

The Guardian

April 23, 2004

by John Fordham

Tomasz Stanko

Selected Recordings (ECM)

When the pensive, haunted-looking Polish jazz trumpet legend Tomasz Stanko toured the UK in February, the governing principles that operated through 30 years of his jazz life seemed unchanged – don't stay in a jazzers' bubble remote from other arts, don't cut free-jazz loose from the traditions of Chet Baker and Miles, and don't let an international reputation alienate you from homeland roots.

Now in his 60s, Stanko remains a fascinating, mysterious, sometimes rather severe pioneer of a unique kind of east European jazz independence, and this ECM collection tracks that development from his debut for the label with 1976's *Balladyna* to 1998's *From the Green Hill*.

Dave Holland, John Surman, Jack DeJohnette and Jan Garbarek are among the sidemen, and though most of the sessions were under Stanko's leadership, two of the tracks are from albums by Gary Peacock and the late Finnish drummer Edward Vesala.

Stanko is a lateral thinker whose influences appear to come as much from movies, painting and poetry as from jazz. The atmosphere here is more often darkly meditative and wide-ranging in structures and references than it is jazzy, though an exhilaratingly-swinging Ornette Coleman influence is apparent in the offbeat, smacking drive of Gary Peacock's *Moor*.

More typical are the harmonically subtle slow dirges from which Stanko's penetrating sound erupts with its mixture of raw intonation and rhythmic surefootedness – like *Litania*, and the slowly intensifying lament *Balladyna*. *Die Weisheit von Le Comte Lautreamont* (one of two tracks from the 1996 Stanko classic *Leosia*) is a beautiful piece of tone-poetry. The other *Leosia* selection, *Morning Heavy Song*, draws on Stanko's Chet Baker affiliations, a melancholy slow original that sounds like a standard ballad.

John Surman is superb on bass clarinet in the imaginative quintet behind *From the Green Hill* (1998) that also included bandoneon player Dino Saluzzi – his mellow folksiness here perfectly complements Stanko's austerity. *Sleep Safe and Warm* and *Litania* appear from the trumpeter's tribute to a late associate, the film-composer Krzysztof Komeda – the first of these two being from Komeda's score for *Rosemary's Baby*. Of course, Stanko's rather monochromatic palette is not necessarily the kind of thing to lift your spirits on a rainy day – yet it's uplifting in its independence of spirit, commitment to discovery, and devotion to the art of listening.

IRISH TIMES

April 22, 2004

by Ray Comiskey

TOMASZ STANKO

Selected ECM ****

Stanko, who headlines the Bray Jazz Festival on May 2nd, has chosen well in this retrospective of his work for ECM over the years 1975-98. The bulk comes from the succession of marvellous albums he made in the 1990s - Matka Joanna, Leosia, Litanian and From the Green Hill - with two pieces from his 1975 label debut, Balladyna, and a couple from albums he made under Edward Vesala and Gary Peacock. Much of it is magnificent, successfully treading the line between freedom and emotional coherence unflinchingly embraced by such as Bobo Stenson, Dave Holland, John Surman and Jan Garbarek. It's dominated by Stanko's plangent trumpet, and suffused with a tart, painful and compelling lyricism. Although Select has a preponderance of slow tempos and doesn't fully capture the variety he can call on, it's an excellent introduction to his work.

JazzWise

June 2004

by Duncan Heining

Tomasz Stanko

Selected Recordings

ECM Rarum XVII

Stanko is currently enjoying the kind of international acclaim that has long been his due. With his current quartet of young musicians he attracted standing room only crowds during his American tour last year. This is no mean feat; it is rare for a European jazz artist to tour America, never mind fill prestigious venues and pick up great reviews from the likes of Variety, Time Out New York, The Washington Post and others. So this retrospective is a timely look back on Stanko's distinguished career with ECM. 'The selected tunes were composed between 1969 and 1994... from chaos to order, from fury to lyricism,' he says in the liner notes. Included are four tracks with the exemplary quartet he led in the early 1990s with Bobo Stenson on piano, Anders Jormin on bass and Tony Oxley on drums, taken from the albums Matka Joanna From the Angels and Leosia that with hindsight point to the direction of his current band. Stenson is an exemplary pianist, seemingly at home in any musical situation and perfectly compliments Stanko's music while the more rugged Oxley displays a side of his musical personality he prefers to keep under wraps with his own often recondite music. Stanko had a long association with the Finnish drummer Edward Vesala,

and three tracks represent this association, two from the memorable Balladyna. Perhaps surprisingly, his association with Krzysztof Komeda is celebrated by one track from Litania, his Komeda tribute album that perhaps more than any other - until his current success - brought his name before a broader public. standable in terms of what has gone before in the music, while providing a signpost for what would follow.

