



NEAR THE POND

The new album from American cornetist **Kirk Knuffke** (born 1980), Swedish bassist/cellist **Thommy Andersson** (born 1973), and Swedish vocalist **Josefine Cronholm** (born 1971) explores cross-continental friendship and cultural exchange, themes which ring true throughout both the realization and the initial inspiration for the project – namely, the poems of Swedish-American author Carl Sandburg (1878-1967).

Sandburg was born in Galesburg, Illinois in 1878, to two Swedish immigrants, Clara Mathilda and August Johnson. The family lived in extreme poverty and Carl left school as a 13-year-old to work odd jobs. At 17, he volunteered to serve in the military, a decision that would eventually land him in Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War. After the war, he enrolled at Lombard College in his hometown, where a local teacher was impressed with his talent for writing and actively supported the development of his creative voice. He went on to produce a large body of work ranging from collections of poems to an extensive biography of Abraham Lincoln. Two Pulitzer Prizes are among several honors he received for his literary contributions. The three Sandburg texts featured on this album are culled from a 1916 collection entitled Chicago Poems.

Many of Carl Sandburg's poems explored industrialized America, capturing the US in focused and simple language, oftentimes bending traditional rules with regard to form and structure. The author also collected American folk music and became a skilled guitarist and singer. **Kirk Knuffke** was moved by the melodies he heard in the prose and the overall musicality in Sandburg's poetry, leading to the genesis of this project.

Knuffke and **Andersson** have worked together in multiple settings over the years, forging and cultivating a unique friendship. “**Thommy** and I quickly

discovered that we have the same sense of tonality and like to work with quite simple root movements. I think we see ourselves as folk musicians more than jazz musicians... I love jazz, but when I was growing up, I was more preoccupied with playing the blues.” **Knuffke** recalls.

Andersson describes something similar from his own perspective: “We have a certain tradition, but you can also find elements of blues in Swedish folk music. The crucial thing is that the musicians, no matter where they come from, can back up what they play – I couldn’t dream of trying to adapt and sound like an American bassist. Musicians must have the courage to play as they see fit. Then it makes perfect sense to come together across borders and cultures.” Knuffke concurs: “One of the amazing things about music is that people want to play and can play together across oceans and generations.”

On the subject of cross-generational inspiration – the poem featured in the song *Near The Pond* (also the title of this release) is by Shunn Theingi, who wrote it at age 9. **Kirk Knuffke** found it in a book he discovered on the street in New York City.

Josefine Cronholm and **Thommy Andersson** have both lived in Copenhagen for many years, but they still live and breathe their native Swedish pulse and the rich culture of their homeland. On this recording, it intersects with American history and tradition in music that unfolds itself freely. “One of the interesting things about this project is the meeting of cultures. I have strong roots in Swedish folk music, but have played jazz and improvisational music. I listen to and am inspired by musical traditions from all over the world. It’s part of my identity,” **Cronholm** shares.

Her unique musical gifts have taken her far away from any predictable or

clichéd traditional singing role. Her voice is her instrument. She expresses herself through it, as does **Tommy Andersson** through his bass and **Kirk Knuffke**, his horn. In this group, the voice is included as an equal element, and **Cronholm** is as much of an instrumentalist as the others. As a wordless improviser, she demonstrates a confident command of her voice, radiating courage and imagination.

American drummer **Kenny Wollesen** (born 1966) was brought into the fold, and the core trio grew into a quartet for this recording. **Wollesen** – who, like his friend **Kirk Knuffke**, lives in New York – has been mesmerizing audiences and bandmates for decades with his versatility, imagination, and ability to break down the boundaries between genres and traditions. Neither of the two Americans heard on this album play or think about music in terms of clear stylistic purity, right/wrong, either/or. **Knuffke** has positioned himself as one of the most compelling musicians of his generation with his strong personal voice and technical virtuosity, balancing a commitment to both the experimental and fundamental.

An appropriately unconventional string trio comprised of one cello and two violas can be heard on some selections, as well – the decision to bring them aboard and the arrangements they play both made by **Tommy Andersson**. As a bassist, he is known for his confidently deep, warm, down-to-earth, and darkly resonant playing. He sails through the lower frequencies in his arrangements, delivering the goods while avoiding the superfluous. It was a deliberate decision not to include violins, which are usually heard in smaller string groups. Their absence gives the cornet and vocals room to shine without distraction or interference in the upper end of the sound spectrum. His string arrangements on this album tastefully lay the violas and cello down with his bass in the sonic depths.

