

SCOTT HAMILTON MEETS JESPER THILO



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"We don't fight – this isn't a war," tenor saxophonist Jesper Thilo informs the audience, when welcoming them to concerts with American sax man Scott Hamilton and himself. They do not consider their performances traditional tenor battles, where the soloists are combatants trying to outdo each other.

Tenor battles are an old tradition in jazz. Back in the 30's, Lester Young and Herschel Evans played up an unrelenting storm in Basie's orchestra even though they were the best of friends. Battles have always been a favorite with audiences, and saxophonists like Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray and Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt continued the demanding exercise a few years later, as did Johnny Griffin and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and Zoot Sims and Al Cohn. But, although there are moments that send sparks flying, it is obvious that Scott Hamilton and Jesper Thilo are not trying to outplay each other.

Jesper Thilo explains that they both have a similar approach to music. "If you have a story to tell, the choice of tune isn't that important. As long as you feel that you can give a part of yourself, then everything is fine. And everything was fine – we played at the Copenhagen Jazz House on the three evenings preceding the recording session, so there were no problems in the studio. After five hours, we had plenty of material, and a lot of the tracks were first takes. Scott is a great guy, easy to work with and easy to get along with. The first time I played with him was in 2005. We discovered that we enjoyed playing together, and since then we've performed now and then without forcing anything – if it happens, it happens. If not, it wasn't meant to be."

On SCOTT HAMILTON MEETS JESPER THILO, the differences between their styles are apparent, and these differences highlight their individual strengths. They share common roots in mainstream and swing jazz. Hamilton is introverted, and his tone is lighter. At first, Thilo seems more outgoing, more exuberant – perhaps a touch more "modern". Jazz isn't always about finding new approaches. It is equally important to keep the flame burning, and no one keeps tradition alive more beautifully than Thilo and Hamilton. Both are iconoclastic to aficionados of early jazz.

Born in 1952, Scott Hamilton's heroes include Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young – the founders of swing sax. When he emerged in the 70's – the heyday of jazz-rock – his fondness of early jazz made him a rare and strange species. But Hamilton stuck to his chosen path, and over the years he has toured steadily and released a long string of albums for the famous Concord label.

After the fine CD, SCOTT HAMILTON LIVE AT NEFERTITI, featuring the American saxophonist with two Swedes, guitarist Ulf Wakenius and pianist Jan Lundgren, and two Danes, bassist Jesper Bodilsen and drummer Kristian Leth, Stunt Records is proud to release yet another summit, this time featuring Hamilton with soul-mate Jesper Thilo, and another sparkling rhythm section led by a blazing Søren Kristiansen on piano, closely followed by bassist Jesper Lundgaard's rich lows and Kristian Leth's straight forward, swinging drums.

Born in 1949, Jesper Thilo has probably never played better than right now. However, that statement has often been heard since the early 60's, when he began performing. Over the years he has played with slews of jazz greats – Ben Webster, Harry Edison, Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, J.C. Higginbotham and Vic Dickenson would be just scraping the surface. He held a long-time chair in the DR Big Band, where he digested every musical influence that came his way. Thilo originally studied classical clarinet, an instrument featured on his CD Stunt Records, JESPER THILO ON CLARINET. Since 1990, he has led his own quartet. If you listen closely, you may still hear traces of Webster and "Lockjaw" Davis, but they come out as pure Thilo.

"...without exaggeration two of the finest living artists in mainstream jazz, Danish Jesper Thilo and American Scott Hamilton continue on CD a collaboration which began on stage. Their love and knowledge of the music of the 30's and 40's and the tenor greats of the period is genuine and sincere. Thilo is dark and robust; Hamilton has a brighter tone and a greater reverence for Lester Young. There is no battle between the two, it is the joy and pleasure they share for the same music, which makes this meeting so successful and meaningful. Retro? Not at all." Information, April 2011

Blue Lou / Good Bait / Blue Monk / Berbies Tune / Body And Soul / Blues Up And Down.

Scott Hamilton, Jesper Thilo (ts), Søren Kristiansen (p), Jesper Lundgaard (b), Kristian Leth (d).

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STUNT RECORDS

Sundance Music ApS Gothersgade 107 1123 Copenhagen K Denmark
T: +45 3333 8720 F: +45 3315 0206 www.sundance.dk sundance@sundance.dk