

Tomasz Stanko Quintet - Dark Eyes (2009)

Written by bluesever

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1 *So Nice* 2 *Terminal 7* 3 *The Dark Eyes of Martha Hirsch* 4 *Grand Central* 5
Amsterdam Avenue 6 *Samba Nova* 7 *Dirge for Europe* 8 *May Sun* 9 *Last Song*
10 *Etiuda Baletowa No. 3* Musicians: Tomasz Stanko: trumpet; Jakob Bro: guitar; Alexi
Tuomarila: piano; Anders Christensen: bass; Olavi Louhivuori: drums

It's easy enough to hear why the Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko is often mentioned in the same breath as Miles Davis. Both musicians have recorded accessible music that the average person – who might otherwise cross the road to avoid jazz – could happily listen to. *Dark Eyes* may be relatively easy on the ears, but don't be deceived; it's a million miles from easy listening.

So Nice makes for an ambiguous beginning: Stanko's delivery clearly refuses niceness. Indeed, the music is threaded through with a deep-seated ambiguity, a dark joke told with deadpan irony. *Terminal 7* has a suspended, rolling feel like a wave refusing to crash down onto a beach. Guitarist Jakob Bro makes his entrance partway through with a singing fluidity that's taken up by Stanko playing long soft notes through to the song's conclusion.

At a touch over 10 minutes, *The Dark Eyes of Martha Hirsch* is the album's longest track. It's almost half over before dancing bass and feather light drums begin to propel the action forward. Stanko is accordingly energised into a flurry of note-rich activity for the first time. He even overblows repeatedly in a way that'll rudely awake any listener unwise enough to assume they're in for a quiet ride.

Grand Central rings with ruminative piano courtesy of Alexi Tuomarila and echoed by Anders Christensen's electric bass. Each of *Dark Eyes*'s compositions possesses an originality whether

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in form, tone or feeling. Samba Nova features a mid-section that sees Olavi Louhivuori take the music into a beautiful, becalmed space redolent of a subterranean lake.

Throughout there's a strong sense of the players listening intently to each other. There's also a feeling of drama that never threatens to stray into theatricality, and the whole project is underpinned by ECM's characteristically clear and spacious production. ---Colin Buttimer, BBC Review

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