

Jazz | BY PETER MARGASAK

New Nordic Improvisers

On Swedish drummer Jonas Holgerson's debut as a leader, Snick Snack (Moserobie 075; 46:34 ★★★½), he embraces a lean, crisp sound with a trio inspired by Sonny Rollins' early work. While the playing of saxophonist Karl-Martin Almqvist and bassist Christian Sperring is superb, the real delight is the way the drummer (known for his role in the long-running Jonas Kullhammar Quartet) revels in the sustained sizzle of his cymbals, the muted throb of mallets across his toms and the sharp thwack of his sticks on his snare, both on the buoyant, hard-swinging trio cuts and on three concise solo pieces.

Ordering info: moserobie.com

Finnish pianist/harpist Iro Haarla makes a beautiful virtue of meditative restraint on Vespers (ECM 2172; 60:36 ★★★★★). The album embodies a certain Scandinavian reflectiveness, but there's passion and substance underneath the surface calm. In particular, Norwegian trumpeter Mathias Eick and saxophonist Trygve Seim are stellar in the front line, thoughtfully and patiently elucidating her gorgeous, slowly unfolding melodies with a mix of tonal purity and harmonic daring, while Haarla, bassist (and the leader's husband) Ulk Krokfors and drummer Jon Christensen create hydroplaning rhythms that propel as well as cushion.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Green Side Up (ILK 172; 55:59 ★★★★★) is the third album by the quartet Delirium, a wonderful post-Ornette Coleman combo that injects bracing energy and exacting chaos into pithy original compositions. Volcanic Finnish reedist Mikko Innanen is joined by three of Denmark's best players—bassist Jonas Westergaard, trumpeter Kasper Tranberg and drummer Stefan Pasborg—and they peerlessly navigate sharp post-bop heads, rhythms that veer from swift swing to kinetic turbulence and extended improvisation that careens from astute motific development to bulldozing free blowing. They cover lots of stylistic and temporal turf with an energy level and sense of joy that's deeply infectious.

Ordering info: ilkmusic.com

The fat, low-end brass frontline of Norway's Magic Pocket guarantees a unique sound, and with drummer Erik Nylander and guest keyboardist Morten Qvenild helping out on The Katabatic Wind (Bolage 013; 46:00 ★★★★★) they've delivered one of the year's most stunning debuts. Trumpeter Hayden Powell, trombonist Erik Johannessen and tuba player Daniel Herskedal blow mournful, extended lines that unfold with regal grace;



Iro Haarla

they collide, descend in unison patterns and wiggle in parallel harmony while Nylander creates a thunderous, tom-heavy drive. Qvenild's alien synthesizer patterns lacerate the thick din with nicely plastic, sharp-edged tones. The sonic density requires patience to decode the music, but its richness opens up with each listen.

Ordering info: bolage.no

On Popmotion (Hoob Jazz 023: 35:48 ★★★★★) Sweden's Nils Berg Cinemascope takes a dicey concept and knocks it out of the park. Reedist Berg built tunes around elements he'd adapted from various videos of amateur musicians from around the globe—including Japan, Ghana and India—so that his nimble trio with drummer Christopher Cantillo and bassist Josef Kallerdahl are joined by a variety of virtual guests. Romani cimbalom licks ripple through "Marlon," a nifty harmonium riff serves as a pop-like hook in "Orissa (In The Hands Of The Lord)" and casual female singing from Brunei is at the core of "Gavin's Gravity." Berg transcends conceptual cleverness; the tunes and the performances would be fantastic even without the video cameos.

Ordering info: hoob.net

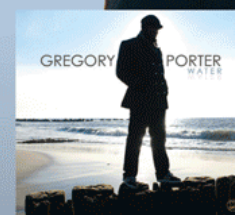
A few years ago, bassist Ingebrigt Håker Flaten and reedist Håkon Kornstad made a gorgeous album featuring interpretations of Norwegian folk songs that the former had heard his grandmother sing when he was growing up. On Mitt Hjerte Altid Vanker—1 (Compunctio 005: 45:50 ★★★★★) the remarkable percussionist Jon Christensen joins them and they perform many of the same pieces. While this new effort (recorded live at the Oslo Jazz Festival in 2009) has a stronger connection to jazz, the tender lyric quality remains, and in some ways the performances are even more introspective. Christensen colors more than he propels, leaving the throttle to Håker Flaten. Kornstad is the poet.

Ordering info: compunctio.com

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