

Jakob Bro

Uma Elmo

Jakob Bro: guitar

Arve Henriksen: trumpet, piccolo trumpet

Jorge Rossy: drums

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With *Uma Elmo*, his fifth album as a leader for ECM, Danish guitarist-composer Jakob Bro presents a new trio featuring Norwegian trumpeter Arve Henriksen and Spanish drummer Jorge Rossy. Astonishingly, given the trio's musical synergy, the first time these three musicians ever performed together was for the album's sessions at the Swiss Radio studio in Lugano, with Manfred Eicher producing. Among the album's highlights is the opening "Reconstructing a Dream", a darkly lyrical reverie which underlines an observation about Bro's work by *London Jazz News*: "there is no hurry to this music, but there is great depth."

"To Stanko" is Bro's hushed tribute to the late, great Polish trumpeter who featured the guitarist in his quintet for the ECM album *Dark Eyes*. Another track that serves as an homage to a late elder is "Music for Black Pigeons," which was given its evocative title by saxophone sage Lee Konitz, with whom Bro also worked closely.

Listeners will recognize Arve Henriksen's whispering, intimate sound from his 2008 ECM album *Cartography*, as well as from his collaborations for the label with Trio Mediaeval and Tigran Hamasyan. Rossy is well known to jazz fans on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly for his decade-plus tenure in Brad Mehldau's career-making first trio. As for the leader, *DownBeat* aptly noted in its review of his previous ECM album, *Bay of Rainbows*, that "Bro's guitar is luminous... his music both hypnotic and dramatic."

Bro created the title of *Uma Elmo* using the middle names of his young daughter and infant son, with the guitarist having composed much of the album's dulcet material between his newborn son's naps. "It's a special time in my life right now with the kids being so young – and it's also a strange time in the world, of course," Bro says. "I wrote music for the recording session being doubtful that we could actually all meet and complete the session, at the end of summer this past year, with a German producer, Spanish drummer, Sweden-based Norwegian trumpeter, Danish guitarist-composer and an Italian engineer – all in a studio in Switzerland. And the music is, as it always is, a reflection, more or less abstract, of what's going on around us. To have this musical document from this year will always represent some kind of milestone for me. And to have everyone there in Lugano: Manfred, Jorge, Arve and engineer Stefano Amerio, all determined to shape and capture this music with me despite the many obstacles facing us – needless to say, I'm very grateful."

Throughout *Uma Elmo*, Henriksen most often takes the melodic lead in Bro's compositions, hovering and moving serpentine through Rossy's subtly dynamic rhythms and the guitarist's harmonic shimmers, tolling lines and looped atmospherics. About his trio mates, Bro says: "I performed with Jorge Rossy a

few times before the *Uma Elmo* session, including a tribute concert for Paul Motian during the Copenhagen Jazz Festival in 2014 and then at the ECM50 event in Warsaw. But I admired Jorge from the first time I heard him, back in 1997 or so. He was on many albums with musicians I loved, like Chris Cheek, Mark Turner, Larry Grenadier, Ethan Iverson, Kurt Rosenwinkel and, of course, Brad Mehldau. Jorge has a deep understanding of time and form. He can be there inside the music, with everything around him moving, and just be present, not do too much, playing exactly enough, adding warmth, drive, contrasts, color, time, swing, soul. He also has a great sense of composition within the composition itself – making the music breathe.”

Bro first took note of Henriksen in 2016. “Arve’s sound struck me immediately,” he says, “and I soon began talking with him about a collaboration. But the session in Lugano was not only the first time we played music together – it was also my first actual physical encounter with him! It turned out to be an inspirational meeting. But it was invaluable to have Manfred on the side, listening, advising and guiding, especially since the three of us were coming together for the first time.”

Reflecting on the track “To Stanko,” Bro says: “I wrote the song to celebrate the life and sound of my friend Tomasz Stanko, in whose band I recorded and toured worldwide for more than five years. Stanko was such a soulful musician. For me, the mystery of music, why some sounds move me, is an essential part of my continued curiosity in playing. With Stanko, it was so evident. With one note, he told his story. When life pours out of an instrument, you’ve reached the ultimate, in my opinion. Arve plays beautifully on my tribute, ‘To Stanko.’ Tomasz would never play or sound like this – which, to me, just makes the dedication even stronger, emphasizing the fact that the inspiration from Stanko goes way deeper than anything you can define.”

Regarding “Reconstructing a Dream,” Bro recalls learning to re-contextualize his repertoire from Paul Motian’s example. “Performing at the Village Vanguard with Paul and also recording his ECM album *Garden of Eden*, we worked with such pieces as ‘Etude,’ ‘Mumbo Jumbo,’ etc. – songs Paul had composed for his earlier groups,” the guitarist explains. “Having listened to all of Paul’s recordings, knowing his songbook so well, it was an out-of-this-world experience for me to reimagine this music with him. So, having recorded ‘Reconstructing a Dream’ 13 years ago in New York with Paul for one of my albums, it felt like time to reinterpret this song. And with Jorge on drums this time. Jorge, to me, is a beautiful, warm, poetic drummer. I’m sure Paul would approve. ‘Slaraffenland’ is another track on *Uma Elmo* associated with Paul for me, because he included this tune of mine in the repertoire for a tour with the Electric Bebop Band when I was quite young.”

Concerning past heroes and new lives, entrancing sounds and pensive circumstances, *Uma Elmo* conjures an aura that lingers even after the notes fade from the air. With the aforementioned tracks as well as “Beautiful Day,” “Sound Flower,” “Housework” and two versions of “Morning Song,” Bro and company have created something of enduring value in strange times.