Cronholm contributed new music and lyrics which explored her fascination with Clara Mathilda's fate - the young woman's lonely voyage across the Atlantic and her dreams of the Sweden she left behind. The songs on this album are generally simple and relatively short in length, a musical architecture which liberates the performers by design. The improvisation is free and agreements regarding forms were few and far between, a nod to Sandburg's affinity for structural looseness.

the unique prose and poetry of Carl Sandburg published in the early 20th century, as well as a poem by a 9-year-old... used as inspiration for a modern trans-Atlantic and multi-faceted quartet - two Swedes residing in Denmark and two Americans... paired with an unorthodox string trio and skillfully sparse arrangements... All this might seem like a dizzying amalgamation of moving pieces. But because of their mutual friendships and shared musical experiences, it was meant to be.

Bandmates who are also friends can breathe together in unique, sometimes magical ways, and the trust that comes with true friendship almost always elevates and empowers all parties while working towards a common goal... or making an album together, in this case.

In the words of **Kirk Knuffke**:

"I think it always helps to be friends."

Birger Thøgersen, Copenhagen
January, 2021

CLARA MATHILDA'S DREAM

MUSIC & LYRICS: JOSEFINE CRONHOLM

Dream of a landscape
Pastures and meadows,
A place to be
Emerald forests,
The sound of a cuckoo
A lilac sky
Down by the stream
You'll find wild orchids blooming
Through wilderness you have to walk
Raspberry bushes,
A wild rose,
Her scent is heavenly made
Follow the path,
Take left by the old abandoned house
You'll see a cottage
A garden with apple and cherry trees
Smoke from the chimney
A silhouette in the window,
My mother's face
Full moon that rises
Soft voices gathering
At the end of the day.

I DON'T KNOW

MUSIC & LYRICS: JOSEFINE CRONHOLM

The sea, the sky
Horizon reaches my eye
Land far away
keeping my faith everyday

I don't know how to comb my hair
I don't know what clothes to wear
I don't know what the future brings
I just know what's in my bag

I don't know how to spell the words
I only know the sound of the birds
I don't know what's going on
I don't know

Look at the stars
Watching the days going by
Got nothing to lose
Singing to keep away the blues

WHITE SHOULDERS

MUSIC: KIRK KNUFFKE / LYRICS: CARL SANDBURG 1878-1967

Your white shoulders

I remember

And your shrug of laughter.

Low laughter

Shaken slow

From your white shoulders.

DOZEN A DAY

MUSIC & LYRIC: KIRK KNUFFKE

Every lonely child builds a world of his own.
Both with objects and in fantasy.
A dozen a year or a dozen a day.

SUBWAY

MUSIC: KIRK KNUFFKE / LYRICS: CARL SANDBURG 1878-1967

Down between the walls of shadow

Where the iron laws insist,

The hunger voices mock.

The worn wayfaring men

With the hunched and humble shoulders,

Throw their laughter into toil.

ONE WISH

MUSIC & LYRICS: JOSEFINE CRONHOLM

One wish little God

One wish little God

One wish little God

One wish little God

One wish little God

One wish, one wish, one wish

I SANG

MUSIC: KIRK KNUFFKE / LYRICS: CARL SANDBURG 1878-1967

I sang to you and the moon
But only the moon remembers.
I sang
O reckless free-hearted
free-throated rhythms,
Even the moon remembers them
And is kind to me

WRONG WITH YOU

MUSIC & LYRICS: KIRK KNUFFKE

Don't ever be wrong with you

'cause I don't ever, ever wanna be wrong with you

So don't ever be wrong with you

'cause I don't ever, ever, ever, ever wanna be wrong with you

I don't ever wanna be wrong with you

I don't never, ever, ever wanna be wrong with you

So don't ever, be wrong with you,

cause I don't ever, ever wanna be wrong with you

NEAR THE POND

MUSIC: KIRK KNUFFKE / LYRICS: SHUN TEINGI

Season, Houseboat, Umbrella,
Neighbor,
Near the pond
Fishing

THANKS TO:

Friends and family all over the world.

To Peter and Søren at Stunt Records for believing in this project.

KIRK:

This band is a dream come true for me. When playing with Thommy and Josefine I feel right at home and we tap into something fresh, ancient and new. Thanks also to my old friend Kenny for his work here and to Lena, Marta and Melissa for their beautiful sounds. Special thanks to Madeleine for encouraging me to sing, and to friends and family all over the world. My Colorado family Doug, Kathy, Derek and Jay. My Italian family: Armando, Caterina, Valentina, Giancarlo and Jean-Marie.

JOSEFINE:

Thank you, Kirk, for introducing me to Carl Sandburg's poetic universe and for sharing your beautiful music. Special thanks to Johan, Miro and Rafael for always giving me a new way of looking at the world.

THOMMY:

Liva, Ronja and Svante.

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