

## Mp3 Alms Trio - Advocates



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Saxophone, double-bass and drums perform original "multiform jazz" compositions, using traditional and harmolodic approaches to improvisation, varied song structures and broad thematic range--lovingly recorded on 2 inch tape for that warm, analog sound 12 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Free Jazz, JAZZ: Traditional Jazz Combo Details: Allen Livermore, saxophone Michael Szekely, drums Dan Shuman, double-bass

What is the Allen Livermore-Michael Szekely Trio? Ralf Smith Musicians feel it is very important that you "understand" their work, for two major reasons. In their view, first of all, they are engaged in an activity of profound magnitude to our society. Many believe that the Industrial Revolution, the work of Albert Einstein, the discovery of penicillin and the invention of sliced bread, among other critically important events, would not have been possible without music. Secondly--and this point may eclipse the first in significance--they believe that the more you, the listener, "understand" their work, the more likely you will be to purchase their concert tickets, compact discs, decorative wall hangings and other quality products.

Let me pause a moment and introduce myself. I am an alternative music critic. My training, education and insight uniquely qualify me to be your guide. Be assured that the body of knowledge that I possess was not earned easily. Indeed not. Many days and nights have I toiled, mastering the classics of the field, composing learned papers and articles. It is my duty to share my broad learning and humanitarian spirit with others. Let's begin... You are sitting in a concert hall, art gallery, school or chicken-and-rib house and you are waiting for tonight's entertainment to take the stage. The few moments before a concert begins are typically a time for reflection. You hope the music will be successful and that your money and time will not be wasted. After all, there are many interesting activities that you could be doing instead of attending a musical performance; for instance, buying a striking piece of diamond-substitute jewelry on one of those cable shopping networks. Tonight's entertainment is the Allen Livermore-Michael Szekely Trio, Featuring

Dan Shuman. Or perhaps you know this group as the ALMS Trio. They are both the same group. That a single ensemble has two names is admittedly strange. But, you see, "Allen Livermore-Michael Szekely Trio Featuring Dan Shuman" is a very long name and "ALMS Trio" is nice and short and looks better in advertising. The ALMS Trio consists of saxophonist and composer Allen Livermore, drummer and composer Michael Szekely and bassist Dan Shuman. They have been performing together since 1998. They rehearse in a studio located in lower Manhattan, beginning their sessions early (for musicians), around 11 AM, to avoid having to compete with the loudly amplified rock bands that play next door. Their music demands the highest levels of concentration and aesthetic refinement. They play jazz, mostly original compositions but also standards. They are artists who strive to connect with every possible audience member, performers "of the people" who approach songs by popular artists like Morrissey or the Eurythmics with the same artistic fervor and earnestness normally reserved for perennial favorites like "Autumn Leaves." Like all great jazz artists, they are exiles from the marketplace of cheap consumer sentiment. The ALMS Trio is a jazz group, meaning that their compositions and performances follow in the tradition represented variously by Jelly Roll Morton, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Gene Krupa, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Bill Dixon, Mary Lou Williams, Tony Oxley, Michele Rosewoman... Here is where you, the listener might interject: "You've just compared the ALMS Trio to some jazz greats. Bill Dixon and Tony Oxley, I've never heard of, but I know Charlie Parker and Gene Krupa and the ALMS Trio doesn't sound anything like either of them. What's going on?" What's going on is this: the ALMS Trio redefines common jazz conventions. They take the fundamental building blocks, or tinker-toys, if you will, of the art form and reshape them, just as jazz artists for decades have done. Even though some might find the music of the ALMS Trio "esoteric," "avant-garde," or "not suitable for use in a luxury car commercial," most aspects of the group's approach are deeply tied to jazz tradition. To be specific: the ALMS Trio plays their instruments in ways that clearly emerge from examples of generations of jazz artists, in terms of tone, attack and so forth. One would not easily confuse Allen Livermore with a symphony saxophonist or Michael Szekely with a pop drummer. (Dan Shuman, however, has been confused, on a couple of occasions, with a Swedish professional wrestler named Lars Umansson.) The typical ALMS Trio performance likewise follows jazz tradition in terms of what happens. Usually you hear a written melody, followed by improvisation and then a return to the melody at the end. What happens during the improvised section of an ALMS Trio performance? Before I can answer this question, I direct your

attention to the structure of a typical "mainstream" jazz performance, so I can astutely show you how the ALMS Trio follow this most common pattern and how they diverge from it. The pattern of a "mainstream" jazz composition consists of a written melody with written chordal accompaniment. ("Chord" means harmony, the groups of notes that a piano can play simultaneously or that a bass usually spells out one note at a time.) Performers following this plan play the written melody and then, one at a time, improvise new melodies (called a "solo") based on the written pattern of chords, with appropriate accompaniment from some of the other instruments. One complete passage through the chordal pattern is called a chorus. Solos consist of a fraction of one, or one, or many choruses. The ALMS Trio, ground-breaking as they are (in their own minds, at least), make repeated use of this tried-and-true formula. They also employ a lesser-known, but well-established, method, developed by Ornette Coleman in the 1950s called "harmolodics." In a harmolodic performance, players will not only improvise new melodies (the typical mainstream solo), but also improvise new harmonies at the same time. So whereas a mainstream jazz performance has built-in symmetry, because the performance consists of evenly measured out choruses, a harmolodic performance is less regular and does not use the chorus as a basic element. A harmolodic performance offers both musicians and listeners different challenges and satisfactions than does a mainstream performance, although both rely upon individual improvisational skill and group communication. Many groups use the mainstream pattern in virtually all of their performances and a lesser number use harmolodics, but the ALMS Trio is equally versed in both approaches. They are versatile, and this versatility is increasingly leading to financial remuneration. You should also note that the ALMS Trio explores a broad emotional range in their work, as expressed in their striking use of textures and dynamics and other devices. They are not afraid to be economical when the situation calls for it. They have nothing to prove, in a musical sense. Contrast this to a performer who seems mostly interested in proving "look how loud and how fast I can play!" Your attention to this little essay will unquestionably pay significant dividends. You now possess great insights into the music of the ALMS Trio, combined with a new understanding of certain technical issues, which should enhance your appreciation of jazz as a whole. You will most certainly gain more from tonight's performance than even you could have imagined. Jazz is usually thought of as celebrating "freedom" and "individuality." In this age of slavish conformity, you can feel good that you are here, in this fine venue, in an audience of forward-thinking, educated, attractive persons like yourself, about to experience one of the truly great

ensembles of our time. Ralf Smith is an alternative music critic based in New York.

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