

Trygve Seim, Frode Haltli**Our Time****Trygve Seim:** soprano and tenor saxophones; **Frode Haltli:** accordion

ECM 2813

CD 6024 655 8599 5

Release: 30 Aug 2024

On *Our Time* saxophonist Trygve Seim and accordionist Frode Haltli rekindle their longstanding partnership (the duo will have played together a quarter century in 2025) in a programme of thought-provoking improvised and composed material, the Ukrainian lullaby “Oy Khodyt’ Son, Kolo Vikon” and North-Indian traditional “Shyama Sundara Madena Mohana”, following up their 2008 duo album *Yeraz* with a freshly invigorated sense of wonder and creativity. The Norwegians’ recorded collaboration goes back to Trygve’s *The Source And Different Cikadas* ensemble from 2002 and has since spawned many a fruitful venture, yet in this intimate setting, increased freedom and dynamic possibilities give rise to even more playful, inventive but also fragile playing. And, as *Downbeat* magazine commented on their last joint effort, here even more “the improvisations unfold with exquisite care, in lines steeped in melancholic beauty and sometimes glimmering hope.”

“In a way this recording reflects the fact that in concerts we play as much freely improvised as composed music,” says Frode. “And we also approach the written music, or traditionals, with a lot of liberty – oftentimes we’ll just use fragments of known material and go from there. Since we’re mainly improvising, we can’t know exactly where we might end up, so the respective compositions could just as well be considered little triggers for improvisation.” Trygve – confirmingly – notes, “I have the impression that the freedom and joy this kind of interplay allows is as dear to Frode as it is to me.”

One such fragmented instance can be glimpsed on the seventh piece, though in reverse, with the composed part serving as the performance’s tail. Trygve and Frode, improvising fluidly from scratch, enter in a textural conversation that encompasses the piercing, sometimes shrill extremes of their instruments before segueing into a re-envisioned interpretation of Stravinsky’s *Les Cinq Doigts No. 5*, providing the coda for their exploration. The same sequence of events is true for the second track on the album, where a quietly brooding, soft-spoken improvisation between the two develops into the Trygve original “Fanfare”. A reimagined “Fanfare”-counterpart returns for the sixth cut – another two-split improvisation/composition. This juxtaposition of the obliquely avant-garde and the lyrically tuneful is a recurring trait throughout *Our Time*.

Recorded in 2023 at the Himmelfahrtskirche in Munich, where several previous recordings for ECM were made (e.g. albums with Toshio Hosokawa, Valentin Silvestrov, Gidon Kremer as well as an Anja Lechner solo programme, to be released in late 2024), striking acoustics frame the session in a distinct atmosphere, where the instruments’ respective properties – from the most sustained tenor saxophone note to the quietest clicking of the accordion’s buttons – come to the fore. “Recording in this specific church of course gave something special to the music,” says the duo. “It’s not unusual for us to play in different kinds of spaces, as we often tour and adjust to different rooms, small and big. However what is unusual, is to work with a producer, who is as influential a presence during the session as Manfred Eicher. He really helped us record something we could not have recorded elsewhere or otherwise.”

“Pure beauty is the common tone of Trygve Seim and Frode Haltli. There is something folk-song-like in this music – intersections where secular and sacred music meet to dance,” is how the German weekly paper *Die Zeit* has described the duo’s common enterprise, and the traditional Ukrainian lullaby “Oy Khodyt’ Son, Kolo Vikon” connects with that folkloric thread seamlessly. The song’s arresting melody is phrased with great care on soprano saxophone, as the accordion tiptoes around the horn’s woeful lines. “The Lullaby was introduced to me by the British harp player Ruth Potter,” says

Trygve. “I adore this beautiful and simple melody as well as the way Ruth arranged it. After playing it in concert with her I started to include that lullaby in every concert I did, including with Frode.” The Ukrainian piece is paired with another traditional in the North-Indian “Shyama Sundara Madena Mohana”, to which Trygve was introduced by British sarangi scholar Nicolas Magriel. Microtonalities come to play here, both in the duo’s freely improvised passages and in the Hindu chant’s forward-pushing theme.

Elsewhere Frode and Trygve explore melodic inventions of their own designs. “Du, mi tid”, from the pen of Frode, is an impassioned invocation that opens the album, while “Arabian Tango” recalls the dancing element suggested above. Concluding the record is Trygve’s “Elegi” – a six-minute long crescendo that features both the duo’s quietest and most fiery expressive playing on *Our Time*.

The album was produced by Manfred Eicher.

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Trygve and Frode first started playing together in 2000, when the accordionist joined Seim’s large ensemble just prior to the release of the award-winning album *Different Rivers*. They have since collaborated on a number of recordings, including *The Source And Different Cikadas* (2002), *Sangam* (2004), Trygve’s quartet setting of Jalaluddin Rumi’s poems on *Rumi Songs* (2016), as well as their duo album *Yeraz* (2008). They have also appeared individually on a number of other recordings for the label.

Frode released his leader debut for ECM in 2002 with *Looking On Darkness* – a unique collection of compositions by Nordic composers in which the accordionist is paired with a string quartet. His second leader date followed with 2007’s *Passing Images*. A chamber orchestra joined Haltli for his album *Air* from 2016, containing performances of music written for him by Danish composers Bent Sørensen and Hans Abrahamsen (“a historic-psychological polyphony of the past, the present, the incidental or the firmly focussed” – *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*)

Trygve Seim’s history with ECM includes over two dozen recordings at this point, and already his debut *Different Rivers* from 2000 won the Preis Der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik award. He subsequently appeared recurrently on albums by Christian Wallumrød, Sinikka Langeland and with Iro Harlaa on *Northbound* (2005), *Vespers* (2011) and *Ante Lucem* (2016). Seim also recorded as part of *The Source* (2006), with his *Sangam* ensemble (2004), alongside the Marcin Wasilewski Trio on Jacob Young’s *Forever Young* (2014), with Arild Andersen, Mats Eilertsen and on Manu Katché’s *Playground* (2007). Additional albums include his quartet recording *Helsinki Songs* (2018) and *Purcor* (2010) in duo with keyboardist Andreas Utnem.