

JAZZ PUBLICATION OF THE YEAR

ISSUE 150 MARCH 2011 £4.25

# Jazzwise

The Truth  
Of The Song

## Kurt Elling

Opens The Gate

"If I owned some  
suits and was thin"

## Ian Shaw

The Fame Game

## Magnus Öström

Picking Up The Threads

Plus

NEWT

TWELVES

EVAN PARKER

KYRIE KRISTMANSON

Beyond The Trio

## Kit Downes

Exploding On  
All Fronts

## Claire Martin

Bewitched

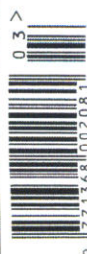
## Mathias Eick

Chilled Energy

## Claude Deppa

The Player

THE UK'S  
BIGGEST  
SELLING JAZZ  
MAGAZINE





# coming to terms

Devastated by the death of Esbjörn Svensson, it's taken time and much soul searching for EST drummer **MAGNUS ÖSTRÖM** to return to music. Still facing up to the challenge of his loss, Öström has assembled a new band playing his own music and is joined by Pat Metheny and EST bassist Dan Berglund on one track. **STUART NICHOLSON** talks to Magnus about his journey back to music

**I**t's been a long time coming, and there was a moment when it might not have happened at all, but drummer Magnus Öström is back. Announcing his return with a brilliant new album *Thread of Life* on the ACT label, it gives full reign to his compositional, arranging, production and band-leading abilities. The result is a multi-faceted work that reveals what was so often hinted at during his time with the Esbjörn Svensson Trio – that each member of the group had listened widely and was able to subtly incorporate these experiences into their music. But this time Öström's wide-ranging influences are writ large, from jazz to jazz-rock, from electronica to art rock, and from drum 'n' bass to modern classical, all mediated by his signature drum sound that one web site currently describes as "the most exciting drumming since Tony Williams."

"I am really excited about the album," says Öström down his mobile from a quiet corner in a coffee shop in Stockholm. "I am really happy that I finally, at this stage you could say, 'I've got it done.' I am looking forward to what is to come next." What comes next is touring the music with his band that includes Gustaf Karlöf on keyboards, Andreas Hourdakakis on guitars, and Thobias Gabrielson on bass, additional keyboards and trumpet. "I love these guys and I love playing with them and I see huge potential in

the band live-wise when we actually get to tour this music, because I know when we jam they are really open minded guys, I picked them for that, I really wanted people as open as I am to go in any direction so there is no thinking about genres, its all about the music."

The album is a major landmark in Öström's life that was turned upside-down on 14 June 2008, when his long-time musical associate Esbjörn Svensson, a close friend since childhood, died suddenly and tragically in a diving accident. At the time EST, which had begun life as the Esbjörn Svensson Trio, had become the biggest draw in European jazz. In the year leading-up to Svensson's death, teenage girls in the audience (yes, the band's appeal extended far beyond the usual jazz constituency) had begun screaming when the band walked on stage in a way that evoked Beatle-mania of the 1960s. And while early tours of the U.S.A. had resulted in financial losses, they had gradually built up a fan base and seemed on the brink of repeating their European success in America. In just two weeks time they were about to headline at the New York Jazz Festival. "Esbjörn's death was a huge shock," Öström recalls. "We were preparing for a tour in the States and Canada, I got a message from the family, I got a phone call from his sister. It was like

life stopped, but time went on, you know? It was a blow on so many levels and my life completely stopped, you can say, for a long, long while. Everyone knows when you lose a close friend or relative you're in shock for quite a long time after. My work, my profession, stopped as well, it was at many levels, it was hard times for a long time after."

In many ways *Thread of Life* is about getting past the darkness of the months immediately following Svensson's death and coming to terms with life after EST "We came so far with the trio and I thought maybe I have done this now, because we went so far with the trio yet we still had a lot to do and record, many, many ideas, we kind of lived our childhood dreams, in a way, when we were kids our dreams were to tour around the world and all that stuff, and we did! So I thought for a while I would stop playing and do something else, because I couldn't find any positive things back then But somehow, I realised, no, I am not finished with the music yet, I had to find a way back."

