

# ***KIND OF JAZZ***

*Saturday, 07 October 2023*

## **Daniel Karlsson Trio - Sorry Boss**

Written by Rob Mallows

**Authors Ranking:**  **Classic**

Seven albums in, Swedish trio keeps on delivering magical jazz.

I spoke with keyboardist **Daniel Karlsson** at Ronnie Scott's earlier this year when he was playing keyboards in the Magnus Öström Band and asked him about plans for a new trio album. To paraphrase, he wanted to build on their established sound but take more risks and introduce new elements to their playing.

With his seventh album - *Sorry Boss* - Daniel Karlsson has been true to his word.

The benefits of the tight musical bond he's developed with bassist **Christian Spering** and drummer **Fredrik Rundqvist** over many long Swedish winter evenings in his home studio on the small island of Runmarö in the Stockholm archipelago are richly displayed on this album which is probably their strongest output since 2014's *Fusion for Fish*.

The Daniel Karlsson Trio is a band that makes a virtue out of the limitation of the traditional jazz piano format: far from being constricted by the limited tonal palate on offer, their expansive playing and judicious use of synth effects insinuate a bigger sound without losing sight of the underlying simplicity - and beauty - of piano, bass and drums.

In downtime between composing and touring, Karlsson drives a water bus which connects many of the small islands that make up Stockholm, and first track *Bus Stop Story* offers speed, comfort and frequent stops and starts. Groove-filled, staccato chords crash in and out in between Spering's simple bass licks; the track opens up as Karlsson's solo - embellished with echo - evolves into eery effects and mild distortion over bowed strings, like a crash from a particularly good high.

The title track *Sorry Boss* throws up a rippling opening over which a descending trill darts between fulsome chords before the track settles down, then stops, and restarts again. The joy here is the background keyboard sounds and the introduction of a Rhodes piano; this track explore a multitude of textures via juddering chord changes underpinned by brilliantly effective drums fills from Rundqvist, before Spering's bass just lets rip. The track showcases Karlsson's capacity to explore all sorts of musical waters, and circumnavigate unexplored islands, without ever losing sight of land.

*Last Minute* is slower paced with shuffling drums and a simple bassline that both serve the melody well. The engineer has captured fantastically the 'close' studio sound of what is, in effect, Karlsson's front room. It's a laid-back tune, with few keyboard histrionics, just bar after bar of soothing chords and playful departures. Short at only 2:43, it serves as something of a musical aperitif.

*Heaven or Elsewhere* starts with an odd time-signature riff, Spering's bass high up on the fretboard playing off Karlsson. There is evidence of mild effects on parts of the track that expand the piano sound, as well as synth pads that wouldn't sound out of place on a documentary about the stars. Karlsson's brilliant left-field chord choices help the tune to progress in fits and starts as he unpacks the central melody and lets rip with some heavenly runs up and down the keyboard.

*Happy Hour* begins with a crashing chord and upbeat motif before dropping into a deliciously dirty groove, with Rundkvist's high-hat playing exuberant and Spering's low tones dense in the mix. It provides an exultant tone worthy of the title before departing mid-track into a dreamlike sequence scored by eighth notes from Spering, before Karlsson's solo wrings every ounce of emotion from the underlying harmony. The key to this track is the periodic decoration of synth sounds that augment the trio's established sound. The denouement is one of the funkier I've listened to for a long while, and it's a disappointment when it ends.

*Confidential Document* opens with more held chords hinting at Nordic melancholy as the sustain decays and the tune unfurls like a bud to reveal underlying colour. Karlsson plays alone, every note captured brilliantly; another short track, it has the temporary beauty of a spring meadow, rich in colour but with the sadness associated with ephemeral beauty. A reminder - if it were needed - that Karlsson can conjure many moods at will.

*Pigeons on the Wire* starts with Spering's bass and Karlsson's left hand exploring the tune like dogs in a forest, darting here and there in search of the melody, all the while Rundkvist's symbols generate a taut atmosphere until he gets out the brushes and the track smooths out. Karlsson takes the melody on a ramble while Spering's bass thumps and sings, sometimes mournfully, sometimes joyfully.

*Clock Out* has a curvy, odd-metered and tumbling opening over gorgeously plump chords; it offers a nod to the jazz of the past but remains firmly in the present. Spering's solo jumps out of the speakers as Karlsson and Rundkvist back him to the hilt with tight playing. Midway through the track tempers, along with Spering's bass, as Karlsson's brings the tune to a slow resolve over eery chords - with effects and echo - that make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up straight. The track fades into nothingness like a candle flame burning to nothing, giving the album a delicate finish.

And like a candle flame, this album explores numerous zones of colour and musical temperature in a way that simply entrances.

It is a mature album, and one can detect evolutionary departures from 2019's *Fuse Number Eleven*. Nevertheless, it retains the distinct Trio sound that's developed over the last decade and which - if there were any justice in this world - would be heard and enjoyed by a much wider audience.

Karlsson recently took up a new role as visiting Professor of Piano at the Musikhögskolan in Stockholm. If you enjoy Nordic jazz then you would do well to keep an eye out for his students over the next decade - they're going to be learning from a master!