



Helge Lien Trio Revisited



Passion under the Microscope

Improvisation is at the heart of Jazz. It is also at the heart of *Revisited* in various surprising ways. After the departure of long-term band members Frode Berg (after *Guzuguzu*) and Per Oddvar Johansen (after *10*), Helge Lien had to re-think and re-assemble his trio during the pandemic, while continuing to record and (virtually) perform – you could call it improvisation squared. In the act of rehearsing and playing, the new formation arrived at interpretations which felt like a look back and a fresh departure all at once: This is not a revolution, it's passion under the microscope.

Revisited is a hybrid of studio- and concert-recordings. Miraculously, however, you can't hear that. All tracks blend into a cohesive, 50-minute piece: There are no sounds from the audience and the studio takes feel as urgent as the live performances. After intimate sessions at the Toyen church in Oslo, which provided half the material, the musicians headed over to their gig at the Anjazz Festival in October 2020, of which five pieces are included here. As a result, *Revisited* is all about connections and contrasts: Between the old line-up and the one on; between different performance situations and different spaces.

Most of all, it documents the transition phase from one version of the group to the next. An essential reason why the process turned out to be successful is that only bassist Johannes Eick is an actual newcomer. Knut Aalefjær, on the other hand, was the very first drummer of the Helge Lien Trio in the early 2000s. On *Revisited*, it feels as though he's never been away: The elastic groove of "Gamut Warning" (off *Hello Troll*) has a liquid flow to it, allowing Lien to pour his glistening piano cascades on top. "Jasmine", one of the key pieces of *Guzuguzu*, simmers on a twilight-pulse, going even deeper than the original and carefully expanding the dynamic palette.

These subtle maneuvers reflect Lien's current take on improvisation. Whereas, more than a decade ago, he would radically deconstruct a piece like Miles Davis's "So What", his focus has shifted towards a dense, precisely synchronised group sound and hypnotic, quicksilver piano runs. There is still no safety net, however. The art of improvisation always takes place at the edge of failure – no one knows this better than Helge Lien.