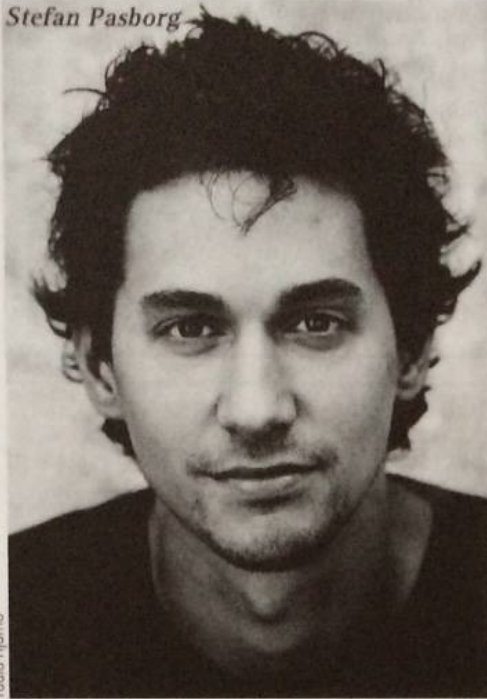


Profiles

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Stefan Pasborg



Tuula Hjärno

STEFAN PASBORG

"Alex Riel gave me my first set when I was three years old. The drums chose me. I was smitten with my godfather's joy in playing"

"I've never considered the drums as being confined strictly to acting as an accompaniment instrument." This is not just one of Europe's most interesting drummers speaking, but one of Europe's most interesting musicians. Stefan Pasborg's credit on an album sleeve is a virtual guarantee of bold and exploratory music inside. The current crop of activity includes a set of jazz interpretations of classical/ballet material (explanation in just a moment), a fine duo date with pianist Carsten Dahl and a new set with his Ibrahim Electric project, which allows him to move across more eclectic territory.

Like Jack DeJohnette, who he somewhat resembles in approach, but unlike DeJohnette in not feeling a need to stray beyond the kit, Pasborg finds a sufficiency of music in his drum set. "I rather consider it to be an instrument that is fully capable of generating rhythmic and contrapuntal ideas on an equal footing with other instruments. And this is precisely why I have always felt most comfortable playing in small-group constellations like solos, duos and trios, where I really have a chance to stretch out and open myself as a conduit for musical impulses to burst forth, without having to feel constrained by pre-set rules and conventions. An immense sense of freedom!"

There's a good deal of genetic and environmental imprinting in Pasborg's CV. "I grew up in a very musical family, my mother and stepdad both being ballet dancers at the Royal Danish Ballet." There the young Pasborg first heard and saw enacted the

Stravinsky scores that form the substance of his recent Firebirds album. "My godfather is Alex Riel, one of Europe's leading jazz drummers. Alex gave me my first set when I was three years old. The drums chose me. I was smitten with my godfather's joy in playing. I often attended his concerts at the Jazzhus Montmartre, when I was still small. So a delight in playing got hold of me at an early age."

It's a test easily and embarrassingly failable, but there's a theory that you can always tell a jazz drummer who grew up in the rock era as against an older player. It would seem to be true of Pasborg, even without checking his 1974 birthdate. "My biggest idol as a child was Elvis Presley and a little later The Police (with Stewart Copeland on drums!) but when I started to listen to jazz, my idols were Art Blakey and Gene Krupa. After that I got into experimental jazz."

Pasborg's work is strikingly various. As he says, there's no real connection between the three recent releases beyond his name on the cover. "The Ibrahim Electric album is our eighth and our main band-sound is still quite intact; the one thing that overshines it all is our love for playing and performing and the mix of funk, jazz, surf and Afrobeat. It was recorded in just two days before we entered a frantic summer with concerts at some of the greatest jazz festivals on the planet, in Rochester, Montreal, Vancouver, Molde, Kongsberg, Copenhagen. We spent most of the tour trying to agree on what tracks to choose and what to call them! I think it's my favourite of the Ibrahim Electric records so far."

The Firebirds disc is pretty much explained by that early experience at the ballet, getting goose-bumps when Stravinsky's *Dance Of The Young Girls* begins, making that subliminal connection between music and physical movement that has been lost from so much of our creativity since social dancing retreated and declined. The duo album with Carsten Dahl, with its vivid *Psyko Kalypso* and a luminous, quite unexpected *Blame It On My Youth*, was recorded on a Sunday afternoon in the beautiful room at the National Gallery of Denmark in front of a thousand people. "It was pretty amazing to walk on stage - as a duo - to play to a crowd like that."

He's one of a small cadre of drummers around at the moment who's quickly identifiable even in the midst of a group. But what does he think is distinctive about his own approach? "Well, what you said. That's my goal: to have my own sound! With keywords like energy, lust for playing, expressiveness, personality." There's a pause. "... And to tell a story on the drums." Musical fairy tales with hard centres. A steady but never forced narrative momentum. Beauty in every phrase. Stefan Pasborg, the Hans Christian Andersen of contemporary jazz.

Brian Morton