



*Winner of Parliamentary Jazz Award for Best Media, 2019*

*October 26, 2023*

## Album Review

### **Daniel Karlsson Trio, Sorry Boss**

(Bark At Your Owner BAYOHOWL11)

**Authors Ranking:** ★★★★★ Classic

**Daniel Karlsson – piano, keyboards, Christian Spering bass, Fredrik Rundqvist drums, percussion**



Strong melodies, infectious and powerful grooves, an effective mix of acoustic and electronic sounds and a sense of humour that is reflected both in the tune titles and in the playing itself.

“Sorry Boss” is the new album release from this Swedish trio led by pianist and composer Daniel Karlsson. It follows six previous album releases and the recent EP “Climbing the Ladder”.

I first heard Karlsson’s playing when he was a member of the Swedish band Oddjob, a group once signed to the prestigious German label ACT for whom they released the albums “Sumo” (2008) and “Clint” (2010), both of which are reviewed elsewhere on this site. In 2010 I enjoyed a sold out

performance by Oddjob, featuring Karlsson, at London's Vortex Jazz Club as part of that year's London Jazz Festival.

Karlsson is also been a member of the quartet led by former E.S.T. drummer Magnus Ostrom and appeared on Ostrom's excellent 2016 album "Parachute". Review here;  
<http://www.thejazzmann.com/reviews/review/magnus-ostrom-parachute/>

Besides his work with Oddjob and the Ostrom band Karlsson has also collaborated with trombonist Nils Landgren and with vocalists Rigmor Gustafsson and Viktoria Tolstoy, all artists associated with the ACT label. He has also worked with the German born trumpeter / vocalist Til Bronner.

Since 2013 Karlsson has led his own trio, recording for the Swedish label Brus & Knaster. The trio's albums have attracted a compelling amount of critical acclaim and resulted in a number of awards in their home country. They have also enjoyed regular airplay in Italy, Germany, the UK and Ireland, accruing a dedicated following in all of these countries.

In late 2019 the trio visited the UK and toured with the support of the West Midlands Jazz Network. Their itinerary even included a visit to my home city of Hereford. Unfortunately that gig was rather sparsely attended, in part due to local flooding problems at that time, but the performance was excellent and I was able to speak to Daniel and his colleagues afterwards.

Daniel was kind enough to provide me with a copy of the trio's then latest album "Fuse Number Eleven", from which the majority of the material at Hereford had been sourced, for review purposes. My favourable review of that recording can be found here;  
<https://www.thejazzmann.com/reviews/review/daniel-karlsson-trio-fuse-number-eleven>

The Karlsson Trio returned to the UK in 2022 and I was able to enjoy another live performance from the group, this time at Kidderminster Jazz Club. Much of the material was sourced from the then unreleased "Climbing the Ladder" EP, augmented by highlights from the trio's distinguished back catalogue. My review of The Kidderminster show can be found here;  
<https://www.thejazzmann.com/reviews/review/daniel-karlsson-trio-kidderminster-jazz-club-corn-exchange-room-town-hall-kidderminster-worcs-06-10-2022>

"Sorry Boss" represents DKT's first album for Howling Jazz!, a division of the Swedish record label and publisher Bark At Your Owner. It was recorded at Karlsson's home studio on the Swedish island of Runmaro in the Baltic Sea.

The song titles are sourced from the minutiae of everyday life, following a precedent set on the "Climbing the Ladder" EP. The album packaging features photographs of the trio dressed as bored office workers.

Although Karlsson is credited with 'piano' the judicious use of electronics has always played a substantial role in the DKT sound. This album is no exception and Karlsson is also featured on a number of electric keyboards throughout the album. The two live shows that I have witnessed have also featured Spering and Rundqvist deploying electronic effects.

All of the pieces on the new album are written by Karlsson and events get under way with "Bus Stop Story" (all the titles are in English), which features an odd meter groove, powered by Spering's monstrous bass and Rundqvist's drums, with the latter's cymbals periodically mimicking the sound of a bus conductor's bell. The leader's piano brings a blues sensibility to the music, just one of the many diverse influences that inform the trio's sound. The piece concludes with a quieter, dream like

sequence featuring the sounds of acoustic piano, cymbal scrapes and a judicious soupçon of electronica.

