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Vossajazz 2017

By **IAN PATTERSON**
April 23, 2017
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Stańko was showcasing music from his twelfth release for ECM, *December Avenue* (2017), with the latest incarnation of his New York ensemble. David Virelles was unavailable for this European tour, so the piano stool was filled by Alexi Tuomarila, who of course knows Stańko well, having recorded and toured *Dark Eyes* (ECM, 2009) with the trumpeter. With Reuben Rogers replacing Thomas Morgan, it meant that Gerald Cleaver was the only side-musican remaining from the *Wislawa* (ECM, 2013) New York Quartet.

The set began with the boppish "December Avenue," Stańko's lean phrasing punctuated by explosive trills, his spaces inviting more expansive replies, first from Tuomarila, alternating between free-flowing lines and chordal progressions, then Rogers, who made his bass strings sing over Cleaver's brushes encouragement. Collective fire gave way to the dark-hued, smouldering balladry that's second nature to Stańko. Few can match the veteran trumpeter's handling of a ballad, and although the set, like the current album, was tipped in favour of slower numbers, fiery interjections such as "Yankiels Lid," with Stańko leading from the front, provided collective thrills aplenty. It took a drum solo, however, for Cleaver to really show his

chops, a reflection perhaps on the through-composed weight of Stańko's current music. The aching melancholy of "Ballad for Bruno Schultz" closed the set on an introspective note. A short but sweet set from the Polish maestro of dusky balladry and post-bop tension.

Benedicte Maurseth & Jasser Haj Yiuseff

Norway's rich folk traditions have long held an important place in Vossajazz's program, fittingly so, given that the town is home to the Ole Bull Academy, the country's foremost centre of folk music studies, and through whose doors the majority of musicians in Norway's conservatoires pass at some point, for sojourns of varying length. Understanding the roots of Norwegian folk music also sheds light on so much of the contemporary jazz/experimental music being made in Norway, which often draws from folkloric traditions much older than jazz.

This year's concert in the Vanhskyrkja, Voss's thirteenth century church, featured one of Norway's most noted Hardanger fiddlers, Benedicte Maurseth, and Tunisian viola D'Amore player Jasser Haj Youssef. The duo first came together at a festival in Sardinia in 2014, where an improvised concert paved the way for an ongoing collaboration. To a packed church, the duo presented Norwegian folk tunes and Maurseth's own compositions, with the lines between seventeenth century and twenty first century tunes deliciously blurred.

Maurseth's haunting vocal incantation over a circling fiddle motif, tinged with Yousef's gently keening Oriental colors, made for a striking opening. Bucolic meditations with slow but steady heartbeats, unhurried improvisations on melodies of simple beauty, haunting laments and plaintive tone poems followed. A surprise came with Maurseth's heartfelt rendition of Scottish poet/songwriter Ivor Cutler's "Women of the World Take Over," Youssef's spare, plucked viola a constant rhythmic companion to Maurseth's lyrical vocal and fiddle lines. The finale saw fiddle and viola entwine in a hypnotic, country-ish waltz that gathered impetus down the home straight, drawing a line under what had been a quietly riveting journey.

Solveig Slettahjell, Knut Reiersrud, In The Country

The closing concert of Vossajazz 2017 saw a quintet featuring singer Solveig Slettahjell, veteran blues-rock guitarist Knut Reiersrud and contemporary jazz trio In The Country reprise the blues and gospel-tinged tunes from Trails of Souls (ACT Music, 2015), before an appreciative audience in the Vossasalen.

Taking well known tunes and slowing them down was the modus operandi, an approach Slettahjell has taken since the early 2000s with her aptly named Slow

Motion bands on albums like *Good Rain* (Curling Legs, 2006) and (Universal Music Norway, 2010).

The opener, James Anderson's "Borrowed Time," set the tone for much of the set, Slettahjell guiding this slow burner with gospel and soul gravitas in equal measure, while's tasteful solo was carved from the same idioms. The guitarist doubled on harmonica on a rather bland version of Bill Wither's "Grandma's Hands," drummer Pal Hausken and bassist Roger Arntzen keeping simple time, while leaving embellishments to pianist/keyboardist Morten Qvenild. Peter Gabriel's "Mercy Street" was a song of two halves, Slettahjell low-key, ghostly vocal giving way to more jazz-centric collective improvisation, led by Qvenild. A haunting vocal-guitar duet of the early twentieth century gospel tune "His Eye Is on the Sparrow"—made famous by Mahalia Jackson—bled into a stirring arrangement of the traditional gospel-blues "Soul of a Man."

