

## Jakob Bro *Unlimited Light*

Performing with his trio at a festival several years ago, Jakob Bro was surprised when an audience member approached the stage, his eyes on the Danish guitarist's white Telecaster.

"This guy who I didn't know asked to borrow my guitar," the 33-year-old, Copenhagen-based musician recalls. "He wanted to play with the group. So I said, 'Sure,' and handed him my guitar. He played a solo—and that was Kurt Rosenwinkel. He said afterwards, 'I never take a guitar out of somebody's hand and play a solo. But you guys sounded so good I had to join you.' Kurt asked me to come to New York, and he said he would hang out with me anytime."

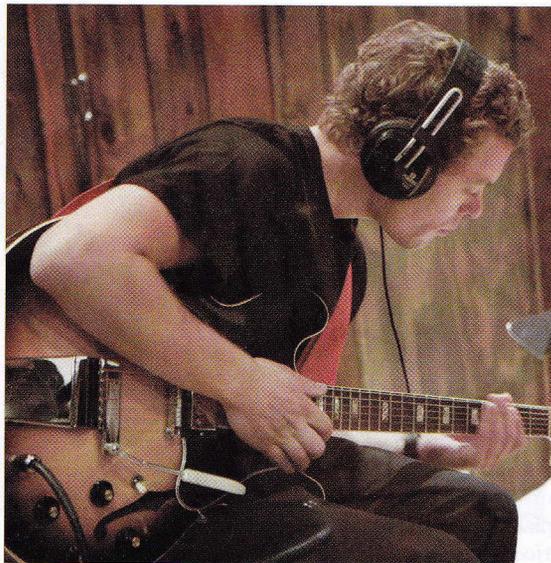
Since that invitation in 1998, the quiet guitarist with the luminous sound has forged many musical friendships, both in the United States and abroad. A member of Paul Motian's defunct Electric BeBop Band and a current member of trumpeter Tomasz Stanko's quartet, Bro seemingly brings the existentialist yearnings of his homeland to original material that qualifies as jazz—and something else.

Opening for Gretchen Parlato this July at Skuespilhuset hall during the Copenhagen Jazz Festival, Bro and his flexible trio—accompanied by wild-eyed tenor player Bill McHenry—played variations on a gleaming whisper. Bro guided the group through at-times ethereal, at-times shimmering and even spectral music (from two forthcoming albums) that floated, slowly grew in power and intensity like a sunrise, then dissipated like leaves settling after a rustle of wind.

"Bill adds a lot of contrast to these songs," Bro says, referring to the saxophonist. "He makes the simple melodies exciting. But it's also nerve-wracking—you never really know what Bill does."

Like many players on the Danish jazz scene, Bro's interest in classical, rock and jazz is reflected in his growing catalog of seven albums. His compositions are heavily influenced by the works of Motian and Stanko.

"I've listened to Paul's music more than Tomasz's," he says. "But I am inspired by Tomasz's way of leading a band. At first with Tomasz, it felt like I was from another planet; I didn't know how to fit in with a grand piano and drums and bass. That gig helped me to make a soloistic statement. With Motian's band, I was so overwhelmed playing with Chris Cheek and Mark



Turner. That was a study in learning how to blend in."

Bro is less concerned with guitar solos than group conceptions, evident in his two latest Loveland Records releases: *Balladeering* (with Motian, Lee Konitz, Bill Frisell and Ben Street) and *Sidetracked*, where layer upon layer of un-guitar-like sounds create an acoustic/electronic texture web. Bro's group performed selections from these two albums at the Copenhagen festival; a DVD, *Weightless*, reveals the recording process behind *Balladeering*.

"*Balladeering* is more like sketches," Bro explains. "I was very aware of not writing too much stuff. I wanted open sketches to create enough room for everyone to play. Everything was like I dreamed it should be. *Sidetracked* had many tracks on the computer, but I didn't want to do an electronic record. I wanted it to be alive, somehow. That was the challenge, because everything was so totally organized. I am doing a similar project now."

Though quiet in nature, Bro is ambitious. He's currently working on two projects: one, a followup to *Balladeering* with a similar lineup; the other, a broad-ranging, large-scale work involving Kenny Wheeler, Roswell Rudd, Paul Bley, Thomas Morgan, Jeff Ballard and a boys choir.

"Denmark is a small scene," Bro explains. "We have opportunities; there's no limit to what you can do. But the musicianship is different than in the States. When I studied at Berklee in '96, there were so many people who could play stuff that overwhelmed me. I would never be able to do those things. But in terms of making music, we've found ways of expressing ourselves in a slightly different way. And we have the history of great musicians living in Denmark."

—Ken Micallef

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