

Tomas Janzon

By Joe Patitucci

"Humility is a good word for the right approach. My experiences in the jazz community have always shown me that this music is coming from a spiritual approach. That is how you connect, it goes through your heart."

Jazz Inside: Tell us about the concept and development of your new recording, *Experiences*, featuring Albert Heath on drums?

Tomas Janzon: I have been working with Tootie [Albert Heath] since when I was living in Los Angeles. We played together at local venues and I was over at his house playing drums/guitar duo. He has been a tremendous inspiration to me, so I have had in mind to record with him for some time. I had been thinking about a trio that focuses on the drums. Making interaction the main thing and then, naturally to me, the drums as the center. So we started this trio format with a concert at Alvas showroom in San Pedro, with Tootie on drums and Jeff Littleton on bass. Then I had a booking at the Kitano here in New York, with Ken Filiano on bass this time, and further a tour in Sweden with the original trio: Tootie and Jeff Littleton. So by now I thought I just got to go for it and record this while we are still warm. I still had the same concept of interaction and bringing the drums up front, telling a story. I had tried some of my writing at rehearsals and some worked and some did not. So finally I decided to record whatever felt natural and fun to play together. Then I started thinking about Art Hillery, who I had played so many concerts with, and also been working on tunes together at his house. I figured he had to be part of this. He is a legacy in his own right, by the way. So we ended up recording some trio tracks and some quartets with piano and some with the B3 organ. It was this incredible constellation of personalities, including the engineer Nolan Shaheed, sometimes during the session the air was so filled with energy you had to take a deep breath to stay grounded. Finally this recording is all about experiences, it is telling a story of experiences, including the experience of driving from L.A. to New York.

Ji: What jazz artist or recording that you heard first or early on, provided was the spark for your inspiration to take this creative path and a life in jazz?

TJ: Definitely Charlie Parker's "Cool Blues", it just came to me. A strong memory from childhood is watching on TV at my grandmother's house up in the north, Clark Terry playing with the Swedish big band Four Leaf Clover.

Ji: How did your interest in jazz develop growing up in Sweden? What were some of the challenges and benefits to your inspiration and pursuits of jazz listening, study and performance growing up in Sweden?

TJ: I was actually in classical music first, growing up playing the cello. Playing Bach's Art of the Fugue with our local Chamber orchestra when I was twelve made a big imprint. But I was so curious about many things, so a classical career felt too withdrawn from the world. Then came jazz and I couldn't help from becoming full time musician anyway. It had to be. Outside Stockholm where I grew up a couple of older friends of mine started the first Swedish independent music school for "different music", as they called it: Solletuna Jazz Workshop or SJW. Many of the jazz musicians and also Latino musicians used to teach and rehearse there. I was soon teaching there myself.

Ji: What words of encouragement or support, or quotation or fragment of wisdom have you received from a mentor or associate is it that provides inspiration or guidance in your life?

TJ: Hmmm ... just got an email from an American friend of mine who lives in Copenhagen, he says: Go, man! - but not away.

Ji: Talk about some of the processes and approaches you go through in composing and arranging - and your core philosophies about composing.

TJ: That's a big question. I will try to make a brief statement. Composition for an improviser is a delicate issue. You have dedicated yourself to creating in the now where you have to deal with intuition, the unconscious and the connection between the body and the soul and so on. When composing you would like to stay in touch with all this and work as much as possible from what you have gained in this approach. This means a less pseudo-intellectual approach and more of a merging of your heart and your intellect. For me this makes the composing not so different to what I do as an improviser. I end up working with different ideas, concepts, sounds that happens to ring within me at a certain time. Just go with it, stay with the idea and let it evolve. It is a very subtle thing, to connect with the heart, sometimes your voice can help. And also to be pragmatic, try it out at rehearsal, go back and change. Go forward and change.



Ji: When you moved from Sweden to the United States, you resided in Los Angeles and studied at USC and with guitarist Joe Diorio. What was it about the Los Angeles scene that attracted you, and given your very recent move to New York, why did you make this big change?

