran into Mark I thought, 'Hey, what a great band this would be.'" ○

Back home, van der Schyff mulled it over some more. Where would they play? How would they get along? And maybe most importantly, what would he ask them to do? ○

The plan, he realized, should be simple: have them bring some music, nothing more. Everyone writes and with five voices in play the combinations of colours could be intriguing. It would be a real collaboration, something that would develop in the moment, something natural and – apart from the compositions themselves – entirely unscripted. ○



"It wasn't ever meant to be my specific vision or anything like that," he explains. "My main interest over the last 10 years has been in the dynamics of collaboration, this is an extension of that study. It's only my project because I created the space for it to occur." ○



The arrangements quickly fell into place. Songlines agreed to an album and the festival in Vancouver gave

them a gig, helping out with transportation costs as well. They would meet over four days, with two rehearsals, a recording, and a concert. Music wouldn't be discussed in advance. ○

What they ultimately conjured up is something exhilarating indeed – the moods, the structures, the playing itself. And the materials are enormously diverse, from Helias's "Jacques," a graphically notated, event-based abstraction, to Turner's "Queen of the Box Office," an open improvisation framed by a pair of lines. Somehow, everyone sought out a space where written and improvised forms were perfect companions. ○

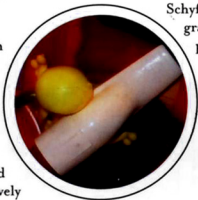
Some of the songs even arrived with little stories. Moore's playful (and deceptively simple) title piece was inspired by a radio ad he heard in rural Michigan; "Gaivotas Sobre Lapa" ("Seagulls Over Lapa") was sketched in Rio de Janeiro's Lapa district while thinking about his dad (on his birthday) and watching a lovely scene in the sky. Kaufmann's complex, three-part piece, "Siberian Elm and Furrowed Brown," was started in Vancouver only days before the date. ○

Out of this mix van der Schyff puzzled together a program. The order isn't an afterthought; he spent hours tinkering with the chain of events.

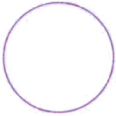
"There's a temptation to always go for contrasts," he observes, "but I'm more interested in creating a longer kind of arc. There are certain amounts of tension and release built into these pieces and I think it's important to place them where they're going to mean something." ○

With that mind, and without adding a layer of commentary to the action, we might just remember how fleeting this moment really was. For now, *The Definition of a Toy* is the only permanent record of this quintet's brief life. ○

"If this is just a special event and it ends with this nice album then that's fine," van der Schyff says. "I was very flattered and grateful that everyone agreed to do the project in the first place. My only regret is that we couldn't have played more. Maybe this record will help make that happen." ○



○ ○ ○ Greg Buim
March 2004



Produced by Dylan van der Schyff and Tony Reif

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① Trio I	2:25
② Definition of a Toy	13:01
③ Duet	4:37
4 Jacques	5:55
5 Queen of the Box Office	8:53
6 Siberian Elm and Furrowed Brown	7:54
7 Trio II	2:39
8 Gaivotas Sobre Lapa <i>for Jerry Moore</i>	6:02
9 Broken	9:54

2, 8 composed by Michael Moore (Buma/Stemra)

4, 9 composed by Mark Helias (Radio Legs Music/BMI)

5 composed by Brad Turner (SOCAN)

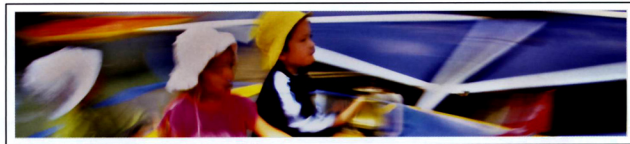
6 composed by Achim Kaufmann (GEMA)

1, 7 by Moore, Kaufmann, van der Schyff (Buma/Stemra, GEMA, SOCAN)

3 by Turner, Helias (SOCAN, Radio Legs Music/BMI)



BRAD TURNER *trumpet* MICHAEL MOORE *alto saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet*
 ACHIM KAUFMANN *piano* MARK HELIAS *acoustic bass* DYLAN VAN DER SCHYFF *drums*



- | | |
|--|-------|
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Total time: 61:46



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