**'I thought for a while  
I would stop playing  
and do something**

**else'**

**- MAGNUS ÖSTRÖM**

That way back came with a telephone call the Gothenburg bass player and ACT artist Lars Danielsson, who called Öström out of the blue in early 2009, "It was actually very, very important for me," he recalls. "It was a turning point when Lars called, because I was sitting in my car driving and the phone rang and I picked it up and answered and he asked me this question and I started to shake, and I had to say I'll call you back as I had to think, it was a time when I was back and forth inside, but I felt now was the time to say 'Yes!' He called me at exactly the right moment, somehow it just clicked and it was a real turning point for me."

Danielsson's offer was a series of gigs with his *Tarantella* project, a group that took its name from an eponymously titled album he had recorded for the ACT label in 2008. "Lars asked me to join his *Tarantella* project for a couple of gigs in Poland, together with pianist Leszek Mozdzier, and I finally said yes to something. I'm really thankful Lars called me up because that brought me back on stage again, it was really fun to go out there and play with such great guys – John Parricelli, the guitarist from London, and

Mathias Eick, the Norwegian trumpet player, were also in the band, great guys. It was really a great setting for me, great positive energy for me, I think the first concert was in March 2009, and since then we have played maybe five or six shows, it hasn't been much, we played in Poland a couple of times and also in Hungary, but it was really, really fun."

The next stage of Öström's route back into music came from an equally unexpected source, Jeanette Lindström, one of Sweden most highly regarded jazz vocalists. She was putting a new group together to record an album of original material she had written and phoned Öström for his input. "Jeanette wanted to play some songs for me to hear my opinion," he recalls. "Because she was producer it ended up that I said as a little bit of a joke, 'Why can't I produce it?' I just said it, I don't know why, and we laughed a little bit, and then she came back and asked if I wanted to do it, and co-produce with her, so I did it and I think it went quite well and was fun to do. With that record we also went over to England to stay for a week or two at the home of Robert Wyatt, so Robert is on the album as well, we went there in May last year to record it in his home. He is singing and

**playing a little trumpet too, but**

mainly singing on the album. So it was really fun to meet and work with him as well. Great person."

The album, *Attitude and Orbit Control* was released in the autumn of 2009. "Magnus has been decisive, his input tremendously important," said Lindström when the album was released. "We worked hard and intensely and without him this album would not have become what it has." To their joint delight the album won a Grammis [Grammy] at the Swedish Grammis Awards [Grammy Awards] in January 2010. "That was really great to see," says Öström. "There were fantastic reviews here in Sweden, so









## Band of brothers

**MARTIN LONGLEY** was on the spot in New York when Pat Metheny joined Magnus Öström to record on the album

A key track on *Thread Of Life* stands strikingly apart from the majority recorded by Öström's band. The leader wrote 'Ballad For E' as a specific dedication to the spirit of Esbjörn Svensson. "This is the first thing I wrote after Esbjörn passed away," says Öström. "I didn't want to have piano. I wanted guitar. I wanted to play it with Dan. I could have played it with the [new] band, but it was an emotional thing."

From the outset, Öström had guitarist Pat Metheny in mind. This ideal interpretation eventually became a reality. On 3 December 2010, Öström, Berglund and EST's longstanding sound engineer Åke Linton spent a day recording and mixing with an acoustic-only Metheny in New York's Avatar Studios. Located in the Hell's Kitchen district of Manhattan, this studio used to be known as The Power Station, and formed a significant part of the city's musical history, hosting artists such as John Lennon, David Bowie, Neil Young and Madonna. It was Metheny who suggested Avatar. "Pat lived here for ten years," says Öström, gesturing around the hallowed chambers. "He made *Offramp* here."

Ever the extreme perfectionist, Metheny was in the midst of multiple overdubs whilst I talked with the Swedish contingent. He had a multitude of microscopic surgical edits in mind. The ballad was the final piece to be recorded for the album, and appears as track 6 of 10. "We met him in Montreux, way back in 1999," recalls Öström. "Then again in 2003. Esbjörn wrote some arrangements and we played a concert with a string orchestra. Pat guested on two or three tunes, at the Jazz Baltica festival. Then we played a double bill in Verona, with his trio, and he guested with us on two tunes."

The piece is serene and steadily building, with guitar and bass solos, but no specific spotlight for the drums. "He really wanted to do it," Öström emphasises. "I'm totally stunned that he put that much effort into it. He changed some chords, and made transition parts in the song. He's diving deep into it." Indeed, Metheny came back at them with an elaborated arrangement. So the piece was now heading for nine minutes, when they were expecting five or six. Metheny's additions led to Öström having new ideas of his own, and so the composition evolved. "It took six takes. We're using the fifth. We took a break after take four, and you can really hear that. The music was really fresh."

for me it was a good sign that I could manage little by little on my own, you could say. I got some energy back and I thought, 'Maybe I'm not finished with the music yet.' I had thoughts I would stop playing and do something else, but these two things – playing with Lars and co-producing Jeanette's album – bought me back on stage and also into the studio again and I am really grateful for that."

