

Jonas Westergaard - "Helgoland"

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"It is not easy to be in the slipstream of the many young Danish jazz bassists. However, Jonas Westergaard has found his own innovative and challenging place in music without turning his back on traditions."

These were some of the words that accompanied the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's P2 Prize 2006, when it was awarded Jonas Westergaard (b. August 6, 1976) for his obvious talent and his consistent contributions to the jazz scene.

Westergaard's bass playing has long since found its way to improv as well as more traditional jazz audiences. His bass line began when he was 14; it wove its way through the Rhythmic Conservatory in Copenhagen, private tuition in New York with Mark Dresser among others, and into many bands and collaborations with a large number of Scandinavian and American musicians. His first sign of recognition came when the trio Fuchsia, of which he was a member, was elected Young Scandinavian Group of the Year. Westergaard's stay in New York (2001-2003) led to collaborations with saxophonist Michael Blake in Blake Tartare, and with saxophonist George Garzone. In 2005-2006 Westergaard was based in Berlin. Other of his many activities include recordings and live performances with musicians and groups such as Søren Kjærgaard, Bandapart, Anderskov Accident, John Tchicai/Oliver Lake/Kresten Osgood, and the trio WBZ with Jesper Zeuthen and Peter Bruun. His Scandinavian collaborations include Norwegian saxophonist Peter Wettre's groups and the Danish/Finnish band Delirium. Westergaard is of a generation of Danish jazz musicians who orientate themselves internationally and who with ease play music that crosses traditions and genre boundaries.

Part of the P2 Jazz Prize was a recording in one of the corporation's studios, and Jonas Westergaard returned the favor by leading a group playing original arrangements of his own material. The basic ensemble is a nine-piece band of handpicked musicians in an instrumentation providing the diverse textures, which are part of Westergaard's vision. The musicians have been chosen among people with whom Westergaard has worked in various groups – musicians with a personal means of expression and a personal sound.

Westergaard's music is sometimes fragile, subtle and translucent. It breathes in an intense but often quiet mood. It is certainly influenced by Ellington and Gil Evans. The stage is set with an inkling of minor and a melancholy flavor.

The title tune "Helgoland" was originally written for a documentary on the Copenhagen ocean bath Helgoland. It has since been reworked and arranged for the nine-piece band and Jesper Zeuthen's lead alto sax.

Bassist Westergaard is the kind of musician that favors interplay in a band, and although he is the bandleader here, he is somewhat stingy with his own solos. However, in "The Impossible Dream", a blues in E, his firm, deep bass finds its way to the forefront in a blues and gospel flavored mood right from the beginning of the bass introduction. By the way, Westergaard's early bass influences include Jimmy Blanton, Oscar Pettiford, Wilbur Ware, Butch Warren and Charles Mingus.

The creation of a piece of music is sometimes circumspect and difficult to trace. Although in a different form, the melodic material for "One Over the Hill" was the basis for a previous Westergaard composition ("Kreuzer Valse"). Here it has been rearranged for the nine-piece band and dedicated to pianist and composer Andrew Hill. In this Hill tribute, Søren



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

Kjærgaard on Fender Rhodes and Jakob Bro on guitar display their fascination with Lennie Tristano-Billy Bauer, before Jakob Høyer's lively drum solo paves the way for a walk back over the hill.

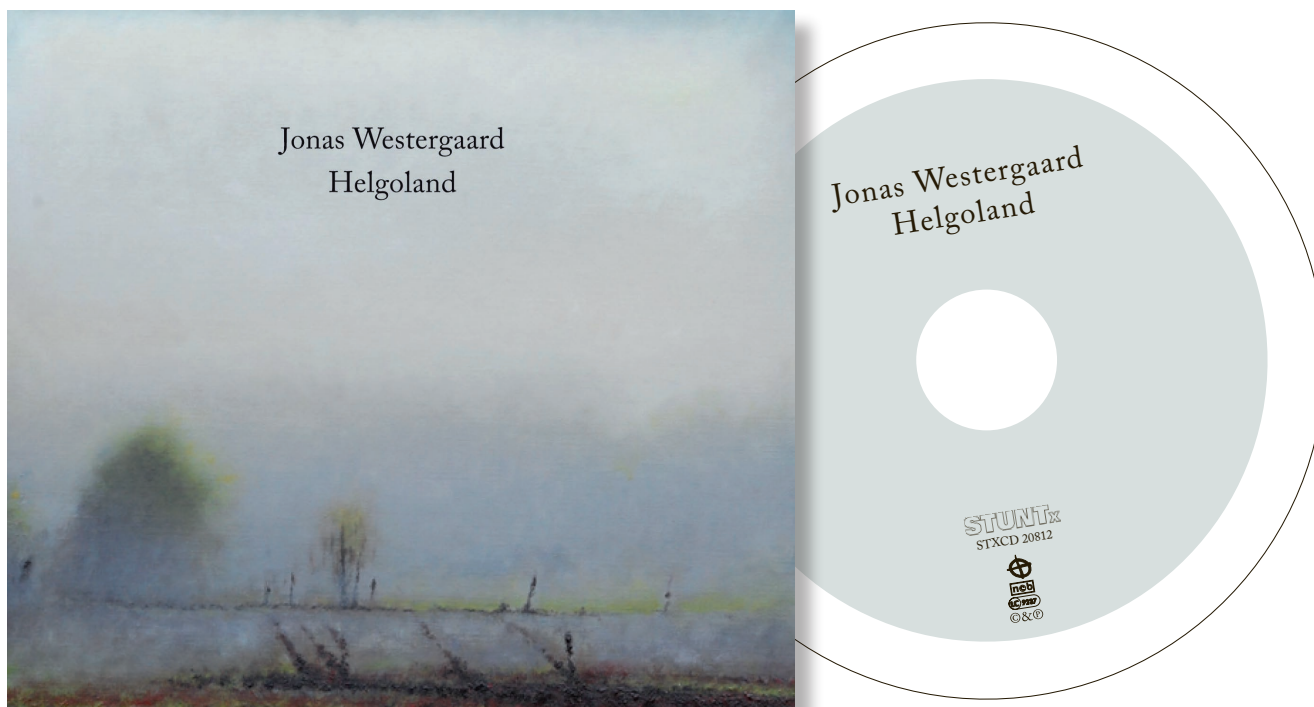
"Red River" is a classic ballad arranged for a septet with guitarist Jakob Bro in the leading role.

It is not far from the ballad to the introductory rubato of the long melody in "...And they'll take what you got", which eases into steady time as trumpeter Kasper Tranberg begins his solo.

A contrast to the broad brush strokes of the nine-piece and septet arrangements, "Levitated" is a fragile, cloudy tune played by a clipped quartet with Bro's guitar and Kjærgaard's celeste with the heavenly sound weaving melodic lines, and the open ending hanging like a question mark in midair.

Jonas Westergaard is not in a hurry on his bandleader and composer/arranger debut. The music is allowed to unfold in all its beauty and facets, and on the final track, "Until It's Time" – another nine-piece arrangement – Jesper Zeuthen's alto sax once again cuts to the bone with its particular cry, soloing over an Ellington-inspired backdrop.

On "Helgoland" Jonas Westergaard presents us with a beautiful collection of tunes and moods.



Cover painting by **Klaus Thommesen**



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