

The Tolvan Big Band: A Walk in the Centerpoint (2003)

By

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When it comes to swinging in a contemporary groove, Sweden's Tolvan Big Band takes a back seat to no one. This is a killer ensemble, able to stare down the most formidable charts without flinching or even blinking an eye. Regardless of mood or tempo the sense of forward motion is always there, thanks to fastidious unison work by all hands and a strapping rhythm section governed by drummer Lennart "In the Groove" Gruvstedt.

Music director Helge Albin wrote five of the seven selections on *Centerpoint*, tenor saxophonist Cennet Jönsson the others, and none of them is a happy-go-lucky walk in the park — for the band or the listener. This is music that demands one's undivided attention. For purposes of comparison, one could say that Tolvan traverses roughly the same territory as Maria Schneider, George Gruntz, Pierre Dorgé, David Murray and other cutting-edge composer / arrangers, but with a little more emphasis on melody and a lot more on swinging.

Both traits become immediately visible on Albin's propulsive opener, "Centerpoint," with febrile statements by alto Fredrik Kronkvist, trombonist Ola Åkerman, and pianist Jacob Karlzon — who's equally impressive whether soloing ("Santiago Nights," "Running Thoughts") or comping. Jönsson wrote the richly textured "Papa Knows Best," on which his full-bodied soprano and Vincent Nilsson's growling muted trombone are showcased; and Nilsson solos again, with Karlzon, on Albin's sensuous and serpentine "Santiago Nights."

Jönsson's second composition, "Running Thoughts," is an introspective piece that again features Karlzon, this time alongside Albin's glossy alto. Albin's rhythmic "Sideways" picks up the pace, with Jönsson's soprano and Peter Asplund's muted trumpet hitting the mark, while the undulating "Brazilian Waves" is a showpiece for Nilsson's soulful trombone.

The band leaves the same way it entered, opening the throttle wide on Albin's "Like a Secret" to underline resourceful solos by Albin, Asplund, and tenor Inge Petersson, the last leading to an ending so abrupt and muted that one could be forgiven for presuming that the recording engineer had signaled "time's up." This is big-band jazz for adventurous ears, exceptionally well-written by Albin and Jönsson and well-played by the world-class Tolvan Big Band, with the bonus of entertaining and informative liner notes by drummer Billy Cobham.

Track Listing: A Walk in the Centerpoint; Papa Knows Best; Santiago Nights; Running Thoughts; Sideways; Brazilian Waves; Like a Secret (71:01).

Personnel: Helge Albin, music director, alto sax, flute; Christer Gustafsson, Anders Gustafsson, Roy Wall, Fredrik Davidsson, Peter Asplund, trumpet, flugelhorn; Fredrik Kronkvist, alto sax, alto flute; Inge Petersson, tenor sax; Cennet J

Record Label: Prophone Records

