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## Jakob Baekgaard's Best Danish Releases of 2010

By Jakob Baekgaard

The Danish jazz scene has evolved tremendously during recent years. The recurring Copenhagen Jazz Festival is a testament to the strength of the Danish jazz scene and its ability to soak up influences from outside. Openness towards musical influences is also reflected in this year's harvest of the best Danish records, which often bring in American collaborators to create an amalgam of transnational beauty. While the following picks only cover the tip of the iceberg, they nevertheless represent the diversity and quality of music currently found on the Danish scene, covering everything from avant-garde to big band and electronica. The records listed are in no particular order.

Søren Kjærgaard/Ben Street/Andrew Cyrille

*Open Opus*

ILK Music

Spacious improvisation from Kjærgaard's sublime trio, merging elements of classical music and lyrical free jazz into a highly personal expression. In a long row of outstanding releases, this is at once Kjærgaard's most subdued and forceful work. There's a haiku-like simplicity to his compositions that reveal the profound poetry of sound.

Richard Andersson Sustainable Quartet

*Richard Andersson Sustainable Quartet*

Blackout Music

Denmark has a proud tradition of fostering bassists and Richard Andersson is the latest in the lineage. His debut sees him introducing his New York Quartet with saxophonist Tony Malaby as a special guest. The music is

a mix of standards, originals and free jazz. Music that is both timeless, tuneful and challenging.

August Rosenbaum

*Beholder*

Gateway Music

Another talent in collaboration with American musicians, pianist August Rosenbaum's debut is an exceptionally mature artistic statement. Rosenbaum redefines the role of the piano, creating open structures that allow the players to shape the music in the moment. Drummer Dan Weiss and bassist Thomas Morgan add a fluid intensity to the melodic fragility of Rosenbaum's playing, and Danish guitarist Jakob Bro adds his signature sound.

Jakob Buchanan Kvartet

*I Land in The Green Land*

Long Life Records

Jakob Bro also turns up as sideman on trumpeter Jakob Buchanan's peculiarly titled *i Land in The Green Land*. Creating a mixture between Miles Davis' electric period and the Nordic aesthetics of the ECM-sound, the record showcases Buchanan's talent as a composer and instrumentalist with a warm sound that wraps itself like a shroud of fog over a deserted landscape.

Hans Ulrik/Benjamin Koppel/Jon Balke/Palle Danielsson/Alex Riel

*The Adventures of a Polar Expedition*

Cowbell Music

*The Adventures of a Polar Expedition* is a bold adventure in sound. Saxophonist Benjamin Koppel translates the expeditions of famous polar explorers into ambitious suites that cover an emotional spectrum from ecstasy to fear, adding a touch of humanity to the endless icy horizons of the landscape.

Niels Lyhne Løkkegaard

*The Scale of Grey. The Tone of Black*

Gateway Music

Niels Lyhne Løkkegaard is another saxophonist who paints landscapes in sound. *The Scale of Black. The Tone of Grey* is minimalistic in approach, often eschewing the solid beat of the drums in favor of fluent saxophone lines merged with wordless singing, creating beautiful tone poems with a Nordic air.

Karen Bach

*Secret Rooms*

Blue Kite Productions

Pianist Karen Bach's trio also explores the area of Nordic melancholy, but merges it with the dynamics of post-rock. Bach's compositions morph into several interesting sound patterns while never losing track of a good melody and groove. *Secret Rooms* is the best release so far from this compelling trio.

Girls in Airports

*Girls in Airports*

Gateway Music

Considering the young age of the band and the fact that this is its debut, the achievement of Girls in Airports becomes all the more remarkable. This is an album that can not only be rated among some of the finest new releases in Danish jazz, it is also a work that introduces a whole new sound, where mellow Nordic lyricism is combined with sounds from Africa and the East.

Indra

*Indra*

Gateway Music

Here is a singer who has an immense knowledge of American tradition and translates it into lived life. Indra could easily approach the league of the great jazz singers like Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan and it is, indeed, a musical fairytale that she has chosen to grace the small country of Denmark with her exceptional voice.

Lars Winther Big band

*Lars Winther Big Band*

Your Favourite Jazz

Besides running his own label, Your Favourite Jazz, pianist Lars Winther also has a busy career as a musician and now also as a leader of his own big band. The deadpan title of the album doesn't say much about the sparkling content. Bringing in everything from electronica to oriental scales and hip-hop, Winther's big band is a unique take on an often conservative musical form.

Emil de Waal

*Elguitar & saxofon*

Your Favourite Records

Drummer and multi-instrumentalist Emil de Waal has created a playful and enchanting hybrid of electronica

and jazz on *Elguitar & saxofon*. Electronic beats, Afrobeat and moaning saxophones unite on "Birba," a brilliant example of the album's inventive sound.

Jesper Zeuthen Trio

*Jesper Zeuthen Trio*

Blackout Music

Saxophonist Jesper Zeuthen is a musician's musician and something of an unsung legend on the Danish scene. His influence reaches across generations with a special brand of Scandinavian lyricism which merges elements of free jazz and Eastern influences into a singular sound. There have been few albums in his career, but *Jesper Zeuthen Trio* is a proof of Zeuthen's continuing strength as an improviser and composer.

Nicolai Munch-Hansen

*Chronicles*

Stunt Records

Bassist Nicolai Munch-Hansen's second album is blue chamber jazz at its finest, with some of the most prominent players on the Danish scene participating, including guitarist Jakob Bro and pianist Søren Kjærsgaard. Munch-Hansen creates understated hymns of great beauty that sometimes break out in moments of chaos, as when saxophonist Ned Ferm wails deep into the night on the smoking "The Rise of Sheriff Leroy."

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