TJ: Thanks. Yes, I went to LA to study with Joe Diorio. After spending about ten days in New York in May in the early nineties I felt like there were too many students of jazz in New York in line waiting to play a solo - so maybe I will "cut my teeth" in LA instead. I had been studying some of Joe's scribbles: re-harmonizations, intervallic ideas, the right brain approach and more so I thought let's try this. I didn't like LA at first. But then Joe let me play and we started to get along. I ended up spending a couple of days a week together with Joe in his office working on ideas and tunes. He is an amazing inspiration. I was very fortunate in Los Angeles, becoming part of the jazz community and recording with late Billy Higgins. Sherman Ferguson became one of my close friends: recording, playing and having a lot of great dinners together. I do miss him. Great bassist Nedra Wheeler and I had so many interesting discussions in between the gigs so we will always stay in touch. More recently drummer Donald Dean and I started to work and practice together, so that's another constellation. But, yes, now's the time, and I was on my way in May 2010 driving the Route 66 passing Gallup, New Mexico - and don't forget Winona, and I was going east this time. Soon it said Holland Tunnel in front of me. It was time for New York.

Ji: How do you balance the drive of the ego for power, fame, recognition, financial success and or security that many of us experience, with your creative drive, and the humility necessary to be a student one's craft to ensure lifelong growth?

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which takes you to Penn Station or the other way – out toward Montauk Point. Our housing is modern – five years old. Each room has its own air conditioning unit and private bathrooms, internet, cable TV.

JJ: What inspired your creation of this graduate degree program in music that is designed for summer access?

JC: One thing is that for teachers who do not want to hang around for an extended period of time during the summer, this is a convenient program. With a one-week intensified course, they can accomplish their work and get in and get out – and achieve their results and goals. If someone wanted to do a

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JJ: You have an incredibly deep and diverse background in computers and electronics - in the development of chips and some key software - which lead to work with leading Wall Street companies involving hedge funds. We know that mathematics and music are integrally entwined. How has your involvement in those aforementioned areas provided inspiration and understanding and or challenges to/for your musical development and creative pursuits?

DA: Well, the main challenge is time. Having a demanding full-time career and a family requires me to set aside time every evening and weekend for practice, writing new material as well as promotion of my CD's and gigs. I try to be very focused some of the time, but I also view music as my reward for everything else that I do, so I don't try to go overboard. It has taken me many more years to get to a high level than it would if I were doing it full-time, and I am painfully aware of that, but I am also grateful that I have found a balance in my life and a recognizable musical sound and style. I am happy to develop myself incrementally within that space. I think that every artist needs to have many unrelated interests for inspiration. It has become way too easy to waste time these days. A little bit of Facebook and Google can eat up your whole evening, and if you add some reality TV and random YouTube browsing you can easily eat up the rest of your time. I try to actively control what I consume. I try to eat right, exercise, pick and choose which books to read, which films to watch and what music to listen to. I also try to make it out to as many live gigs as I can. Nothing beats the experience of live jazz in NYC.

JJ: Talk about your association, experiences and observations about saxophonist Steve Grossman, whom you met when he came to Israel.

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TJ: I know, you have to watch it. Ego will always come in your way. If you have self awareness you can handle it, but it can always trip you. Humility is a good word for the right approach. My experiences in the jazz community has always shown me that this music is coming from a spiritual approach. That is how you connect, it goes through your heart.

three week course, I would enroll you in a morning class and an afternoon class. That means that in a three week period, you can only take two courses. By having a series of one-week classes, you can take three courses in the same three weeks. So you can take nine credits of work instead of six credits of work. With the one week courses, you're able to focus and concentrate on one topic.

JJ: Talk about the faculty.

JC: The faculty consists of the regular college faculty and instructors from the TIME Program – Technological Institute of Music Education. TIME is a certification program. They go into music notation using the midi labs. They go into sequenc-

DA: Steve Grossman came to Israel in the 80's and spent a year or two there. I had known of him from Elvin Jones' famous *Lighthouse* album where he played with Dave Liebman. That one album pretty much encapsulated the entire post-Coltrane vocabulary that I and all my friends were trying to learn at the time. The big shock was that one day he showed up at a gig I was playing, and he sounded nothing like he did on that album. By then, he had almost completely abandoned that style, and was playing straight ahead bebop with a sound that was somewhere between Sonny Rollins and Dexter Gordon. Seeing him play chorus after chorus of inventive bebop lines from close up was an experience I will never forget, and it completely restored my faith in bebop as an endless vehicle of creativity rather than a stylistic dead-end. I took some lessons with him, which consisted mostly of writing out choruses of improvisation away from the instrument. That was a very painful process for me in the beginning, as I realized how much I relied on the instrument rather than the purity of the music. He would take one glance and tell me what worked and what didn't, and gradually I learned to play what my musical mind dictated, and I realized that I can upgrade what my mind dictates by transcribing other people's solos. Seeing Steve last year at the Jazz Standard was a wonderful experience - he still plays as great as ever and has remained faithful to his bebop style.

