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Beat

Jakob Bro, Danish Vets Expand Jazz Borders in Copenhagen

As veteran jazz festivals go, Copenhagen's is more labyrinthine than most. Whereas the Montreal festival centers itself in a five-block radius closed to traffic, and North Sea compresses its high-caliber programming into an under-one-roof thicket, the Copenhagen Jazz Festival revels in expansiveness.

Its 38th edition, which ran July 1–10, hit a new record of some 1,300 separate shows. The sheer density, however, is a bit deceptive: The core festival organization presents the major concerts (which included Pat Metheny's new quartet, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Gregory Porter and Burt Bacharach in the architecturally stunning DR Koncerthuset) while also providing an umbrella identity for many clubs and concert presenters.

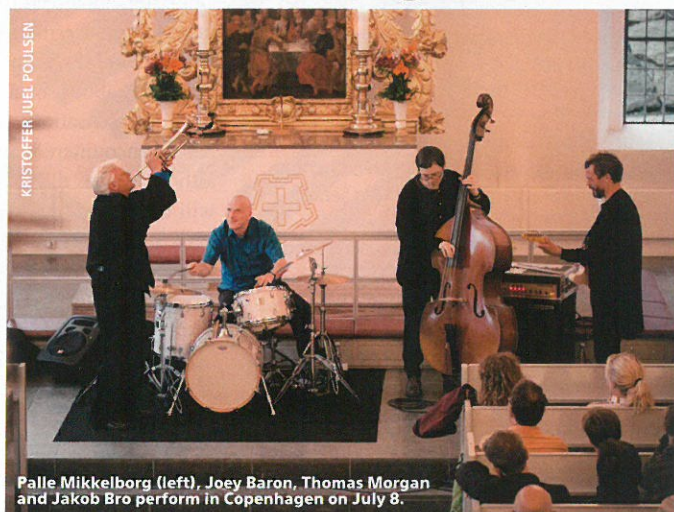
The highlight of my (admittedly modest) festival sampling came when two significant and internationally respected musical Danes from different generations—veteran trumpeter Palle Mikkelborg and young guitarist Jakob Bro—converged with drummer Joey Baron (channeling Paul Motian) and bassist Thomas Morgan. Tellingly, the quartet was preparing to record an album for ECM.

Between a poetic spin on "Nature Boy" and a sweet, folk-like encore, the concert covered a range of themes and variations—on tunes, and collective attitudes—with Bro waxing pictorial on electric guitar and Mikkelborg on his sparest, most ECM-ready behavior.

Not incidentally, this was a magical meeting of concert and context, taking place in the historic and acoustically friendly Kastelskirken church, in the remarkably preserved military fortress Kastellet, dating back to 1626 (the church was built in 1704). This was the first time the jazz festival was allowed to use the site, and the Mikkelborg-Bro convergence made for an especially poetic epiphany in this unique space.

By contrast, the humble funky-chic venue called 5e (also its address) in an industrial area of the city offered up its own site-sound chemistry the next night, when the inventive free improvisational saxophonist Laura Toxvaerd spun her special musical web. (The space is run by the enterprising indie label ILK, co-founded by guitarist Mark Solborg, who played in a variety of settings during the fest.)

Toxvaerd's set was a CD and book release gig for her latest graphic notation project, *18 Compositions*, here with drummer Ole Mofjell and pianist Christian Balvig, working resourcefully within the limitations and possibilities of a simple upright piano (including working the exposed



Palle Mikkelborg (left), Joey Baron, Thomas Morgan and Jakob Bro perform in Copenhagen on July 8.

strings with his feet).

Toxvaerd is a fascinating and sometimes theatrical player who can coax a big, bracing sound on alto, but who savors space and nuance, and the Albert Ayler-esque effect of funneling melodic motifs through an overtone-sculpting, flinty tone.

She returned the next day to the KoncertKirken venue, as part of a series of an international improviser's collective called The Community (curated by another free-minded alto saxophonist, Mia Dyberg), in sympathetic accord with Brooklyn-based drummer Devin Gray and Swedish guitarist Jon Lipscomb.

Supposedly from the "world music" aspect of the program, with generous jazz content attached, the uniquely mesmerizing Brazilian Egberto Gismonti performed a solo piano concert in the pristine theater space of the dazzling "Black Diamond" library addition overlooking the canal.

In his technically adroit and musically fluid hands, jazz, Brazilian folk elements, classical training and that special Gismonti X-factor came together in a beautiful way, leaving an indelible Copenhagen memory, circa 2016.

—Josef Woodard