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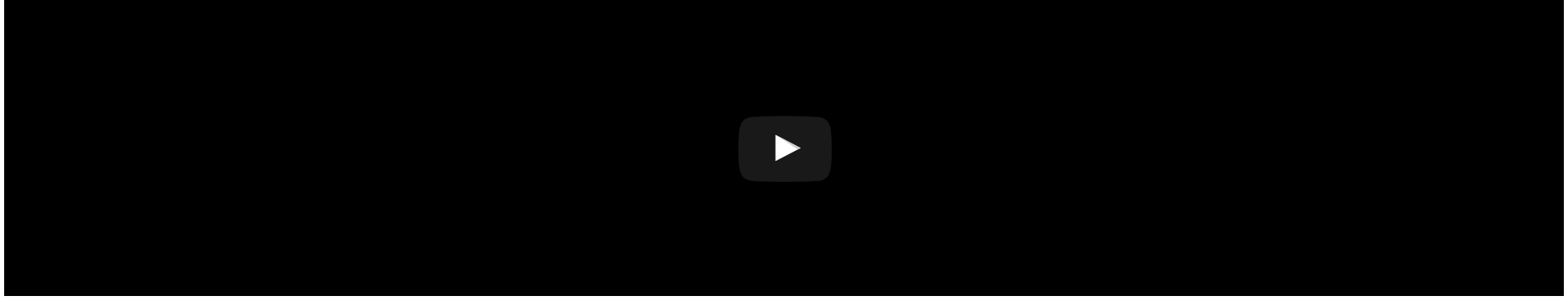

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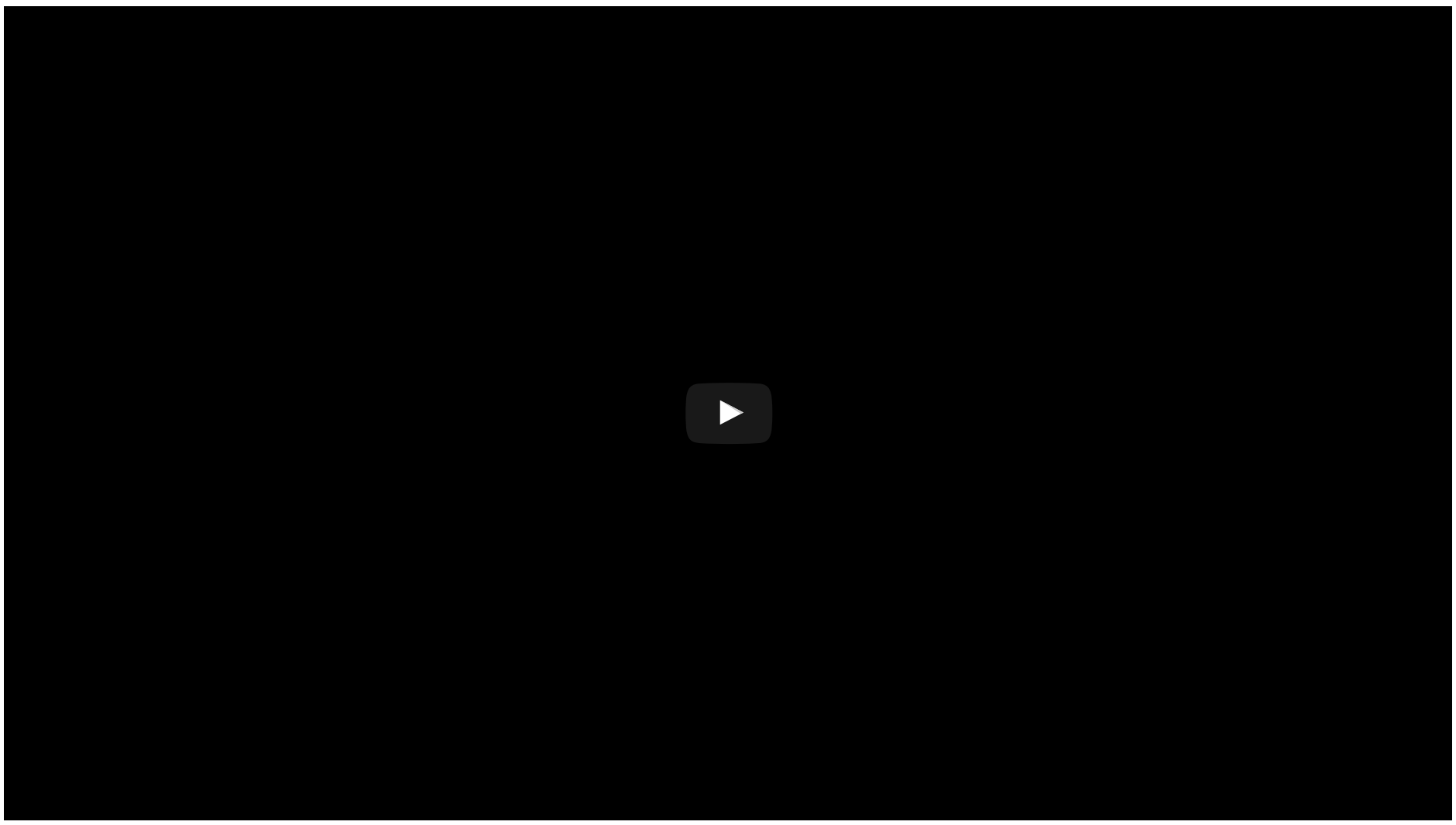