JJ: What are your thoughts on the following perspective of philosopher Eric Hoffer and how it relates to the world of jazz on the creative and business sides? "In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a world that no longer exists."

DA: Well, obviously we are in a state of flux all

ing and developing the curriculum taught in. They educate music educators on how to use electronic music. There are different levels – 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b. 2b for example goes into Sibelius and digital media – and how different forms of music notation can be adopted and used in music education. There are 16 students in a class.

We are doing that to keep the numbers reasonable for personalized attention. We have an electronic music composition – recording original compositions. There are a lot of music technology courses available, taught by experts in their respective fields. Faculty members in general, for the Graduate Program, are working professionals – Dean Karahalas, Peter Rogine, Tony Romano for example, and others. ■

around us. Everything is changing rapidly. Technologies are changing, the music business is changing, economies are changing, world political systems are changing and our environment is changing. Musical styles are also changing. Within the microcosm of jazz, and especially in New York, a new style of music and a new standard of musicianship are emerging. It is important to identify all of that and then try to decide how you want to adapt. It's also important to be realistic about your expectations and your goals. The economics of jazz in New York today just don't make any sense. People are expected to be super-human musicians and play for almost no money, and there is no income from CD sales. You are left with a handful of musicians who can tour for a living and most others end up teaching. Nothing wrong with that, as long as you understand the tradeoffs, especially as you grow older. People who want "The American Dream" have to make a different set of choices.

JJ: Could you share your ideas on what John Wooden said: "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

DA: I think most jazz players who consider themselves artists feel an internal need to play - a need to excel, a need to master their instrument and the music, and a need to express something individualistic and authentic. I think the discipline and dedication emerge out of that, and not from a desire to be recognized. Of course, the reality is that in order to keep being heard and to keep developing you have to also be recognized by others, and so you have to do whatever it takes to build your reputation and recognition as well. It's a delicate balance and certainly not as cut and dry as in that quote. ■

TJ: Funny, I was just reading something by Hazrat Inayat Khan where he talks about the greatness in being a pupil. Yes, learning and finding out is what makes life interesting. There is always a ingredient of this in the great jazz solos we listen back to.

JJ: Could you share your ideas on what John Wooden
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 said: "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

ITJ: If, like some say, "what you are thinking is what shapes you and your path", maybe that is what shapes our character too. I believe it can be helpful to find a way to keep an eye on my thinking. What am I thinking about, and how does it feel? Then there is not much room for being worried about the outside. Instead, with clearness of mind maybe we humans can connect to each other. ■

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 have always devoted a great deal of time and energy to it. From books to private teaching, to my Institute of Guitar, to my work with Mike's Master Classes and my upcoming work with TrueFire, I have never failed to be fascinated by the process. Over the years, I've developed effective ways to unravel some of the mysteries of music and the guitar. I have always and still maintain a heavy schedule of students. I think the relationship of teaching to my own playing primarily centers around an attitude of constant striving to progress, to pursue the horizon.

JJ: What are your thoughts on the following perspective of philosopher Eric Hoffer and how it relates to the world of jazz on the creative and business sides? "In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a world that no longer exists."

CA: The importance of changing within a changing world is key to anyone's development and success in life. Musicians need to adapt as well. The internet technology represents a fundamental paradigm shift for us. The need to recognize and execute digital marketing and develop the business of music is as important as musical and creative development. Learning is obviously central to the teaching situation and ultimately, learning leads to the development of the writers, the musicians and the performers.

JJ: Could you share your ideas on what John Wooden said: "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

CA: I think the issue of being true to oneself is critical for long term stability and balance. Your character represents who you are at the core. The world often creates problems by misrepresenting you and trying to mold you to its own standards. I subscribe to Bill Evans' ideas about playing what pleases you and finding an audience that enjoys what you do. There is no point in chasing players or styles or even fans. Your character should come through your music and through your life in how honestly and fairly you interact with others. ■

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