



Sunna Gunnlaugs



— Concerto, Austria

The Washington Post described her music as possessing “such timeless virtues as lyricism and grace... elegantly bridges soul-searching passages with uncluttered swing.” Sunna Gunnlaugs reaffirms that assessment on her latest CD, “Long Pair Bond” which features fellow Icelander bassist Thorgrimir Jónsson and long-time cohort Scott McLemore on drums. It’s her first trio album since her debut in 1997, and now a more mature, more experienced Gunnlaugs

appeal to me as a kid. I associated it with classical pianists who seemed to have no fun. But on the organ you could play anything, the Beatles, polkas, Strauss and that seemed like more fun.” By her teens, having realized that you could in fact play a variety of music on the piano, it was the gift of a Bill Evans trio record (appropriately named “You’re Gonna Hear From Me”) that sold her on modern jazz. In 1993 she made her way to the US as a student at William Paterson College

rooms such as Cornelia Street Cafe and the Knitting Factory, and rave reviews followed. Gunnlaugs was proclaimed an “impressive newcomer” by the Village Voice.

However, the music she was writing began to need more than just a trio. “I had been listening a lot to the Keith Jarrett quartet and Jan Garabrek with Bobo Stenson and the sound of the quartet was so appealing to me.” She called upon saxophonist Tony Malaby and bassist Drew Gress. “I was familiar with Tony from his own bands and was stunned by how expressive he was. Drew, I knew from his work with Fred Hersch and Dave Douglas. He always added such a bounce to my

“Gunnlaugs proves that jazz can have a wider appeal without losing integrity.”

– All About Jazz

presents this music in an unhurried, contemplative fashion. Ironically, it is the spaces she leaves that creates a sense of urgency throughout the recording.

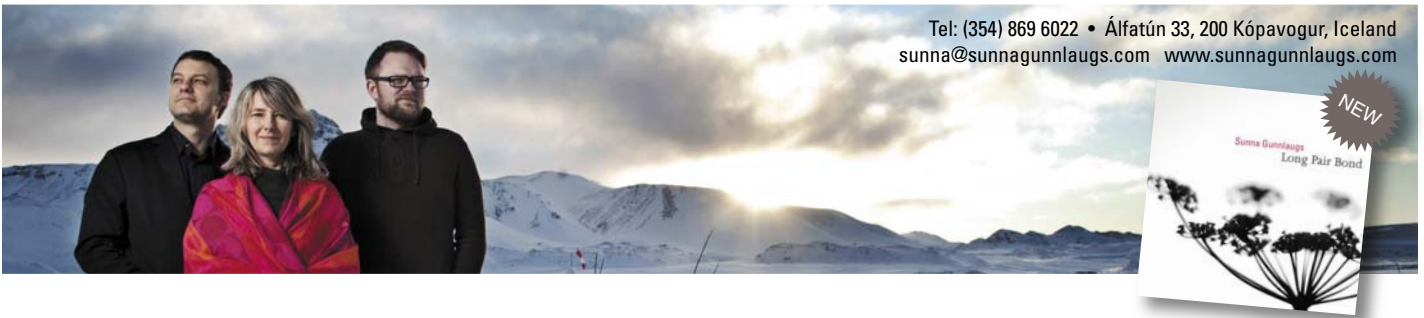
Equally influenced by such American pianists as Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett, and Scandinavians like Bobo Stenson and Jon Balke, Sunna has found a way to make music to which people on both sides of the Atlantic can relate. Her own charming brand of romantic lyricism riding upon a driving American rhythm section appeals to jazzers and non-jazzers alike.

As a child growing up on a small peninsula called Seltjarnarnes not far from Reykjavik she began taking lessons on the organ at the urging of her mother. “The idea of playing the piano didn’t

and began to hone her own distinct musical voice both as an improviser and a composer while immersing herself in the standards and studying the masters. Just a 15 minute drive from Manhattan, inspiration was not hard to find. “Suddenly being able to go to the Village Vanguard or Bradley’s any night of the week and hear amazing pianists was an incredible experience. It was such a stimulating environment,” and one that Gunnlaugs had no intention of leaving after graduating in 1996. She moved to Brooklyn and made her debut recording “Far Far Away” with her trio: bassist Dan Fabricatore and drummer (and future husband), Scott McLemore.

