Tomasz Stanko New York Quartet – December Avenue (2017)

1 Cloud 4:13 2 Conclusion 2:01 3 Blue Cloud 8:52 4 Bright Moon 7:19 5 Burning Hot 5:05 6 David And Reuben 1:30 7 Ballad For Bruno Schulz 6:26 8 Sound Space 4:04 9 December Avenue 6:33 10 The Street Of Crocodiles 6:08 11 Yankiels Lid 6:07 12 Young Girl In Flower 5:57 Tomasz Stanko - trumpet David Virelles - piano Reuben Rogers - double bass Gerald Cleaver - drums

The elder statesman of modern Polish jazz, trumpeter and composer Tomasz Stańko has more than a forty year history with ECM. Dating back to his 1976 label debut, Balladyna, Stańko sounds to have arrived fully-formed, and in the company of Dave Holland and Finnish percussionist Edward Vesala. Stańko's trademark atmospheric and cerebral style is fully intact on December Avenue, his twelth album for Manfred Eicher's label.

Stańko's New York Quartet includes ECM artists David Virelles, whose Mbókò (2016) and Antenna (2016), amassed high praise, and Gerald Cleaver who has appeared on a number of the label's releases including those of Michael Formanek, Tim Berne, Roscoe Mitchell and Miroslav Vitous. Both were part of Stańko's Wisława project while bassist Thomas Morgan has been replaced by Reuben Rogers. The bassist's ties to the label are with Charles Lloyd on Rabo de Nube (2007), Mirror (2010) and Athens Concert (2011).

Stańko has long surrounded himself with a younger generation of top-rate musicians, helping to keep his own, introspective-leaning style, more open. Historically notably among those supporting players was the Lontano (ECM, 2006) group where the trumpeter was backed by the Marcin Wasilewski Trio who went on to substantial success. The New York Quartet has similarly brought out Stańko's considerable free improvisational skills but to a limited extent.

Virelles' meloncholy piano opens "Cloud," joined quickly by Stańko on a languid ballad that sets up the more spirited "Conclusion." On the latter we hear Rogers crafty introduction and Stańko's more animated playing but at just two- minutes, the piece doesn't quite live up to its energetic beginning. The pace doesn't accelerate again until "Burning Hot" where—relative to the reflective stroll of the opening numbers—the title is representative of Stańko's more inventive playing and the complex interaction with Virelles. "Ballad for Bruno Schulz" is essentially a Stańko/Virelles duo and the most appealling of the quiet compositions on December Avenue.

The minimal "Sound Space" leads to the energetic, boppish title track featuring a standout solo from Rogers and engaging contributions from both Stańko and Virelles, held together with some intricate and sophisticated work by Cleaver. "Yankiels Lid" is the most open of the twelve pieces and sees Virelles and Rogers at their most imaginative, while Stańko takes an accompanying role. "Young Girl In Flower" closes the album much as it began-a gentle ballad highlighted by Stańko's breathy signature style.

Stańko has been long been regarded for his ability to cover a wide range of emotions with his instrument and he can make the trumpet speak in tongues when he wishes to do so. But the avant-garde Stańko of circa Bluish (Power Bros., 1991) has long since been supplanted by the lyrically sophisticated minimalist of recent years. That mind-set works well in making his more visionary arrangements pop in the context of an entire album. December Avenue is strikingly balanced and tastefully performed by this well synergized quartet. ---Karl Ackermann, allaboutjazz.com

Three years after Tomasz Stanko's New York Quartet issued their quietly stunning debut Wisława, they return in slightly altered but no less inventive form. The Polish trumpeter brings back pianist David Virelles and drummer Gerald Cleaver, and welcomes new bassist Reuben Rogers, who replaces Thomas Morgan. Just as Wisława took Polish poet and Nobel Laureate Wisława Szymborska as its muse, December Avenue chooses writer Bruno Schulz, another Pole, as its own. Two tracks here are in his honor, and due to their particular compositional elements, they reflect the writer's lasting influence on Stanko.

