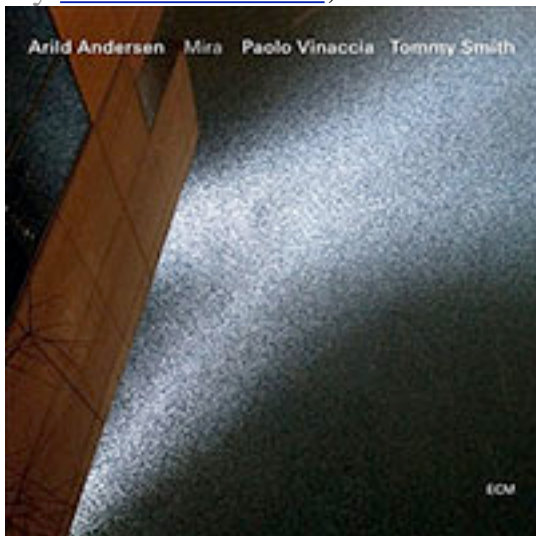


Arild Andersen / Paolo Vinaccia / Tommy Smith: Mira

By [JOHN KELMAN](#), Published: January 22, 2014



The debut of Arild Andersen's now longstanding trio with Scottish saxophonist [Tommy Smith](#) and Italian expat drummer [Paolo Vinaccia](#) on [Live at Belleville](#) (ECM, 2008) came as no small surprise, even to those familiar with the Norwegian bassist's work on the label—dating right back to its inception on [Jan Garbarek's](#) classic *Afric Pepperbird* (ECM, 1971), as well as with his own fine triptych of more accessible early albums, recently collected on [Green Into Blue—Early Quartets](#) (ECM, 2010).

Andersen has proven, over a career now spanning six decades, to be a bassist with a muscular tone and broad stylistic reach: from the freer terrain of *Tryptikon* (ECM, 1973), with Garbarek and Finnish drummer [Edward Vesala](#); through his fusion of jazz modality and the Norwegian folk tradition on *Sagn* (ECM, 1993); to the remarkably focused, spontaneous compositions of *Karta* (ECM, 2000), a trio date with German trumpeter [Markus Stockhausen](#) and French percussionist Patrice Héral augmented, for this session, by Andersen's partner in ECM's original Nordic "Big Five," guitarist [Terje Rypdal](#). Still, few could have expected the absolute heat that permeated *Live at Belleville*, an early document of a trio that, six years later, has further evolved both its language and chemistry.

Contrasting the greater energy of *Live at Belleville*, the studio-born *Mira* may find Andersen, Smith and Vinaccia in a generally more pensive mood, but that doesn't mean there aren't moments where the trio simmers with collective heat. Andersen's "Rossetti" may begin in near-pastoral terrain, but over its relatively brief five minutes, the traditional-tinged theme—doubled by Andersen and Smith, with the saxophonist demonstrating particularly fine altissimo control—opens up into a horn solo of unfettered freedom, occasional piercing screams and fiery phrases of grit and grease. Saxophone trios are a risky proposition; with no chordal instrument to provide a

harmonic context, the very freedom that represents can, in the wrong hands, become a liability. Not so here, as Andersen accompanies Smith with a firm hand, implying harmonic verticality even as he locks, tongue-in-groove, with the ever-unpredictable but always dependable Vinaccia before heading into his own solo, combining an unparalleled robust tone with unmistakably lyrical precepts.

The trio even gets loosely funky with Andersen's "Blussy." Opening with Vinaccia a cappella solo, the bassist soon enters with a visceral line that manages to blend gospel-tinged concerns with more oblique sophistication, challenging Smith to weave his solo through a more complex harmonic foundation, which he does with fiery aplomb, before Andersen takes over, all groove and chicken-necking attitude. Elsewhere, in this set of primarily Andersen compositions, positioned between Smith's meditative shakuhachi solo, "Kangiten" and "Raijin" — an improvised duo where Vinaccia's tribal pulse and some brief chordal washes support further shakuhachi ruminations — the bassist's rubato tone poem, "Le Saleya," finds Andersen and Smith traveling in separate orbits that often intersect but occasionally diverge into soft harmonies.

The intro to Andersen's title track revolves around a looped bass pattern, over which Andersen layers a dark melody steeped in centuries-old tradition, the piece coalescing further when Smith enters — moving effortlessly from low register to soft altissimo — bolstered by Vinaccia's textural leanings; but it's Andersen's resonant, singing tone and melodic ideation that defines this, Mira's most beautiful track.

A long overdue and equally impressive follow-up — albeit for different reasons — Mira presents this trio in a different light to its 2008 debut; still, it's no surprise that Andersen, Vinaccia and Smith prove as capable of darker intents as they do more energetic exchanges. Studio recordings inherently present alternative perspectives, and with Mira, the possibilities both delivered and alluded to on *Live at Belleville* now possess an evolved simpatico, greater attention to space and more expansive, expressive vernacular that, despite allowing so much time to pass since the trio's last recording, is the direct result of its working regularly in the six years between them.

Track Listing: Bygone; Blussy; Alfie; Rossetti; Reparate; Raijin; Le Saleya; Kangiten; Mira; Eight and More; Stevtone.

Personnel: Arild Andersen: double bass, electronics; Paolo Vinaccia: drums; Tommy Smith: tenor saxophone, shakuhachi flute.

Record Label: [ECM Records](#)

Style: [Modern Jazz](#)