

Jan Harbeck Quartet

THE SOUND THE RHYTHM

Stunt Records

Released on CD, LP, and online



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The charismatic tenor saxophonist and composer Jan Harbeck has previously released four albums in his own name on Stunt Records. He's won a Danish Music Award, as well as having received both the Bent Jædig and Ben Webster Prizes. Harbeck and his steady band of many years have long been an important presence on most of Denmark's jazz stages, also enjoying great success around Europe. Over the last decade, the band's releases have been among the absolute best-selling Danish instrumental jazz records. In addition to his own quartet, Jan Harbeck plays with orchestras including the Tivoli Big Band, Niels Jørgen Steen's Monday Night Big Band, The Orchestra, and in drummer Snorre Kirk's band.

Harbeck's expressive, outgoing playing continues in the great Swing tradition. Completely original and extremely stylish, he's a musician who digs deep and understands the importance of presence. Few others are able to blow so much soul into a jazz ballad. As Thomas Michelsen wrote in Politiken, "we once had Ben Webster to awaken the soul. Today we have Jan Harbeck!" It's actually strange that the 43-year-old tenor saxophonist didn't release a tribute to "Big Ben" before now – the legend lived in Copenhagen for a number of years, is buried there, and continues to inspire – but here it comes.

Jan Harbeck cherishes the sound. Standing in front of a band on stage or in the studio, with his eyes closed and his left pointed-toe dress shoe all the way forward, he listens to the sound of his tenor saxophone and the group's sound as a whole. "When I was young, I concentrated on what I was playing; now the music comes by itself; the sound and tone are the essence for me. It needs to be full-bodied and the feeling has to be there. Ben Webster was my first inspiration, and then Paul Gonsalves. It's the tradition I love. It's about playing from the heart. It's a sound, a language," Harbeck says.

Together, Henrik Gunde and Jan Harbeck received the prestigious Ben Webster Prize in 2018, and the repertoire for the con-

cert at the award presentation ceremony was largely the inspiration for putting the program together on this album. There are four compositions by Webster - relatively unknown, but full of blues and swing. "Really nice tunes," says Harbeck, "it's about respecting the strong melody line and building your own story on top." There's a Strayhorn song, Johnny Come Lately, and the rest are Harbeck's own original offerings.

The two days in the big studio, without the use of sound screens or headphones, also became the scene of an unexpected surprise – something which often gives an extra kick to a recording session. In this case... two drummers. Anders Holm recorded the first day, and when Morten Ærø arrived to set up his drums for the next day, he joined in on two songs, spreading new musical colours through the studio. "It was so great to have the two drummers together – they know each other, but hadn't played together before, and the respect and enthusiasm they showed one another was so inspiring. Just check out their lovely battle on Shorty Gull – it was the first take... and the last sound is Morten, who drops his sticks... finished(!)," says Harbeck.

Eske Nørlykke's understated, steady bass figures are important to Harbeck. "He's on the beat and gives us plenty of room... no long tones that get in the way of the rest of the band's sound. No one in the world plays like Eske. And both drummers understand his ideas," the bandleader explains. Eight of the songs were completed the first day. On the second day, Zum (short for alto saxophonist Jan zum Vohrde) was a guest on the Webster/Hodges duet I'd Be There. Zum has worked with Harbeck in several big bands through the years. "The wonderful Webster ballad we play is different from the other tunes, but I think it brings a special colour and quality to the harmonies between alto and tenor. Zum is a master."

"We love the generosity in the music and I hope that the lush, atmospheric, and intimate space is transcended from the record," says Jan Harbeck.

Jan Harbeck (tenor sax), Henrik Gunde (piano), Eske Nørrelykke (bass), Anders Holm, Morten Ærø (drums) + Jan zum Vohrde (alto sax).

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