

ACT

Jakob Manz

Groove Connection

ACT 9966-2

CD / Vinyl / Digital

Release date: 28. April 2023

"Jakob Manz will always surprise you," says pianist / keyboardist Roberto Di Gioia, who produced the 21-year-old's new album alongside Siggı Loch. "It is widely known that Jakob can play the saxophone unbelievably well, and also that he can take it in just about every conceivable direction in modern jazz. What is less appreciated is how authentic he sounds when he plays soul, funk and rhythm'n'blues. And just when you think you've heard everything from him, he will play you a blues solo so deep and soulful, it's incredible." The release of Manz's jazz-rock debut "Natural Energy" in 2020 gave a good pointer to his potential. That album was followed by headline appearances at important festivals: the Leverkusener Jazztage, Jazz Baltica, and also in the Porsche Arena in Stuttgart where he was a guest soloist at the "70 Years of the SWR Big Band" concert, and then at the ACT30 anniversary concerts in the Berlin Philharmonie. 2022 saw the release of the exquisitely crafted acoustic duo album "The Gallery Concerts I" with pianist Johanna Summer. This showed a different side of Jakob Manz, as an improviser of great depth and sensitivity.

Whereas Jakob Manz's debut album gave us a cross-section of his musical spectrum in all its breadth, "Groove Connection" offers a close-up of what are probably his greatest strengths: the ability to enthrall and delight an audience with soulful melody, his incisive soloing and his infallible sense of rhythm. This very rare combination of qualities was the starting point for producers Roberto Di Gioia and Siggı Loch, to which they added a top international top line-up...so the sparks could really fly. Loch comments: "Jakob Manz is an unbelievable talent. For me he stands in the tradition of great saxophonists such as Lou Donaldson, David Sanborn (his hero) and also Klaus Doldinger and his band "Passport". All of these are musicians who found their characteristic sound on a foundation of jazz, which they combined with soul and blues, and became successful worldwide with it."

The bar was deliberately set high for "Groove Connection", and right from the start. It should be an album of international standard, with musicians like Jakob Manz who penetrate the vocabulary of soul, jazz and rhythm'n'blues deeply and make them their own. Roberto Di Gioia, on keys and also a songwriter, was a shoo-in from the beginning – partly because of his history with Klaus Doldingers Passport and his current groove-jazz band "Web Web", and also because of his pop and soul sensibility as a producer of German Motown artist Joy Denalane and hugely popular rapper / singer Max Herre.

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Roberto Di Gioia
Tim Lefebvre
Karin Hammar
Bruno Müller
Per Lindvall



First choice to underpin the band from the bass was American Tim Lefebvre, another hero of Jakob Manz's, an authority on his instrument and collaborator with artists as diverse as David Bowie, Wayne Krantz, Tedeschi Trucks Band and Michael Wollny. A stylish groove comes from the drums, and from the Swede Per Lindvall in particular. His range of credits includes membership of the first Nils Landgren Funk Unit, and also having been drummer for ABBA. Bruno Müller, one of the most sought-after German session guitarists, adds flavoursome funk. The Swedish trombonist Karin Hammar creates a gentler counterpart to Manz's brilliant alto saxophone. There are also guest appearances from guitarist Nguyễn Lê, trumpeter Paolo Fresu and speaker Mark Harrington.

As soon as the members of Groove Connection met in the studio, everything clicked instantly. Roberto Di Gioia remembers: "We had everything perfectly prepared, including top-level bass equipment for Tim...who arrives, plugs his €500 no-label touring bass into the amp, starts to play a bit, then Per Lindvall joins in and immediately there's something happening. That's when I had to shout into the control room that they should start recording immediately." The vibe of those first few minutes continues over the duration of the recording. Everything just flows, everyone seems to grasp subconsciously exactly what the music really needs, which notes to play - and which ones not to. In the end, one or two takes are sufficient for most of the tracks on the album. The fact that it all succeeds so seemingly effortlessly, and that the result sounds so light and unencumbered, but at the same time so rousing, is proof of the fabulous quality of all those involved in the recording. Everyone is at the top of his or her game, and, even more importantly, everyone has deeply internalised the vocabulary and the feeling of this music, there is real communication going on, and a lot of joy in the room. And that joy is audible to listeners from the very first bar - with a mixture of originals and groove-jazz versions of Adele, Billie Eilish, Whitney Houston, Lionel Richie...and many more.

There are very few young jazz musicians who master their instrument with such complete and daunting virtuosity as Jakob Manz, and yet his playing always sounds so unpretentious, clear, soulful and at the service of the tune - all at the same time. His success in doing this is due on the one hand to his talent and the determination with which he works on his musical expression. On the other hand, it is also due to his will to inspire and touch the emotions of the audience with his music. He says it is important to him that he should play his particular instrument, the alto saxophone, in a way that fills the room, but at the same time reaches each individual listener with directness and immediacy. And there is no doubt: he succeeds in this with flying colours, whether it's in a club, a large concert hall, a festival stage... or indeed wherever the listener might hear his new album.

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- 01 Jazz Is a Spirit 4:01**
(Manz, Di Gioia, Hammar, Müller, Lefebvre, Lindvall)
- 02 Little Lucy 3:53**
(Roberto Di Gioia)
- 03 Wade in the Water 5:36**
(traditional, arr. by Roberto Di Gioia)
- 04 Soul Tiger 2:09**
(Paul Nero / Klaus Doldinger)
- 05 Teacher Bleacher 3:31**
(Roberto Di Gioia)
- 06 I Look To You 2:36**
(Robert Kelly)
- 07 Neon Yellow 4:07**
(Jakob Manz)
- 08 Groove Connection 3:01**
(Jakob Manz / dedicated to Nils Landgren)
- 09 Minor Bell 4:06**
(Roberto Di Gioia)
- 10 Dancing on the Ceiling 3:00**
(Lionel Richie, Carlos Rios & Michael Frenchik)
- 11 Soul Good Man 2:09**
(Roberto Di Gioia)
- 12 Easy on Me 3:10**
(Adele Adkins & Greg Kurstin)
- 13 When the Party's Over 3:22**
(Finneas O'Connell)

Jakob Manz alto saxophone & flute
Roberto Di Gioia keyboards
Karin Hammar trombone
Bruno Müller guitar
Tim Lefebvre electric bass
Per Lindvall drums

Guests:

Paolo Fresu trumpet (on 01)
Nguyễn Lê guitar (on 04)
Mark Harrington spoken words (on 01)

Jazz Is a Spirit lyrics written by Abbey Lincoln

Recorded by Arne Schumann at Soundfabrik Berlin,
20. - 22.11.2022

Mixed by Arne Schumann
Mastered by Klaus Scheuermann

Produced by Roberto Di Gioia & Siggie Loch

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