

Adam Baldych & The Baltic Gang - Imaginary Room (2012)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Village Underground* - 04:51 2. *Mirrors* - 05:17 3. *The Room of Imagination* - 07:08 4. *Cubism* - 04:59 5. *K8* - 06:35 6. *Time Traveler* - 03:07 7. *Rama hai* - 05:37 8. *For Zbiggy* - 03:40 9. *11.16* - 04:45 10. *Zarathustra* - 03:14 11. *Inspiration* - 04:04 12. *Million Miles Away* - 02:11
Line Up: Adam Baldych - violin Jacob Karlzon - piano Lars Danielsson - bass, cello Morten Lund - drums Verner Pohjola - trumpet Marius Neset - saxophone Nils Landgren - trombone (on 05 & 08)

Despite the perceived similarities between musical groups and gangs, there are surprisingly few examples of bands with a "gang" appellation. There's American rockers the James Gang, Brit-punks the Tyla Gang and of course there's the Purple Gang (although that was just a rhythm section). *Imaginary Room*, the debut release from violinist Adam Baldych and The Baltic Gang, has none of this outlaw chic, but there's plenty of excitement to be found in the music.

Baldych is a member of the Polish band Damage Control and has also spent time on the New York scene, but the Baltic Gang is a new departure for him. The Baltic Gang is a suitably accurate name for the band (Baldych is Polish, the others are Scandinavian) but somewhat anachronistic. Baldych's violin sound also harks back to an earlier time. The sound of '70s rock—hints of Curved Air's Darryl Way and, more overtly, the John Dummer Famous Music Band's Nick Pickett—jazz fusion and even the blues of Papa John Creach all come across in Baldych's playing. Unlike other young violinists such as Aaron Weinstein or Ben Powell, the influence of Stephane Grappelli is notably absent and Baldych's sound has a welcome bluesy rawness.

The sleeve notes and press release make much of Baldych's technical ability and absence of "lamenting or sobbing." Certainly his fluid, precise, playing is impressive, but what is most striking about *Imaginary Room* is how Baldych uses a wide range of styles and influences to

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create some strongly melodic tunes and some harmonically fascinating interplay between the instrumentalists. It's also notable that some of Baldych's finest moments come on the slower, more melancholy tunes where lamentation is a distinctive theme, with Finnish trumpeter Verner Pohjola a particularly effective partner.

"Mirrors" and "The Room Of Imagination" are beautiful tunes, with a spaciousness and depth that seems like a trademark of the Scandinavian scene. Tenor saxophonist Marius Neset can be a fiery, aggressive, player but his superb solo on "Room Of Imagination" showcases a more considered side to his playing. "Cubism" takes this feel and moves it up-tempo, Baldych's repetitive, upper-register riff adding drive to the rhythm in the tune's opening section.

"K8" drops the tempo down again; drummer Morten Lund, bassist Lars Danielsson and Baldych all give the piece a more emotionally downbeat feeling with the aid of co-producer Nils Landgren's plaintive trombone. West European folk music is at the forefront of the elegiac "Time Traveler," on which Baldych joins co-composer Jacob Karlzon for a stark yet gorgeous violin and piano duet. "Million Miles Away" is the album's shortest tune and its most affecting. A duet between co-writers Baldych—his violin at its rawest—and Danielsson, the haunting melody encapsulates a sense of longing and loss.

Imaginary Room is replete with sweeping melodies and strong musical interplay. Baldych gives his violin a voice and emotional power that have been too rarely heard in recent decades and offers a fresh take on the instrument for the contemporary scene. ---Bruce Lindsay, allaboutjazz.com

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