Although Öström had begun sitting at his piano from around Christmas 2008, some six months after Svensson's death, trying out ideas for compositions, there were understandably long breaks but after his first encouraging steps back into music he decided to pick-up his career again. "I didn't tell anybody I was working on music for quite some time," he reflects. "Then I told Burkhard Hopper, my manager, I want to do this, and then we presented some demos for ACT and they were positive, so I went for it. I was happy that I could release it on ACT, and the people at ACT were really happy." Most of the material on *Thread of Life* was composed during the winter and spring of 2010. "The compositions came first, rather than the line-up of the band, because of course I am writing at the piano so the piano was already there, and I started to make recordings playing piano, playing with synthesisers and drums so in a way 'the sound' [of the band] was already there quite early, in a way I heard a bigger sound in my head, you can't really call it orchestrated, but a little bit bigger, and I first thought to incorporate two keyboards and bass and drums, but I had worked with Andreas Houdakis and Thobias Gabrielson the year before on Jeanette Lindström's album and liked their work very much. They put their own personal voices into the music, I picked them for that because I heard what they could give the music, but the compositions were already there. Of course we did a lot of jams in the summer, just to get our musical language together, because it was the first time for me – I had such a long time with the trio and I never had to discuss anything, just play. It takes a while to find each other, but it came together very fast I have to say."

The band had begun rehearsing in Öström's private studio in the summer of 2010 and recorded the album between 4 and 7 October at the Atlantis Studios in Stockholm, scene of several EST albums as well as several Abba hit recordings. "On 'Piano Break Song,' I had this pattern in my head when I was sitting at the piano, it's for me interesting because you get a feeling of a very straight song, but when you dig deep it is kind of intricate rhythmic-wise. What I hear when I listen to it, I hear a lot of my musical roots – when I was 12 or 13 years of age I was into jazz-rock, Billy Cobham, and I went really deep into that area for a couple of years, and I hear that a little bit in this song, with the theme with the guitar and for me it is a mix of this jazz-rock background with Steve Reich on top, you could go a bit further and

if you listen to the groove you could say it is a little bit related to this club scene, groove – there's a lot of stuff in there!"

In contrast is Öström's composition 'Longing', with its subtle suggestion of ambient/electonica. "The melody for me when I heard it back I was thinking about a female Swedish folk piano and organ player, kind of folk-rock, again my musical roots. I love this ambient side of music, it's a song that reminds me of EST, in a way, the piano is quite strong here and also how I play drums, if I can say it myself, is a kind of signature groove from me like I used to play on 'Seven Days of Falling,' or 'Serenade for the Renegade.' When I heard it back I thought it was maybe like a song we could have played with EST."

The album's centrepiece is 'Ballad for E', dedicated to Svensson, and recorded with his former EST bandmate Dan Berglund on bass with a guest appearance by guitarist Pat Metheny. "I think it was 2003, we had the opportunity to play in the Jazz Baltica festival in the north of Germany and Pat Metheny was artist in residence, and Esbjörn wrote string arrangements for a couple of songs, and Pat guested on three of them with the trio and strings and I think he guested on one occasion in Verona in Italy. He said in the future we might do something together, but it never happened, obviously. This song is actually a composition I wrote when Esbjörn passed away and I felt right away that this was my ballad for Esbjörn. I love guitar so I thought about Pat very early, but it took a long, long while before I dared to asked him and in August [2010] I asked him finally and I got this fantastic friendly email back saying yes, he was really honoured and he really wanted to do this. So we got together to do the recording in New York, the old Power Station, now named the Avatar Studio, in the beginning of December [2010] and we had a really nice day there together."

With the album release imminent, the future and a new direction in his career beckons. Already dates for his new band are being lined up around Europe, and Öström says he can't wait to get on the road again, which had once been such a big part of his musical life. No European band toured more than EST, often on the road for a couple of months at a time. Now a new chapter opens with new musicians. "I hope this band will stay together for a while, because I love these guys and I love playing with them, I am just happy to have a band together again, for me it's kind of a new journey and we will see where it can lead – so here we go!" ■