In New York her focus shifted decidedly to performing her own music. She began appearing at listening





tunes, while keeping it really open.” In 1999, along with McLemore, the quartet recorded “Mindful” and, with time left over on the same day, the newly released “Songs from Iceland.”

“Mindful” (chosen as one of the top 10 CDs of the year by the *Virginian Pilot*) was as personal a statement an artist can make. From the opening flurry of notes in duet with Malaby the listener knows something special is coming. There is at once a joyful buoyancy and ethereal melancholy which envelops the listener from start to finish. That ambience continues on “Songs from Iceland” and the relationship with the material, five Icelandic folk-songs that Gunnlaugs grew up with, is almost as personal. “These were tunes that we were playing on concerts, and when we felt “Mindful” was complete I suggested we record these for posterity. I

formed throughout the US, Canada and Europe, as well as in Tokyo, Japan. “I really like traveling by train in Europe, where you can just relax and reflect. It’s a lot different than driving a mini-van in the US. We once had to get in a tiny little boat to play in Vancouver, and there was almost no room for the upright bass. When you are touring you get to visit little towns that you probably wouldn’t go to as a tourist.”

The 7 CDs she has released as a leader have consistently met with critical praise over the years, and she has appeared in publications such as *Jazzwise*, *JazzTimes*, *Downbeat*, *Jazz Podium*, *Concerto*, *Stereo*, *Jazzman*, *Village Voice*, *Time Out New York*, *Swing Journal*, *All About Jazz* and *The Washington Post*.

Her previous album “The Dream” (featuring saxophonist Loren Stillman, bassist Eivind Opsvik and drummer Scott McLemore) jumped straight to #2 on the Canadian jazz charts and to #20 on US CMJ

“such timeless virtues as lyricism and grace...”

– *Washington Post*

charts...adding new perspective to *Time Out New York*’s statement that Gunnlaugs is “proof that jazz is as much a part of the picture as the pop of Björk or SigurRos.”

“an appetite to explore the inner soul.”

– *Jazzwise*

wasn’t really sure what I would do with them, but it seemed important to document.” Almost a decade later “Songs from Iceland” was released, adding more weight to recommendation from *Jazziz Magazine* that her “unique blend of jazz piano and Icelandic folk music” is a “great listen.”

In the meantime Sunna released 2 albums, the first was 2002’s “Fagra Veröld” (music written to Icelandic poetry), featuring Gress and McLemore as well as the voice of Kristjana Stefánsdóttir and saxophonist Sigurdur Flosason. The 2nd was 2003’s high-energy “Live in Europe” which rode the jazz charts into the top 10 in both the US and Canada. It was recorded in Prague in the middle of a three-week tour of Europe with saxophonist Ohad Talmor and bassist Matt Pavolka.

Gunnlaugs enjoys touring and has per-

More press quotes:

Top albums of 2011 “Long Pair Bond is phenomenal” — *Jazzwrap*.blogspot.com

“Album of the month” — *Jazzstreet*, Japan

“... Sunna Gunnlaugs’ Trio whose cool atmospherics and meditative quality draws on Icelandic folk melodies and brooding soundscapes, yet internally has an unhurried Bill Evans-like swing and an appetite to explore the inner soul.” — Jon Newey, *Jazzwise*, UK

“liting and beautiful enough to have an almost hypnotic effect” — *All About Jazz*

“...erschafft sie vollkommen kitschfreie und harmonisch wie melodisch eigenständige Klaviertrio-Musik,” — *Concerto*, Austria

“Wow, wow, WOW! So damn pretty. This song [Long Pair Bond] has the restrained ambience of a typical ECM-label piano trio, but with the buoyant soulfulness that makes Keith Jarrett’s 70’s American Quartet such a joy to listen to. Highly recommended.”—*All About Jazz*

“Too much spaciness can wreck a good album, and too much earth can, too. Long Pair Bond gets pretty darn close to the perfect balance.” — *Jon Wertheim*, *Adevout Musician*

“Discovery of the week” — *BlogsEtCie*, France

“Es ist eine Musik, bei der man das Gefühl von Frische verspürt, als wehe ein kühler Wind durch die blue notes.” — Wolfgang Sandner, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Germany