Rippling piano arpeggios introduce the title track, with Rundqvist and Spering later combining to create an E.S.T. like groove. Karlsson is still a member of Magnus Ostrom's band, so this influence is perhaps not so surprising. On this track the E.S.T. influence is combined with that of minimalism in a work that skilfully combines groove with texture as the rhythm team provide a powerful momentum that is supplemented by Karlsson's soloing on a mix of acoustic and electric keyboards. Skilfully crafted this is music that makes an instant impact, but which repays repeated listening.

The relatively brief "Last Minute" represents something of a pause for breath, a wholly acoustic piece featuring the leader's piano melodies, Rundqvist's succinct drum commentary and Spering's anchoring bass. Given that the album seems to be based on the concept of 'a day in the office', perhaps this piece represents 'a musical coffee break'.

Still comparatively laid back "Heaven or Elsewhere" combines unusual time signatures with the trio's characteristic mix of acoustic and electric sounds. Karlsson's talent as a composer and arranger shines throughout this recording, his astute blending of rhythm and melody, combined with colour and texture, inexorably drawing in the listener. Here the momentum of the piece continues to gather throughout the performance, carrying the listener in its wake.

The playful "Happy Hour" adds a dash of cerebral funk to the proceedings, and maybe something of the trio's acknowledged soul influence too. Again there's a mix of infectious bass and drum grooves allied to acoustic and electric keyboard sounds, including the effective use of synthesiser. There's another quieter, 'dream sequence' mid tune, prior to an exuberant acoustic piano solo, driven by Rundqvist's crisp drumming. The electronic elements then return prior to the funky pay off.

The following "Confidential Document" offers a complete contrast in terms of both mood and style. It's a brooding solo acoustic piano piece that makes effective use of space and although brief, at a little over two minutes, it possesses a chilly, unmistakably Nordic, beauty.

Unaccompanied piano also introduces "Pigeons on the Wire", with the leader soon joined by Rundqvist's deft cymbal embellishments, and then by Spering's bass. The latter's powerful plucking threatens to subvert the reflective mood, before the piece evolves into an elegant ballad paced by the leader's piano and Rundqvist's brushed drums. Spering is eventually given his head as the piece progresses, his playing now more lyrical and melodic.

Appropriately the album closes with "Clocking Out", as the trio up the energy levels once more. Karlsson's teasing acoustic piano motif points the way home as he and Spering's powerful bass share the lead, urged along by the busy ticking of Rundqvist's drums. Karlsson takes the first solo on acoustic piano, eventually followed by Spering on double bass, the latter a real virtuoso offering. There's a gradual reduction in terms of pace and energy as the music takes a more impressionistic turn, with subtle electronics being introduced as the music gently and atmospherically fades away, with Karlsson again demonstrating his mastery of sound, narrative and dynamics.

Since its release in early October 2023 "Sorry Boss" has attracted a compelling amount of critical acclaim, and rightly so. In many respects Karlsson is the natural heir to Esbjorn Svensson, although, despite the Ostrom connection, he hasn't been able to reach out to such a large constituency. On the evidence of this recording there's no reason why he shouldn't. This is music

that is readily accessible to adventurous jazz and rock listeners and which possesses many of the musical characteristics that made E.S.T. so popular – strong melodies, infectious and powerful grooves, an effective mix of acoustic and electronic sounds and a sense of humour that is reflected both in the tune titles and in the playing itself. “Sorry Boss” is distinguished by intelligent writing and superb playing and despite the comparisons DKT really do have a sound that is very much their own. This is one of the most enjoyable ‘piano trio’ albums I’ve heard in a long time and I hope that the band are able to return to the UK again soon.

In the meantime they have a number of European dates scheduled as follows;

SAT 28 OCT 2023, Duc des Lombards, Paris FR

THU 23 NOV 2023, Jazz Club, Hannover DE

FRI 24 NOV 2023, Jazztone, Lörrach DE

SAT 25 NOV 2023, Delmenhorst jJazzfest DE

More information at <http://www.danielkarlssonmusic.com>