

Jazz Picks

GREG DRYGALA CHOOSES SIX JAZZ RECORDS

FRODE HALTLI

Border Woods

With Emilia Amper, Eric Raude and Hakon Stene

HUBRO 2613



I'm happy to see a new recording coming from Frode, since his *Avant Folk* of last year, as he is an artist whose approach

challenged me. I am even more happy to see that it's a collaboration with another unusual instrumentalist and folk musician, Emilia Amper, Swedish player of the Key Harp (Nyckelharpa) – an instrument rarely heard today. Being a big fan of her BIS recordings, I welcomed this with arms wide open. Here the folk group has been reduced to a quartet, with two percussionists – Erik Raude and Hakon Stene – completing the line-up. *Border Woods* was Frode Haltli's commissioned piece for the Osa Festival 2015 at Voss, Norway, performed there by the very same band, so this recording has been already rooted deeply in those musicians' minds.

Using two percussionists with an extended range of instruments – including those played with mallets like the marimba, Haltli creates very specific textures to complete the unisons performed on harp and accordion. The opening *Wind Through Aspen Leaves* shows that that, creating a shimmering canvas in the background enriched with the euphonic brass decays. It makes an excellent tapestry for the resonating harp strings.

Mostamägg Polska, following on, sounds familiar to my Polish soul, as it recalls the folk spirit of the Northern part of the country and it has a typical construction with its repetitive motifs and choruses – though I was surprised not to hear Emilia singing.

This is the longest track, lasting over 15 minutes, and is carried all the way down an instrumental path with both harp and accordion singing in unison, wrapped in a gentle percussion in the first part. After that, the solo variations of the melody are continued with dissonant harp rubatos and Haltli's chord progressions dialoguing with each other, before they eventually come to the finale in perfect harmony.

Wood and Stone is a nice conversation in

rhythm, carried by both drummers using their own invention to present a universe only possible with using this combination of the two materials.

The most gentle and poetic part comes with *Taneli's Lament*. Here both 'lead' instruments are reaching a scale of integration which makes it almost impossible to say which one is playing on top when they merge into unison. The theme is gentle and lyrical and utterly charming, making this one of my two outstanding tracks.

The second is *Quietly the Language Dies*, which closes the session. It sounds different, being played on instruments tuned to quarter-tones, with some Arabic scales incorporated into Frode's playing: it certainly creates a completely new imaginary world of sounds with oriental influence dancing with Nordic folk tunes. The the background is served by percussionists both playing on wine glasses tuned accordingly.

The same happens in *Valkola Schottis*, where an opening melody is played on glasses and carried on in the fashion of an organ, but reduced into the pocket scale. The same motif is then delivered by both soloists, then carried by them with breaking variations, before the track opens finally into a joyous folk tune, sounding more like it's being played on violin than harp during an ecstatic culmination.

This is a remarkable album, and another phenomenal recording to sway your soul.

HENRIK OLSSON

Hand of Benediction

Barefoot Records



Swedish guitarist and composer Henrik Olsson is a new discovery to me. Living and working in Denmark, he is an active player on

the experimental fringes of the Copenhagen music scene: his technique and style are very personal, and he can be heard in various groups, including his own Penumbra Ensemble, with which he made his debut recording, or the seriously experimental and radical EHM trio I have already reviewed in these pages. This guitar trio is completed

by bassist Jeppe Skovbakke and drummer Rune Lohse, with two guest appearances by Julie Kjør – one of the shining stars of the Fire!Orchestra and mighty young lioness of all kinds of wind instruments along with Kristian Tangvik. Tangvik is an equally creative and active tuba player, and also a part of the Barefoot Records label, a unique conglomerate of artists taking full control over the music they are making. Their intention? To maintain their music, and bring it to the market on their own terms.

The opening track, *Aventurine*, sounds like nothing else you've heard from a guitar, and gives a good sense of the adventure of listening to Olsson's music. The short intro shows a lot of skill, and as the track progresses the trio develops in a more natural way, with the clear lead of the guitar and accompanying rhythm section.

N.H.F.T.P.H.O.B starts in a conventional and melodic way, but quickly turns into the guitarist's tour de force. The piece carries a lot of humour due to a very formal melody structure contradicted by the electronically pimped guitar rave, before ending up in polite, almost predictable figures, as regimented as the pleating on a skirt.

Shocking method restores lost hair is an example of a more challenging and experimental approach, mixing samples of broadcasts, the guitar dialoguing with them in a way that sounds like jumping between stations when tuning the old radio. The parts bringing order are automatically twisted into part of the broadcast itself.

Collect in a bowl, let the afflicted person drink is a rocking horse, literally. It combines psychedelic sounds with changing tempi in the bass groove and rubato drumming, co-creating three-dimensional structures with multi-layered guitar lines, gaining additional texture and inspiration from by rapid changes in the fingering.

Hilarious moments, my second favourite track here, continues in a somewhat similar spirit, eventually getting to the point where the various layers become incredibly congested and the entire piece starts sounding almost microtonal. The pieces are short, and so appear like little gems, properly cut, ground and polished to show their best.