This reissue adds an unreleased version of 'With (Exit)'. Whether that contributes greatly to the historical record is a matter of opinion. For me, this album always stood up in its own right and the addition neither increases or reduces its significance. Nearly 40 years on, this is that rare thing - an important musical document and a damn fine piece of music-making.

JAZZ REVIEW

June 2004

by Garry Booth

Tomasz Stanko

:rarum XVII

Polish trumpet virtuoso Tomasz Stanko is the Scary Spice of ECM. He started out as an avant-gardist but became more accessible under Eicher. He describes his style as "predatory lyricism". This gives numbers such as "Sleep Safe And Warm" and "Tales For A Girl, 12" a certain creepy frisson. But he has the Milesian touch for creating a dark atmosphere, through the elastic time and somewhat bruised tone the horn produces. Stanko is enjoying a renaissance with recent well-received releases Soul Of Things and Suspended Night, so this is a good time for a retrospective.

JAZZREVIEW.COM

by Glenn Astarita

Featured Artist: Tomasz Stanko

CD Title: Selected Recordings: rarum

Year: 2004

Record Label: ECM Records

Style: Progressive Jazz

Tomasz Stanko is arguably, Poland's preeminent modern jazz trumpeter. As he selected these works spanning his prolific career with ECM Records, hearkening back to the '70s. Falling in line with the record label's Rarum series methodology, the artist selected these pieces from previously recorded albums.

He possesses a golden tone incorporated with a slight rasp, amid deft expressionism and thoughtful constructions of themes. A cunning improviser,

Stanko is comfortable exploring the freer scheme of things amid navigations into ethereal soundscapes and much more. Notions of passion, warmth, and simmering, improvisational maneuvers mark his sound and style.

The composition titled "Tale," is culled from his inaugural ECM outing, *Balladyna* and features bassist Dave Holland and the late, drummer Edward Vesala. Here, the rhythm section provides Stanko with a staggered swing vibe, accented with Vesala's polyrhythmic touch – where the trumpeter renders yearning lines via an open-ended theme. Highlights abound throughout, including a probing duet with pianist Bobo Stenson on "Sleep Safe And Warm." Whereby, this composition is culled from Stanko's 1997 recording, *Litania – The Music of Krzysztof Komeda*. As the musicians' ethereal musings are drenched with lament, sorrow, and a glimmer of optimism. Then again, Stanko injects a personalized and somewhat emotional approach into all of these compositions. Folks, these attributes cannot be taught in music institutions! Essentially, Stanko's finely honed craft is structured upon enviable technical gifts and a singular musical persona that provides the overriding mark of distinction. (Ardently recommended...)

JAZZ JOURNAL INTERNATIONAL

September 2004

by Simon Adams

TOMASZ STANKO SELECTED RECORDINGS (ECM :rarum XVII)

With only seven ECM albums to his name over 29 years, plus two guest appearances, Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko seems an unlikely candidate for ECM's rarefied :rarum treatment. Fame is always randomly awarded, but this retrospective, which includes material from his 1975 debut *Balladyna* up to some of his more recent work, shows why Stanko has deservedly made the transition from respected if relative obscurity to Europe-wide plaudits. His approach is stark and intense, his precise notes outlining asymmetrical phrases with an undertow of mysterious intent, "predatory lyricism" as he describes it.

Throughout, accompaniment is always sparse. His debts to the Polish composer Krzysztof Komeda are acknowledged (tracks 7 and 8 are Komeda's compositions from the album *Litania*, dedicated to the master), his own performances enhanced by association with ECM's finest, Garbarek, Surman and Vesala included. Despite the lengthy gap in recording covered by these 12 tracks, this is an informative compilation that flows with style, changing personnel notwithstanding. An outstanding selection by a master musician.