

Gunnar Halle
Istanbul Sky

Stepping into the Unknown

Sometimes, you have to stray far from home to see what's right in front of you. For trumpeter Gunnar Halle, the penny dropped while walking the streets of Istanbul in 2013. For almost two decades, Halle had served in a wide range of band constellations and as a sidekick for performers like vocalist Susi Hyldgaard, electro-rock-formation Whomadewho or his avantgarde quartet Fattigfolket. He had played on a total of seventy albums and participated in up to ten bands at the same time, living his dream of life as a musician to the full. And yet, in all these years, he had never done what seemed so obvious – he'd never recorded an album under his own name and direction. Returning from Turkey to his home of Oslo, Halle knew things could no longer stay the way they were. Less than a year later, he is now presenting his solo debut *Istanbul Sky* - his most personal project ever.

A lot about the album sounds as though it had been created with a clear plan in mind. Quite the opposite is true, however. In many respects, *Istanbul Sky* is a post-concept-album, with Halle writing and recording pieces without any other concern other than making them sound the best he possibly could: *"I decided to just finish all the songs even if they were in different styles. That was the only rule"*, he reflects on the creative process, *"My hope was that there would appear a common theme through it all if only I completed the tracks, and produced each song in the way it asked for."* In practise, this implied combining all of his different influences, from his jazz roots – first established after discovering a collection of Louis Armstrong records as a six-year old – to his interest in contemporary electronics. It also meant stepping out into the unknown and exploring previously unfamiliar territories, trying on new approaches and using his voice more than ever.

It can hardly come as a surprise, then, that each song contains a multitude of intimate references. Sorrowful ballad "Tchicai", for example, was written on the day Halle's colleague and inspirator John Tchicai passed away. The title to moody, electro-acoustic meditation "Port", meanwhile, refers both to a gate in Halle's garden as well as trip hop pioneers Portishead. On other occasions, the associations take on a more universal quality: "Why has the world turned upside down", portrays Halle's fascination for *"how lives can suddenly change completely, just because of a single incident."* The music mirrors his insatiable curiosity as an artist, from the visionary, self-confident funk patterns of "Lørdag" to the acoustic ambient sonorities of "Snøting".

Astoundingly, despite these twists and turns, the album eventually revealed a concept after all – about Halle finding himself as an artist, following his intuition and believing in his instincts. From here on, anything is possible. According to Halle: *"I see this record as the beginning of something new. I don't know exactly where it will lead me and what new land I will discover over the next years. But one thing's for certain: I will use my voice more, will compose more music, and produce more music."*