

## Tomasz Stanko Quartet

### Lontano

**Tomasz Stanko:** trumpet; **Marcin Wasilewski:** piano; **Slawomir Kurkiewicz:** double-bass; **Michal Miskiewicz:** drums

**ECM 1980**

**CD 6024 987 7380 (2)**

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The third ECM album by Tomasz Stanko's popular all-Polish group rings some changes. Where its predecessors, 2001's "Soul of Things" and 2004's "Suspended Night" were recorded in Oslo, "Lontano" shifts the recording locale to the South of France – Studios La Buissonne, near Avignon – and it opens up the group's concept to admit both freer playing and a new look at pieces of historical importance in Stanko's development, while also emphasising the achingly soulful balladry that has increasingly become a hallmark of Stanko's music...

The group arrived in the studio directly from an extensive tour of the Far East – with debut performances by the quartet in Japan, Korea and Australia – which Stanko suggests may have been a factor influencing the departures on "Lontano". "Just the experience of being on the road, playing to very different audiences helps me to change, personally. I wasn't *expecting* record number three with this group to be as different as it is – but then it's almost a policy not to have expectations. As an improviser I want to be open to the whole atmosphere."

"I like very much (producer) Manfred Eicher's way of working, where he is always helping to create a direction we can use. We are always open to his input. And I really enjoy the free feeling we found on 'Lontano' and the communication between the players. It seems 'new' and at the same time it has everything to do with my roots and where I started in jazz. Maybe it sounds paradoxical but I believe it is easier to play freely and with focus in the studio than in the live situation. Firstly because of the clarity of the acoustics; you are in a better position to have control over both your own sound and the ensemble sound..."

In La Buissonne, the energy that the group had built up in live performance was re-channelled to make the fullest use of the potential for interplay. Of the material that Stanko brought to the session, only "Kattorna" was retained, a piece the trumpeter had played with Krzysztof Komeda's group and recorded on the influential "Astigmatic" in 1965. Thirty years later, in '95, Stanko's young associates Wasilewski, Kurkiewicz and Miskiewicz, had revived the tune on their own pre-ECM Komeda tribute recording: it was a piece with which all participants were very familiar. Stanko, scattering sprays of notes, and aided by Marcin Wasilewski's jabbing piano, guides it in fresh directions.

The closing piece, "Tale", first appeared on "Balladyna", Tomasz Stanko's 1975 ECM debut, but is revived and transformed here at producer Eicher's suggestion to round off the programme: Again, Wasilewski plays an important role, his thoughtful chording setting up Stanko's soliloquy.

Elsewhere on the record the emphasis is all dialogue and interaction. The extended pieces "Lontano I", "Lontano II" and "Lontano III" in particular indicate how much the quartet has grown in the five years since "Soul of Things", as they create new music in the moment, together: all four musicians in accord, at a high level.

Stanko's biography is a distinguished one, with many highlights and clearly defined 'periods'. It is evident however that he has gained new energy and momentum from his association with Wasilewski, Kurkiewicz and Miskiewicz. In helping each of them to find their individual voices, he has strengthened his own.

In 2002, in the wake of "Soul of Things", Stanko won the first European Jazz Prize, a major new award initiated by the Austrian Government and the City of Vienna. From the jury's citation: "Stanko has developed a unique sound and personal music that is instantly recognizable and unmistakably his own... A world-class player, a stylist, a charismatic performer and original composer, his music now assuming simplicity of form and mellowness that comes with years of work, exploration and experience. Tomasz Stanko – a true master and leader of European jazz."

In 2005 Stanko's "Suspended Night" won the Australian Bell Award as Best Jazz Album of the Year. In the same year, Stanko placed in six categories in the Downbeat Critics Poll – a significant achievement for a European musician.

The group continues to tour widely, and will be supporting the release of "Lontano" with a 20-date coast-to-coast North American tour in October.

### **Press Reactions to "Suspended Night":**

**Jazz Review, Editor's Choice**  
**Fono Forum, Empfehlungen des Monats**  
**Stereoplay, CD des Monats**

"Stanko's music has changed dramatically in the last decade. He has managed to make his music more accessible without removing the grit and verve that has always been his trademark. And so it is with this, his latest disc for ECM.... It's a strong group, characterised by Wasilewski's ringing impressionistic style influenced by Bill Evans and even more than on *Soul of Things*, the group's last outing together, Kurkiewicz's carefully executed bass figures make his presence felt and anchor the strong melodies that Stanko provides. The album has a consistency and unity that makes the individual songs feel part of a greater whole. Stanko may have mellowed but this album is a beauty."

*Stephen Graham, Jazzwise*

"Like 2002's *Soul of Things*, an artistic statement so conceptually rounded it was almost aesthetically perfect, *Suspended Night* is further proof that trumpet player Tomasz Stanko has managed to reach the other side of middle age with his adventurous spirit still intact. No doubt he's been helped by a group so young they seem to have made the transition from womb to bandstand without any intervening processes. ... The result is a relationship between four distinct and original voices whose private exchanges of deep musical secrets are darkly moving and profoundly uplifting."

*Stuart Nicholson, The Observer Music Monthly*

"Truth and beauty can catch you unawares. We get so used to their more plentiful opposites: the falsehoods of celebrity and advertising, and urban life's routine ugliness... So I recommend *Suspended Night* by the Tomasz Stanko Quartet. Put on your headphones and listen to beautiful music: not pretty, and neither saccharine nor sentimental; not weird nor even challenging – just beautiful jazz. ... Every chiming piano chord, softly nudged bass line

and fluttering snare sounds freshly minted, played with sheer youthful joy and Stanko's masterful trumpet floats over the top – sings, flies, exults, wails and cries with a restrained emotional power.”

*John L Walters, The Guardian*

”There is a marked development from *Soul Of Things*, where greater emphasis was placed on structure, less on improvisation. For *Suspended Variations* the reverse is true and Stanko, as Miles was inclined to do, seems to solo more as a marker for other members of the group to stretch out. Pianist Wasilewski is especially impressive: using the full length of the keyboard he dictates the pace and tempo, providing plenty of opportunity for dialogues with Kurkiewicz. Miskiewicz too has confidence in the adage that less is more and has consequently become a master of economy, adding dashes of texture with just the odd touch here and there. ... This album confirms that Stanko's compositional ability is becoming ever more refined, while his soloing oozes authority and commands attention. Essential.”

*Hugh Gregory, Jazz Review*