



Erik Svela *Bits & Pieces*

Received wisdom has it that Nordic jazz is essentially cool, reflecting the climate, and atmospheric, reflecting the fjords and the landscape.

Eirik Berg Svela's music is certainly cool, although it takes its cue from a coast thousands of miles from Norway. Indeed, in the promo for another, home-based quartet, Svela admits to having an unhealthy obsession with New York guitarists.

The international quartet he fronts here confirms his commitment to the American jazz tradition. Louisiana-born Hammond organist Sam Yahel, English saxophonist Dave Edge and Norwegian drummer Tore Thorvaldsen Sandbakken all have their own voices and approaches but their playing and support allow Svela to emphasise his love for - and to add to - the music that came out of the great Blue Note and Prestige recordings of the 1960s.

Very often on these sessions, the tunes called out were standards that all the musicians would know. This was of necessity because records were made at such regular intervals and with such short available studio time that the leaders didn't always have new original material to play.

Of the nine tracks here, one, **I'll Be Seeing You**, is a standard and another, **New Arm Rash**, is a contrafact, a new melody written over an existing chord sequence, in this case that of There Will Never Be Another You. The other seven tracks are Svela originals and it often seems to this listener that the guitarist has, whether by collision or decision, created what might turn out to be new standards.

He has a terrific ear for melody and he has developed the knack of creating chord changes and arrangements that his fellow musicians clearly love extemporising over. The stepping stone-like bridge that follows **Shame (On) Us's** twisting and turning initial statement and **End of Days'** rising progression are just two examples.

The title track opens the album. A smartly executed melody with guitar and saxophone partnering one another through sometimes intricate cornering, it's a statement of intent in several ways. Svela takes the first solo with a bluesy display

of logical, melodic invention and fluent solo-building, including a nice handover to Edge who, with a mixture of legato lines and staccato notes, creates heat while his pacing remains cool. Yahel and Sandbakken also take solos – and is that a sly reference to Wives and Lovers from the eminently resourceful organist? – but this is a rare occasion when all four musicians solo on one tune. Svela clearly gave thought to rotating soloing order as well as programming and the result brings freshness to the listening experience.

Next Time I See You is a fine example of Svela's ability to conjure up new numbers that feel almost immediately familiar. Buoyed by Sandbakken's light, springy drumming, Yahel, Edge and Svela all solo lucidly, with the organist reprising the melody before going back for more, as it were, and Edge sounding not unlike his fellow Englishman, the late, great Tubby Hayes.

Shame (On) Us, with its spunky, rhythmical guitar intro, is dedicated to saxophonist Seamas Blake, hence the bracketed "on", and **End of Days**, as with I'll Be Seeing You, features just guitar, organ and drums. Svela articulates its mood of regretful nostalgia over Yahel's superbly understated organ support and pulls out a particularly soulful solo.

Crossword enthusiasts might already have noticed that **New Arm Rash** is an anagram of Warne Marsh, whose tenor saxophone style would have suited its tangling, searching melody. Having set the tempo, Sandbakken kicks the group along authoritatively and elicits a muscular improvisation from Edge between Svela and Yahel's quick-thinking choruses before soloing concisely and driving towards the crisp coda.

n/a and **In Awe Of** are another two of Svela's compositions that invite his colleagues to express themselves and Yahel responds on the former with lovely tonal variations and superb note choices. Edge is both assertive and vulnerable on the latter, a ballad that starts out melancholic but has a soulfully uplifting effect as exemplified by the repeated saxophone phrase on the fade-out.

The teacher to whom Sveta dedicated the composition assignment **T.E.** will surely be proud of the association. Reminiscent of Charles Mingus's "Ah Um" band channelling a close relative of The Pink Panther theme, it has a church music quality emphasised by Yahel's preaching style and Edge sounds like he might be – successfully - auditioning for the Mingus Big Band, whose Ronnie Cuber he has played with on occasion.

Which brings us to **I'll Be Seeing You**, where Sveta's aforementioned unhealthy obsession with New York guitarists morphs into full-on admiration for an Indianan, Wes Montgomery. Like George Benson before him, Sveta knows the potency of Wes' octave double stopping style and its potential for injecting urgency into guitar phrases and he signs off with possibly the strongest solo of the set, although it does have quite a lot of competition.