Let's finish with the pieces with the guest musicians, and *Voynich manuscript*, with its flute, starts almost like Debussy's *Prélude à*

GREG DRYGALA

l'après-midi d'un faune, picturesque and warm with the wind lines overlapped with clarinet. However, this idyll breaks in the middle and turns into percussive culmination, then a guitar-led ending.

Black Tourmaline opens with tuba setting a lyrical theme and lines which the flute repeats and expands, giving a path on which Olsson can now slide in any direction he likes. It's a similar contrast to those Ennio Morricone used to employ in his soundtracks, but we're a few decades on, so the borders aren't the same anymore.

KJETIL MULELID TRIO

What You Thought Was Home

Rune Grammofon, RCD 2208 / RLP 3208



Mulelid is only 28 years old but his maturity has grown vastly since I reviewed his first album some two years ago: the communication

inside the band has reached another level. All nine compositions came from the leader, and when I came to this album only *Bruremars* (Wedding March) was known to me, as it had been available to stream a month ahead of release, with gospel spells flying over Kjetil's compositions, and the piano so hymnal that it almost begs to introduce a choral anthem.

Far Away is a lovely ballad with dancy melodic motifs, swaying the listener gently with an emotional intensity reminding me of the unforgettable Mal Waldron: it catches up nicely with another waltz here, *Waltz for Ima*, kept together by phenomenal time keeping from bassist Bjørn Marius Hegge, together with the gentle percussion approach of Andreas Skar Winther.

Another of Mulelid's hallmarks is his ability to introduce a simple folk tune and build on it a wonderful and inventive narrative, dragging it through multiple variations. It always reminds me of Ethan Everson, although he is cold and mathematically precise in his evocations, whereas Mulelid is more human. *When Winter turns Spring* and *Folk Song* are perfect examples of such a workout.

But let's jump back to the opening record

title piece, *What You Thought Was Home*, which is wonderfully intimate, romantic and inviting: you know from the first note that you are expected and welcome.

My favourite track, and the one which I keep coming back, is *Tales* – a pure essence of the trio's style. The pace, the mood control, the lyricism of the tone control and this always present sense of spirituality delivers perfection you can feel, going beyond your imagination or descriptive capabilities.

This is an excellent comeback after two years of silence, and I am sure to be as warmly welcomed by others shortly, and to remain so for a long time.

MATS EILERTSEN

Reveries and Revelations

Hubro, CD 2606



Eilertsen's latest so-called solo recording – complete with contributions from good musician friends and frequent collaborators – is quite unique for

many reasons, not least because it shows different imagination in the production.

And 'production' is a key word here: none of the musicians who contributed to this set ever met, let alone having the chance to play, rehearse or record the tracks together. The entire project all happened in the virtual space, and was edited together later.

Eilertsen always composes with the band in mind, making music with the performer he would like it to be played by: therefore here the similar process must have taken place before the various samples in this patchwork were recorded. Well, almost: the only difference was that he left his contributors complete freedom to add whatever they feel would fit. So, in essence, the project is all about the trust and understanding of long time partners, their style and already having in mind what to expect from them

Add to that a little space to gamble – these are, after all, star class improvisers, so their response can be as random as a phone call and completely dependent on the moment and mood – and the end result couldn't be any better, if you ask me.

The opening *Nighbride* and *Handanger*, which follows, have the contribution of Geir Sundstøl on guitars and banjo. First is a nicely extended piece, with an oriental harmony and contemplative mood. The second track, on which Mats also plays organs is even more cinematic, with dobro sounds and a ladbuck bluesy ambience mixed with a folk touch of banjo notes to bring a similar feeling to Ry Cooder's famous *Paris Texas* soundtrack. However here synthesized flute-like lines make the sound more evocative of the landscape of the Mongolian tundra or the movie set for Herbert's *Dune*.

By comparison, tracks like *Signal*, *Venus* and *Siberian Sorrow* are all mixed with rhythmic patterns and samples created by Thomas Strønen, bringing a strong feeling of fear and claustrophobia, with something dangerous in hiding. *Signal*, with its defragmented rhythms, sounds like something falling apart, the insistent, repetitive bass riff giving a feeling of encirclement and hopelessness.

Venus goes even further into the despair of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, a subsonic bass in the style of Hans Zimmer and wonderfully executed, super low octave double bass hold the listener inside bubble wrap, with only a thin diaphragm film protecting from unavoidable drama.

Siberian Sorrow, with its light organ motif gently blended with upper bass registers bass arcs, catches up the mood, but it sounds more organic and woodier on the percussive side as well as going deeper that way to create a feeling that most floaty and eternal. It conjures up images of hot air blowing over desert sands, or like cosmic space, endlessly extending to allow the perpetual drifting of a lost spaceship.

The closing track, *Appreciate*, has Arve Henriksen's trumpet airily woven into the harmonium chords, creating a beautifully melodic and heart-catching 'outro' to the set, as might be expected from this cosmic traveller. This track nicely balances the entire recording nicely, bringing more light and optimism into the mix.

This is such a great recording that it's difficult to single out what's best. All tracks are equally brilliant, but to me the *Bowet Blues*, which is a clear trip inside Mats' art of double bass playing, is the winner – and the album's most charming part.