December Avenue is a more deliberate outing than its predecessor, but it's also more intuitive. "Cloud," the opener, is an elliptical dialogue between Stanko and Virelles that poses a handful of unanswered musical questions, and is all the better for it. The mysterious piano intro in "Blue

Cloud" opens the doorway for the band to engage in collective improvisation, though they never completely abandon the harmonic frame. "Burning Hot," led by Rogers' pulsing bassline and Cleaver's snare and hi-hat shimmer, introduce a post-bop workout that displays Stanko's more muscular playing and Virelles' most angular. "Ballad for Bruno Schulz" is tender but elegiac as Stanko's smoky, airy tone and tender melody are provided added weight by Rogers' simpatico bassline and Virelles fluctuations between dirge-like chords and song-like runs. Cleaver's graceful brushwork colors all the spaces between. The title tune is a swinging post-bop number with a great head and bridge. The drummer's effortless yet almost frenetic double-time swing drives the band as Virelles delivers a punchy Afro Latin groove in his solo. Stanko in turn offers lean lines with a bell-like sonority. "The Street of Crocodiles" -- titled for one of Schulz's best-known short stories -- offers Stanko's smoky tone delivered with graceful, bittersweet elegance. Virelles adds a physical dimension as Rogers' bowed bass and Cleaver's brushes make more room for the trumpeter and pianist to explore abstraction. "Yankiels Lid" is another uptempo post-bop number with Stanko displaying his physicality again. Virelles is fleet and fluid while Rogers pulls a long, soulful, and edgy solo out of his trick bag. December Avenue offers a more subtle portrait of this unit overall, but that's welcome. As individuals and as a collective, these musicians stay focused on whatever the tune is trying to say. What's more, each player is careful to leave space for his bandmates, not only in solos, but in fills and harmonic feints and shifts. Assembled, this not only makes for a compelling listen, but also reveals the maturity and confidence this quartet has developed since the release of Wisława. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

Tomasz Stańko do perfekcji rozwinął umiejętność muzycznego dialogu i formę jazzowej ballady.

Pisząc o dialogu myślę nie tylko o umiejętności kontaktowania się z innymi muzykami, chodzi mi też o definicję tego gatunku pojawiającą się chociażby w literaturze filozoficznej. To wymiana myśli, której logika kształtuje się na przecięciu dyskursów, chociaż nigdy nie dochodzi do całkowitego połączenia. To przestrzeń, która wypełnia się różnicami i zbieżnościami; pojawia się dużo zaskoczeń, znaków zapytania. To rozmowa, w której nikt sobie nie schlebia i nie boi się wypowiedzieć swojej kwestii.

Z kolei ballady, są ze swojej natury melancholijne. Nie mam tu na myśli smutku, przeczulenia,

nadwrażliwości i cierpiętnictwa. Raczej pewną delikatność w wyrażaniu muzycznych myśli, może nawet nieśmiałość, finezyjność i pewną dozę emfazy. Statyczność, czyli brak potrzeby częstych i gwałtownych zmian w rozwoju narracji. Czasami celem samym w sobie jest u Stańki pewien ornament, wzdychająca fraza, wymiana muzycznych gestów między muzykami.

"December Avenue" to kolejny album Tomasza Stańki, który ukazał się nakładem monachijskiej wytwórni ECM. Polskiemu trębaczowi towarzyszy - podobnie, jak na płycie "Wisława" jego nowojorski kwartet. Zmienili się tylko kontrabasiści, Thomasa Morgana zastąpił Reuben Rogers, czterdziestokilkuletni muzyk, który współpracował już z Wyntonem Marsalisem, Joshuą Redmanem i innymi jazzowymi sławami. Poza tym usłyszymy Davida Virellesa na fortepianie i Geralda Cleavera na perkusji.

Nie znajdziemy tutaj żadnych rewolucji brzmieniowych, Stańko od lat porusza się wydeptaną przez siebie ścieżką. Wiernie towarzyszy mu Manfred Eicher, kurator i właściciel ECM, ale przede wszystkim producent odpowiadający za charakterystyczne, krystalicznie dokładne brzmienie swoich płyt. Najbardziej wybijają się kompozycje nienapisane przez Stańkę, tylko skomponowane przez cały kwartet, czyli momentami wychodzące poza tonalność "Conclusion" oraz klasterowe, hałaśliwe i powolne "Sound Space". Stańko powiedział kiedyś w wywiadzie, że: "improwizatorzy muszą być erudytami, muszą wiedzieć, co z czego się wywodzi, kiedy jest akord skriabinowski, słyszeć to, umieć przez to przejść". New York Quartet radzi sobie z tym doskonale, nawiązując często do zachodniej muzyki klasycznej, osiągnięć jazzu i jego korzeni.

Cichym bohaterem płyty jest kultura żydowska i przearanżowane na kwartet utwory z pięcioczęściowej płyty "POLIN". Znajdziemy tam "Ballad for Bruno Schulz", "The Streets of Crocodiles" i "Yankiel’s Lid". Oczywiście nie jest to muzyka programowa: nie znajdziemy tam dosłownych cytatów z klezmerów, naśladowania żydowskich muzyków. Wszystko opiera się na luźnych impresjach i raczej nieuchwytnych skojarzeniach. ---Filip Lech, culture.pl

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