Eirik Berg Sveta

Eirik Berg Sveta is a Norwegian guitarist and composer currently based in Oslo. After finishing his degree at Leeds College of Music he worked in the U.K. for several years as a freelance musician and since moving back to Norway in 2014 he has been establishing himself as an important new voice of a new generation of jazz musicians in Oslo. In 2018 he completed his master's degree at the Norwegian Academy of Music.

As an improviser and composer Eirik is attracted to pretty melodies and complicated chord changes. His band Eirik Sveta Group has been playing extensively in Norway, and in November 2018 he will be touring in the U.K. with a special rendition of this band with some of the greatest young musicians in the U.K. today.

Eirik also plays in the group MonicaZ Vals, a group dedicated to the music of the Swedish jazz singer Monica Zetterlund. This band features amongst others the hammond B3 player Palle Wagnberg, one of Scandinavia's most renowned organ players.

In addition to his regular bands Eirik has worked with many great musicians including Atle Nymo, Hermund Nygård and Daniel Franck.

Sam Yahel

A distinctive voice among a new breed of Hammond B-3 organ players on the jazz scene, Sam Yahel has earned the top spot in Downbeat's International Critics Poll as a Talent Deserving of Recognition for many years in a row. Equally at home on the piano as on the organ, Sam belongs to a rare breed of multi-instrumentalists.

Since moving to New York in 1990, Yahel has worked with a string of notable jazz artists including tenor saxophonist Joshua Redman, alto saxophonist Maceo Parker, guitarists Peter Bernstein and Bill Frisell, vocalists Norah Jones (on her Grammy-winning Come Away With Me) and Madeleine Peyroux, among others. Sam has also toured the world with his organ trio as an opening act for Steely Dan,

at the request of Donald Fagen and Walter Becker. As a solo artist, Yahel has made his most personal statements as both composer and player. His album, Truth and Beauty, was selected on the New York Times top 10 jazz albums of the year, and his latest album, From Sun to Sun, garnered critical praise for its unique perspective in combining both his voice on piano and organ into one seamless thread. Sam has performed with his trio both domestically at places such as the Village Vanguard as well as overseas at prestigious festivals such as North Sea Jazz.

Dave Edge

Originally from the U.K., Norwegian based tenor saxophonist and composer Dave Edge has performed with Kenny Wheeler, Jon Surman, Sam Yahel, Lew Solloff and Ronnie Cuber as well as many other leading musicians in Norway and the U.K. As well as leading his own quartet, he is currently a member of "The Real Thing" one of the most established and popular jazz groups in Norway. He regularly performs with Øystein Sunde on baritone saxophone and is a member of «Four brothers» - an ensemble which includes leading Norwegian saxophone players, Petter Wettre, Knut Riisnæs and Børge-Are Halvorsen.

Tore Thorvaldsen Sandbakken

Tore Thorvaldsen Sandbakken is an award-winning drummer currently residing in Oslo, Norway. Originally from Trondheim, he cut his teeth on the records of Steely Dan and the Beatles before shifting his attention to jazz and related improvisational music. This led Tore to study at the Norwegian Academy of Music, where he completed bachelor's and master's degrees in jazz performance from 2006-2012.

Tore is one of the leading drummers of his generation in Norway, and is well versed in a multitude of genres. He has been involved in a large number of projects in the jazz/impro vein, both as a leader and a co-leader. These include groups such as Mapping Oceans, Dag-Filip Roaldsnes Ensemble, Odd Steinar Albrigtsen Quintet, Speakeasy (nominated for Spellemannsprisen, the Norwegian Grammy in 2009), Aphrodisiac and Bergljot. He has worked with renowned artists and musicians such as Jens Carelius, Jan Vardøen (Autumn Fall - motion picture soundtrack), Nils Petter Molvær, Arrigo Cappelletti, Stein Bull-Hansen amongst others. His musical activities have seen him touring internationally, both as a leader and a sideman. In addition to performing live, Tore is a sought-after studio musician and has appeared on numerous recordings over the years (see discography for details). Tore also composes for many of his projects.

As a musician, Tore is known for his brilliant musicality and his ability to bring something of his own to the table, regardless of the setting. As well as being a drummer, he is a proficient guitarist, singer and pianist, and he is also a skilled producer and sound engineer. In addition to playing jazz, Tore has a rare sensibility for pop music, and a solid understanding of country and folk music. He is currently working on several different projects, the common denominator of which is music with a groove that breathes.

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