



Jan Lundgren

Potsdamer Platz

ACT 9831-2 (also on vinyl)

German release date: 24.02.2017

Pianist Jan Lundgren makes music like a brilliant architect. If he were to build a house, it would – in the words of the song – be a very very very fine house. And it would have all his hallmarks about it. It would show his deep understanding of both tradition and modernism, together with his preternatural instinct for bringing the two together. It would visibly convey his unique way of blending the very best of American design and construction with immaculate European style and taste. To extend the metaphor, Lundgren's building on several floors would be a delight to inhabit, with rooms that have fascinating shapes, cosy corners, clear lines, rooms that would contain artefacts and objets trouvés which would allow nostalgia to well up in the visitor's mind. There would also be a spacious loft with the room to play, to improvise and to wander. Ever since the early days of his career, Lundgren's artistry has been defined by change and renewal, and yet he never loses sight of the past. His album "Potsdamer Platz" is a statement that is personal, a faithful portrayal of the unique perspective from which he experiences and performs jazz.

One German critic, writing for the highly-regarded DPA recently described Jan Lundgren as "a man who can, quite simply, do everything." The pianist's starting point is his rootedness in the American jazz piano tradition, which was what first brought him together with mainstream players such as Harry Allen and Scott Hamilton. And yet his music is also deeply infused with the musical language of his native Scandinavia. He is a superbly skillful, classically-trained musician who knows the Western tradition well, but that heritage always co-exists quite naturally in his music with swing, with Nordic melancholy and a quicksilver impressionistic wit.

In Lundgren's different projects, he has shown a variety of ways to carry European musical traditions into classic jazz. In "The Ystad Concert", he has followed the paths travelled by Swedish jazz piano icon Jan Johansson, but what he left behind were his own new and distinctive footmarks. "European Standards" has demonstrated that jazz has long since moved from the USA, and has developed its own young cultural heritage back on the old continent. And in "Mare Nostrum" with Sardinian trumpeter Paolo Fresu and French accordion player Richard Galliano, Lundgren has created a unique, distinctive and appealing "sound of Europe."

With "Potsdamer Platz", Lundgren goes further in this direction and has put down a significant marker. All of the pieces (except "Tvåredet") are his compositions. These are personal works, which flourish and blossom in this perfect setting. Lundgren has assembled a group which can really own these pieces, and give them stylistic heft and meaning. "What I wanted," says Lundgren, "was to work with these people, my favourite musicians, and to make something new out of these tunes through the process of interaction. Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against concept albums, in fact I have made a few; but here, it was as if we only realised what the concept actually was after we had done it."

So who is in this quartet of Jan Lundgren's favourite musicians? Melodic duties are the domain of the great Finnish alto saxophonist Jukka Perko.

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Jukka Perko
Dan Berglund
Morten Lund

ACT



In the rhythm section, the drummer is the Dane Morten Lund, who recently instigated and made a very well-received album with Lars Danielsson and Marius Neset. Lund is a stalwart: he was already occupying the drum chair of Jan Lundgren's regular trio in 2000. On the bass is Lundgren's fellow Swede Dan Berglund, who for a long time played exclusively for the renowned Esbjörn Svensson Trio. He and the pianist have known each other for a long time, but Lundgren has never actually shared the stand with him before. "I've had the idea of this band in my head for a long time. Four years ago, we met at the festival in Milan and arranged the project," recalls Lundgren. As so often happens, it took quite a while to put the idea into practice, but in this case the wait has been worth it: musicians who click together into a unit as well as these do are a very rare phenomenon indeed.

These four musicians dispensed with all written music right from their first meeting. The joyous title track "Potsdamer Platz" is bursting with positive energy. "Ballad no. 9" then takes the listener right to the opposite end of the emotional spectrum. With its plaintive melody, it demonstrates what a capable and emotional songwriter Lundgren can be. "Lycklig Resa," the Swedish classic, is then given an extremely cultivated treatment. It starts lyrically, but quickly hunkers down into a groove so solid you could drive your Volvo over it. In "Twelve Tone Rag", things then take off in a virtuosic and tricky direction, with a supporting melody built on a twelve-tone note row which has been craftily inserted into a bebop frame. There is a gleeful lightness of touch and a carefree spirit pervading this album, even if it does go through different moods. "On The Banks Of The Seine" is a melancholic and romantic excursion, whereas "Bullet Train" is febrile and funky. There are moments when Balkan music is transformed into folk jazz ("Dance Of Masja") or when a more sombre mood is created and held, such as in "Song For Jörgen".

The one thing that definitely could not be said about Lundgren and his fellow musicians on this album, is that they have played it safe in any way. All four of them just dive into the torrents of this music, try out new things, they are bold in everything they do, and yet the music never tips over into inaccessibility. There seems to have been a magical, providential hand guiding this album too, if the way the choice of title is anything to go by. "I hadn't thought up a name either for this piece or for the whole album. We were recording at the Hansa Studios at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, and one day when I woke up in the hotel, I suddenly realised I'd got it: "Potsdamer Platz." The name fits perfectly with its jaunty, bright lights, big-city feel, to its funk-march character. This is a tune definitely more about strength than it is about beauty."

"Just as the reconstruction of Potsdamer Platz is, in a sense, a symbol of the new Germany," says Lundgren. "as the title here it stands for the kind of positive force that I feel should always emanate from music. Music should be on the move, taking us somewhere." This new album shows how well Lundgren's new quartet has not only fitted together, but has also grown together, and now started to move forward with a clear and strong common purpose.



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Photo by Sven Thielmann

- 01 Potsdamer Platz 5:20
- 02 No. 9 4:42
- 03 Lycklig Resa 6:03
- 04 Bullet Train 5:23
- 05 The Poet 5:33
- 06 Never Too Late 4:49
- 07 Twelve Tone Rag 4:23
- 08 Song For Jörgen 5:53
- 09 Dance Of Masja 6:25
- 10 On The Banks Of The Seine 4:43
- 11 Tväredet 3:53

All compositions by Jan Lundgren,
except 11 by Per Ödberg

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Mixed and Mastered by Arne Schumann

Produced by Siggı Loch

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Jan Lundgren on ACT:

The Ystad Concert - A Tribute to Jan Johansson (ACT 9814-2, also on vinyl)
European Standards (ACT 9482-2)

with Richard Galliano und Paolo Fresu:
Mare Nostrum II (ACT 9812-2, also on vinyl)
Mare Nostrum (ACT 9466-2, also on vinyl)

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Jan Lundgren / piano
Jukka Perko / alto & soprano sax
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Morten Lund / drums

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