

Jan Harbeck

'In The Still Of The Night'



STUCD 08202 - Stunt Records

An album of ballads - tranquil, pensive. So what is this? And by a young saxophonist otherwise known as a swinging big band tenor. 'Sounds like a young Lester Young', said Niels Jørgen Steen, the prominent leader of the Monday Night Big Band, upon asking Harbeck to join his living institution.

Born in 1975, raised in northern Jutland, Harbeck is a graduate from The Academy of Music, Aalborg. In 1999 he studied with George Garzone and Eric Alexander at New School, Mannes College of Music. Then he moved to Copenhagen, and after a short spell in health care, he made his way into the music scene as a leader of his own group HAVL and as a soloist with Ernie Wilkins Almost Big Band.

But where does he find the inspiration for this album?

Jan Harbeck is a positive and open man, and he tells us that he remembers many of the tunes way back from his father's amateur traditional jazz band. In his previous bands, Harbeck played fast, smart, "youthful", power jazz. That, combined with all his big band work, created a need to do something different, something relaxed and quiet, something heartfelt and warm. And he is a fine balladeer, who has fulfilled his ambition with a beautiful album played with depth and controlled and expert instrumental technique.

Harbeck says that he has been inspired by Ben Webster and Dexter Gordon, but mostly by Ellingtonian tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves' translucent phrasing and playing.

The repertoire features well-known standards as well as more traditional tunes such as Petite Fleur in a wonderful slow, laid-back rendition giving a new slant to a tune, we thought Sidney Bechet had worked to death. The old Armstrong classic, Someday You'll Be Sorry, is usually played fairly fast. Here it is offered at a pace so slow, that the hidden beauty of the tune is exposed. After You've Gone, normally a fast ballad, is given the same slow treatment. And then there is If I Should Lose You, played with vibrancy - and a tranquil La Rosita. And In the Still of the Night, inspired by Frank Sinatra's singing and phrasing, which has meant so much to Harbeck. Come Sunday - the sole medium swinger in the collection - is a Duke Ellington tune that more or less plays itself, if you let it. And we could continue...

His co-musicians are among the best in the country. Pianist Henrik Gunde, who has recorded for Stunt with his own trio ('Gunde on Garner' STUCD 07072) and holds the demanding seat as pianist in the illustrious Danish Radio Big Band. Bassist Eske Nørrelykke is newer to the scene, but impresses with his unpretentious, wood-timbered acoustic bass playing. Last but not least there is drummer Kresten Osgood who manages to play in a myriad of varied musical settings from mainstream to free-form without ever losing his feel for the collective or for the soloist's intentions. (His Stunt recordings include albums with Sam Rivers and Caroline Henderson).

The CD was recorded in the good, old-fashioned way with a natural texture and an intimate and warm sound. All musicians are recorded in the same room without room dividers or isolated chambers, but with a mike right in front of the horn. This ensures a natural, homogenous sound with all the musicians placed in a circle. Sometimes the sound from one instrument bleeds into the microphone of another, which prohibits subsequent corrections, and everyone has to play quietly. But the method guarantees a pleasant, well-blended sound. It is a method perfectly suited for an album that highlights warmth and intimacy. Tunes and tempi, sound and translucency - nostalgia becomes modern.

Insert the CD. Dim the lights. Can we have the sexy lighting, please?



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