

Helge Lien Trio  
Guzuguzu

## Where Words and Sound Collide

If music is a language, then maybe, vice versa, words can be used to imitate specific sounds. This fascinating phenomenon of onomatopoeia is the point of departure for the Helge Lien Trio's 9<sup>th</sup> album *Guzuguzu*. Each track is based on a different onomatopoeic Japanese term and the rich field of associations it opens up: What does a smile sound like? "Nikoniko". Spinning around in circles? "Kurukuru"! Even the album title – *Guzuguzu* – falls into the same category, describing what it sounds like to "move slowly". Intriguingly, as Lien was writing the pieces, he discovered hidden connections between them, which added up to a new vocabulary of sound. It has turned the trio's latest effort into their most ambitious and thrilling work to date.

The conceptual angle may seem to point at a rather cerebral recording process. In fact, the exact opposite is true: *"We were able to record the album in a single take"*, Lien recounts, *"We spent close to an entire year preparing the recording of Guzuguzu, so when we met in Rainbow studio for the actual sessions, the album was more or less complete, not to say 'garari'. Listening to how it came out, it strikes me how closely it resembles a live experience."* For Lien, who has always regarded the zone between improvisation and composition as extremely fertile, this two-pronged approach encompasses all his ideals about music: *"For me, improvisation and composition are inevitably intertwined. I always strive to be a composer when I improvise, and I always use improvisation as one of my main tools when I compose. The composing part is the framework, which makes sure the listener is safely transported through the musical stories. Improvisation, on the other hand, creates surprises and an unpredictable and living stream of music."*

Constantly oscillating between these poles, *Guzuguzu* combines the spirit of jazz with symphonic development. All tracks emerge from the same melodic theme, with just a single exception: "Jasmine", which combines Nordic and oriental elements in a more meditative state, was recorded on its own and accordingly placed at the heart of the record. Although the music was entirely composed by Lien, it was always clear that the intimacy and tightness that *Guzuguzu* required could only be realised within his trio with Frode Berg (bass) and Per Oddvar Johansen (drums). With Frode Berg he is constantly working since their two breakthrough albums on Ozella, *Hello Troll* (2008) and *Natsukashii* (2011) – *"the interplay and the way we breathe together reached a new level for us on these records"*, as Lien emphasises – and it is taken to an even higher plateau with the new drummer Per Oddvar Johansen on *Guzuguzu*.

In fact, after they finished the recording, the trio was confident enough to perform the music in its entirety, from start to finish, during a concert at the mysterious Bran Castle in Transylvania, Romania. In the same spirit of discovery, the album approaches the theme of onomatopoeia like a kaleidoscope, going from the sounds of a distant thunder to the soft sensation of quiet rain. When the last notes have subsided, the listener is led into a sublime state beyond music and words, best described by Wittgenstein's famous aphorism: *"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."*