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JUN 30 Fri	Hot Licks @ Six, Sounds & Tastes Of The Big Easy Suicide Six Lodge South Pomfret, VT	9:00 pm $35
JUN 30 Fri	Interplay Jazz & Arts Instrumental Jazz & Vocal Jazz Workshp/Camp Woodstock Elementary School Woodstock, VT	9:00 am $1400
JUL 1 Sat	Interplay Jazz & Arts Instrumental Jazz & Vocal Jazz Workshp/Camp Woodstock Elementary School Woodstock, VT	9:00 am $1400
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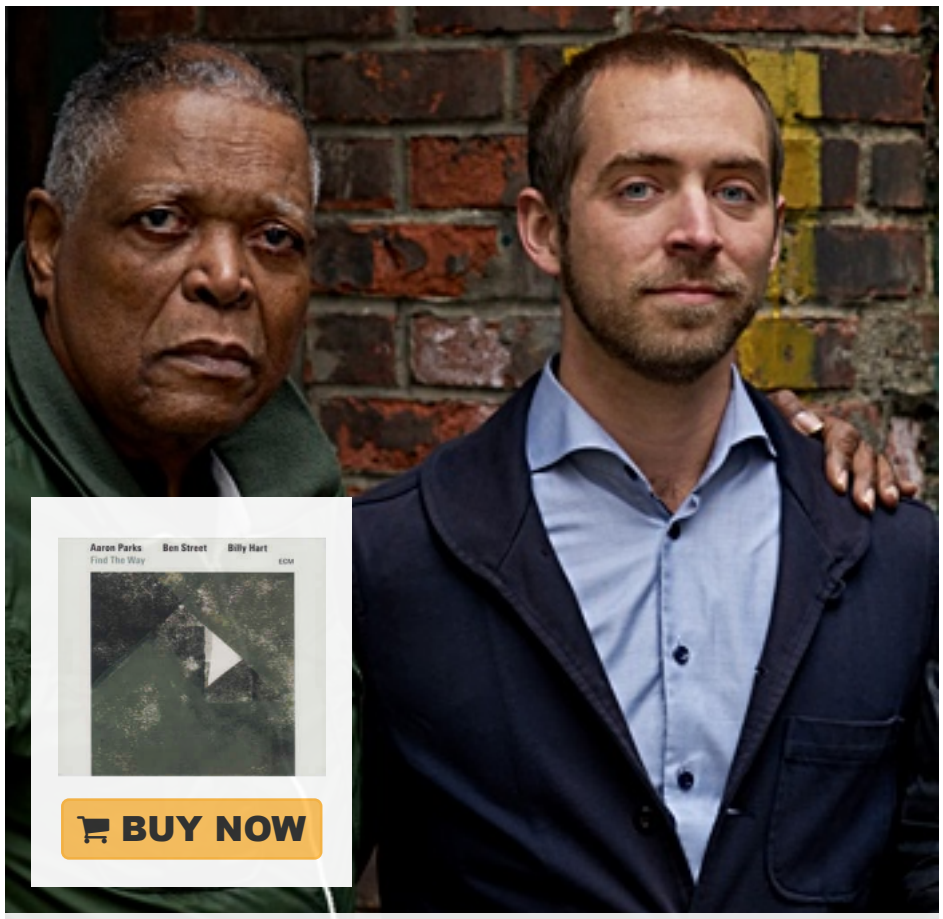

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