

Mikkel Ploug Solo

# Balcony Lullabies

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These are trying times. Our climate is writhing and a global pandemic is upon us, threatening our lives and livelihoods. What was once a movement toward international cooperation has morphed into isolationism and nationalism reinforced by virtual and literal/physical walls. Despite all this, Danish guitarist Mikkel Ploug reminds us through his music that we all still sleep under and gaze up at the same stars in the same sky. He does it with his accessible and refined musicality, rather than with the heated political statements one might expect from an artist of his caliber. At the beginning of the pandemic, he embarked on a musical journey, resulting in **BALCONY LULLABIES** – a solo guitar response to the lockdown and reflection on the coronavirus’s impact on everyday life around the world:

*“It began out of frustration over the isolation, and a sad realization that my kids suddenly had to learn to stay away from other people. So, one night I took my guitar and amplifier out on our little balcony and tried to play something beautiful, something moving. Maybe I was trying to send a message to the world. I don’t really know. I was just going to play. I didn’t know it at the time, but my neighbors opened their windows to listen and then clapped when I was done,”* the guitarist shares.

And so began Mikkel Ploug’s concert series from the balcony of his apartment in Copenhagen. At 6:15pm each evening, Ploug plugged his guitar in and launched into a new arrangement of the material he had been working on that day. The guitarist had performed all over the world but suddenly found himself sitting on his balcony and playing not only for the empty streets, but also to open windows, hearts, and minds. As darkness settled over the globe, he managed to create a spark of life. The results are nothing short of dazzling, and they reflect the full range of human emotion – tunes that are soothing and touching, warm and thoughtful. They may indeed be just what our restless souls need in these trying times.

Mikkel played 28 nights in a row, and then went straight from his balcony to the Black Tornado Studio, joined by Morten Bue behind the faders to record the refined interpretations. The repertoire includes music taken from the rich Danish songbook – evening songs and lullabies with a few lone standards sprinkled throughout. They’re low-key, thought-provoking, and evidence that the American magazine “All About Jazz” was not wrong when they described Ploug as having “an original voice with something to say.” Just listen to *The Weather Today Is...*, the song about a woman in love who welcomes spring and buys hyacinths, with a melody that makes the song soar like bright, vivid memories; or *The Elephant’s Lullaby*, one of the most beloved Danish goodnight songs, still sung in many homes at bedtime. *The Spring Song* by Sebastian is also in the program, a tune about sun and lilacs, a piece of music full of life and warmth; while “The Sun Is So Red, Mother” is also an intensely beloved song for children drifting off to dreamland, with music by Carl Nielsen – quite simply one of the most evocative songs in the Danish songbook. Nielsen is also the author of *I Know Of A Lark’s Nest*, while Thomas Laub can be credited for *Quiet Heart*, *Sun Goes Down*, painting an evocative but slightly melancholic picture of a sunset over the moor. Tommy Seebach’s *Under The Stars In The Sky* placed 22nd out of 25 participating nations at the Melody Grand Prix in 1993 with only nine points, but has nonetheless become a popular evening song sung wherever people meet. Povl Dissing’s wonderful *Greetings To The Spring Sun* simply had to be included here, and *You Came With All That Was You* is a moving song and has become Denmark’s love anthem, about a love story that breaks traditional molds and barriers. These Danish songs, deserving of the whole world’s attention, are supplemented on the recording with John Lennon’s *Julia*, the classic ballad *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, *You Are My Sunshine* (one of the most played songs in American popular music history), and Hoagy Carmichael’s *The Nearness Of You*.



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The 42-year-old Mikkel Ploug has performed in 22 countries and released 13 albums, one of which (Alleviation) has enjoyed more than 2 million streams on Spotify, and another (Faroe) which was selected for the first round of the American Grammy Awards in the category “Best Instrumental Jazz Album.” The wide reach of his recordings and concert tours, including in the United States, has made him a household name on the international jazz scene. Ploug has been a soloist with the Danish Royal Ballet as well as with the Danish Radio Big Band, and has worked with some of the great modern musicians of our time at home in Denmark and abroad, including collaborations with the American saxophonist Mark Turner, the Danish classical cellist Jakob Kullberg, and the German-American choreographer and dancer Tilman O’Donnell.

Previous words from the press regarding Mikkel Ploug’s work:

“*Extreme beauty*” (Faroe, 2018) Downbeat, USA

“*Stunning!*” Wall Street Journal, USA

“*One of the most intriguing and best-recorded acoustic guitar albums of recent years.*” All About Jazz, USA

“*Some of the most beautiful and unexpected solo guitar music one might wish to hear.*” WholeNote Magazine, Canada

“*Mikkel Ploug is the latest sensation on the European jazz guitar scene with a personal voice and a sound that sings!*”  
La Vanguardia, Spain

“*... the danish guitarist Mikkel Ploug is on his way into the Champions League of contemporary jazz guitarists.*”  
Jazzpodium, Germany



*Mikkel Ploug - guitar*  
*Tracks' Arrangement: Mikkel Ploug*

Det er i dag et vejr / Elefantens vuggevise / Vårvisen / Somewhere Over the Rainbow / Julia  
Solen er så rød, mor / The Nearness of You / Jeg ved en lærkerede / Stille Hjerte, sol går ned /  
Hilsen til forårssolen / You Are My Sunshine / Du kom med alt det der var dig / Under stjernerne på himlen

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