

Mathias Eick When we leave

Mathias Eick: trumpet, keyboard, voice; **Håkon Aase:** violin, percussion; **Andreas Ulvo:** piano; **Audun Erlien:** bass; **Torstein Lofthus:** drums; **Helge Andreas Norbakken:** drums, percussion; **Stian Carstensen:** pedal steel guitar

ECM 2660

CD: 6024 3856308 1

Release: September 24, 2021

Mathias Eick is among the most immediately recognizable soloists to have emerged from the Norwegian jazz scene, and his wistful trumpet sound and strongly melodic compositions have met with a positive response around the world. When his ECM leader debut *The Door* was issued in 2008, US magazine *JazzTimes* described the trumpeter's tone as "plaintive and spare," while emphasizing that, "like all good bandleaders, his focus is on the interaction of his musicians. The contrast of his restraint and the energy around him constitutes the album's driving tension."

Over the years, Eick has focused and strengthened his approach on both fronts, as soloist and ensemble leader, with concepts for the band adjusted to meet the needs of each project, as well as what *The Guardian* has described as "a cinematic interest in musical storytelling." *Skala* (recorded 2009 and 2010), for instance, introduced the two-drummer format, latterly a hallmark of much of Eick's work. *Midwest* (2014), a meditation on the voyage of Norwegian music to North America, brought violin into the ensemble sound along with colours and textures from folk music. *Ravensburg* (2017) turned the spotlight on Eick's own biography, looking, with affection, at his Norwegian and South German family roots. The full group heard on *Ravensburg* returns for *When we leave*, augmented by Stian Carstensen's pedal steel guitar – last heard in an Eick context on *The Door* - and the saga continues.

Mathias Eick sees *When we leave* as "a natural continuation of *Ravensburg*, almost a *Ravensburg 2*. More of everything." Where its predecessor drew portraits of friends and family and sketched some personal interactions, the new album follows its protagonists through a troubled year. A sense of narrative could be drawn from the interplay of titles and musical atmosphere: "The songs and titles on *When we leave* play upon each other, draw inspiration from each other."

Meanwhile the Eick band continues to grow in confidence and range. Violinist Håkon Aase, increasingly recognized as one of the outstanding improvisers of his generation (his ECM credits also include two albums with Thomas Strønen's Time Is A Blind Guide ensemble), augments the bandleader's solos with lines that draw upon folk traditions as well as jazz. There is mystery, too, in the way that the violin leans into the delicate swell of Stian Carstensen's pedal steel. Eick: "Stian's carpet of harmonies adds a feeling of depth - and the combination with the violin creates a special sound. I'm always searching for sounds that are unique and stand out of time."

Powerful drummer Torstein Lofthus has played in contexts from pop to free jazz (including

sessions with US saxophonist Sonny Simmons) and is known also for his contributions to exploratory rock group Elephant9. When *Ravensburg* was released, Eick explained his decision to add a second drummer: “I wasn’t trying to make the drumming bigger but rather more three-dimensional. What’s going on in the area of rhythm is very much like what’s happening between Håkon and myself, where a similar idea of shadowing and call and response is taking place.” Co-drummer Helge Andreas Norbakken digs into the textures of the music, creatively detailing the rhythm and working freely with sound as he has on ECM recordings from the Jon Balke/Amina Alaoui project *Siwan* to the “percussion think-tank” Batagraf or Jon Hassell’s *Last Night The Moon...*, as well as Mathias Eick’s *Midwest*.

Andreas Ulvo, a pianist of lyrical gifts, draws inspiration from classical music, in his own projects juxtaposing Satie and Rodrigo with free playing, and working across a broad range of idioms. Latterly he has been collaborating with Swiss harpist Giovana Pessi in a new project: an ECM release is in preparation. In parallel with his musical activities he is also a photographer, and has contributed images to albums by Dans les arbres and Giovanna Pessi/Susanna Wallumrød, among others.

Bassist Audun Erlien’s particular groove, informed by years of playing soul and funk music, has been part of the Eick band sound since *The Door*. Erlien can also be heard with Nils Petter Molvaer on *Solid Ether*.

Mathias Eick was born into a musical family in Norway in 1979 and took up the piano at the age of five, followed by trumpet a year later. A multi-instrumentalist, he also plays vibraphone, double bass, guitar and keyboards, although the trumpet was always “the instrument closest to my heart” as he once put it. He has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the International Jazz Festival Organization’s “International Jazz Talent” prize, the Statoil Scholarship and the DNB Prize.

When we leave was recorded at Oslo’s Rainbow Studio in August 2020. It was produced by Manfred Eicher. The Eick band presents music from the album in concert at Nasjonal Jazzscene Victoria, Oslo (September 17), Collage Festival, Copenhagen (October 2), Jazzfest, Brno, Czech Republic (November 1), and Schloß Elmau, Krün, Germany (November 20).