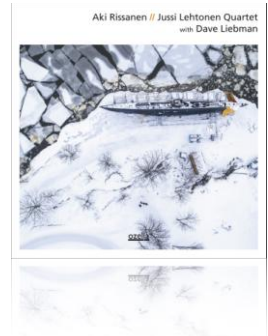


**Aki Rissanen // Jussi Lehtonen Quartet
with Dave Liebman****Biographical Connections**

Inspirations from the past, serendipity and complementary contrasts – the new album by the Aki Rissanen and Jussi Lehtonen Quartet with Dave Liebman is full of them. Little wonder: Rissanen has always considered himself a modernist and traditionalist at the same time, equally connected with the legacy of classical music and the vibrant, forward-looking Finnish improv scene. On the wings of the Liebman connection, the ensemble now advances to the heart of these both hidden and overt links, injecting traces of Slavic culture and folk music into ten powerful jazz gems. It has made the self-titled release one of the quartet's most intense statements so far - and a formidable sum and summary of their aesthetics and approach.

Of course, jazz has always been about the relationship between tradition and progress. But over the course of these spellbinding sixty minutes, the past and the future are more closely intertwined than ever – as are the personal biographies of the artists. In 1972, for example, Liebman received a phone call from Miles Davis, inviting him to play on *On the Corner*. Many decades later, an account of that story inspired Jussi Lehtonen to write his own piece "In the Corner", a monolithic tour de force filled with stylistic reminiscences. Another classic tune, Billy Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge", suddenly seemed particularly relevant when Rissanen spent springtime 2013 in Paris and composed a French echo of it with his piece "Pont Marie". For Liebman, meanwhile, the collaboration marks the culmination of a long-lasting love affair with the Finnish jazz community, the seeds of which would be sown when he participated in an iconic LP by Lars Werner on the now legendary Finnish Love Records imprint back in 1967. To this day, Rissanen and Lehtonen cite the album as a major influence on their path in music.

Sessions for the new record commenced at the Finnish Broadcasting Company in April 2013. Instead of over-polishing their tunes, the performers opted for a full-on live-approach to bring out the mutual trust as well as the tight and flexible interplay within the constellation. For Rissanen, the inclusion of bassist Jori Huhtala provided a sense of cool grace to the grooves as a counterpart to Lehtonen's "more swinging and straight-forward side". Charging between up-tempo outbursts of energy and dark, slow-simmering mid-tempo fantasies, the results accordingly oscillate between suspense and resolution, between pure beauty and the experimental sonorities of closing group improvisation "Gong Song". What holds these contrasts together is a pervasive mood of Finnish melancholy, particularly present on "Scriabin", an homage to Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915).

These unexpected openings are what turn the album into a point of departure for new explorations. For Rissanen, too, it is merely the first in a projected series of three full-lengths for the Ozella label, allowing him to finally present his artistic vision in its full scope. Which seems only apt. After uncovering the lines that bound their histories together, the quartet are now free to take them wherever they want to.