

# Where The Wild Things Are – The Arild Andersen Trio live at Stirling Tolbooth 12.11.13

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*Jazz can be an intimidating environment for the uninitiated. Strange unfamiliar shapes tend to leap out at you from unexpected places, pull your hair and then disappear from whence they came. Certainly, they are mysterious and powerful, but they mean you no harm. **The Arild Andersen Trio** featuring **Paolo Vinaccia** (drums) and **Tommy Smith** (saxophone and Japanese flute) seemed mild-mannered enough, but it soon transpired that they have a touch of the wildness about them too.*

The upright bass is something of a beast itself but it is safe enough in the firm grasp of Andersen's strong grip. Nevertheless, the ECM veteran chose to open first with a tender touch, as if to placate the instrument and reassure the audience of the group's intentions. *Reperate* began with a slow-bow cetaceous song played over a self-sampled loop. I once heard the naturalist Gerald Durrell describe the humpback whale as "*An Underwater Cathedral*". I don't think he was much into jazz, but I think he would have been fascinated to hear his description paraphrased by Arild Andersen.



The piece built into a platform for Arild and Paolo that gave early notice of their free-form credentials. The exploration of uncharted shores excites jazz musicians in much the same way as a page turning-bedtime story animates a young mind. There is the frisson of adventure that contains “mild threat” and “some language”.

*Saturday* began with a simple riff that submitted itself to some writhing sax. Let the wild rumpus begin indeed. The music was full of squirming tension as if the players were chasing something that’s alive before capturing it, marking it and releasing it again. Paolo Vinaccia is one of the most remarkable drummer/percussionists you will ever see and hear. He has sharp, muscular reflexes and a latent ursine power. If you’ve ever had a bear swipe its paw at you (and I have) you will be surprised by its speed and accuracy. The bear missed me, but Vinaccia will get you every time.



There was some spare-sounding abstract blues on the minimalist and strangely named *Blussy*. That wasn't entirely unexpected given Andersen's history with Jan Garbarek, and it stretched a simple figure every which way like funny putty. The interplay between Vinaccia and Andersen is often astonishing. There are things done with his bass that shouldn't be possible (or allowed) while the drumming is never anything less than fascinating and intuitively dynamic.

Tommy Smith produced a Japanese flute for a lovely solo introduction to *Gjargenta*. During the interval he explained that he is self-taught on the instrument, but he is of course a fully accredited member of the brotherhood of breath. In many ways, it is like meeting the explorer on his return from his trepidations. You are keen to hear of his adventures and he is keen to show you what he's found. There were also some charming percussive touches by Vinaccia who sat quietly manipulating sticks and dusting the air with brushes. The number morphed into an urgent, undulating tune full of sinewy equine grace that set jazz to one side and became a sort of pure music of the kind made simply for its own sake.



The trio will soon release *Mira*, their new CD for ECM, and they chose to showcase the title track. It's a lovely melody but it also contains a lyrical bass intro based on another nice

song, Paul Simon's *Jonah*. The bass voice in its higher register was sublime and sonorous, and again provided its own counterpoint in a self-sampled loop. It featured some languid sax playing which is arguably Smith's metier, and there is no doubt that audiences warm to its seductive nature. Elsewhere in the set though he would begin with almost Getzian motion before quickly deciding that he wouldn't let us off quite so easily. He frequently opened up the throttle for the kind of unbridled soloing that burns rubber and takes hairpin bends at full speed.

There is a lot of the playful animal about this trio. Arild Andersen's meaty fingers are like courting spiders when encounter one another near the belly of the beast. Tommy Smith has a slightly unnerving stillness about him. He's the quiet one you have to watch for he may break out at any moment, and without warning. And every wee boy would undoubtedly take up drums if they thought they'd really be allowed to hit them like Paolo Vinaccia.



However, an encore of the Bacharach/David song-from-the-movie *Alfie* was given the tender respect that it duly deserves but so rarely receives. It is such an evocative little melody and it's often been engulfed by vocal histrionics or wrapped up in sixties *schtick*. In this setting, it was allowed to speak for itself and it made for a suitably subtle and gentle farewell in such an intimate venue as The Tolbooth. I slipped quietly away into the night of my very own memory of great music to find supper waiting for me and, like the music of the Arild Andersen Trio, it was still hot.

**The Curator**

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**Photos Gavin Mc Laughlin**