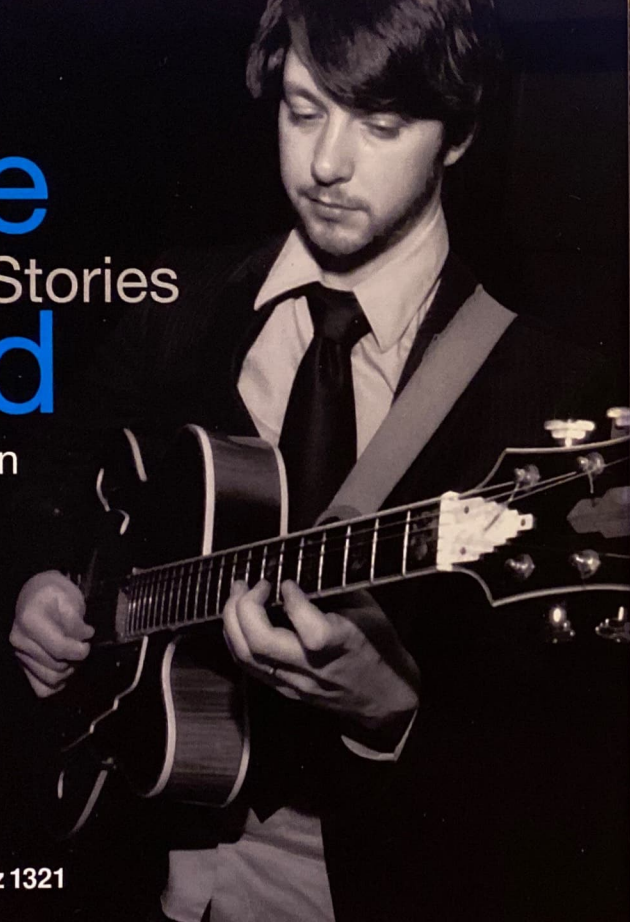


Lage

Unlikely Stories

Lund

Edward Simon
Ben Street
Bill Stewart



Criss 1321 CD

UNLIKELY STORIES LAGE LUND

1. **SWAGGER**
(L. Lund) 7.28

2. **FOLLY**
(L. Lund) 9.29

3. **WORMS**
(L. Lund) 7.42

4. **12 BEATS**
(L. Lund) 8.00

5. **TRUCKSTOP QUEEN**
(L. Lund) 6.48

6. **DRUM**
(L. Lund) 9.48

7. **LIFE AT THE BOTTOM
OF A LAKE**
(L. Lund) 7.00

8. **WHAT WE SEE**
(L. Lund) 10.05

TOTAL TIME: 66.52

LAGE LUND guitar
EDWARD SIMON piano
BEN STREET bass
BILL STEWART drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano
Mixing: Max Bolleman
Mastering: The Masters
Recorded: November 5, 2009
© 2010 Criss Cross Jazz

Recorded at Systems Two Recording Studios, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Photography: Mary Jane Farnsworth
Cover Design: Gerry Teekens/Bloemendaal in Vorm



Criss Cross Jazz, Postbox 1214
7500 BE Enschede, Holland
Phone (31) 53 - 433 03 38
info@crisscrossjazz.com
www.crisscrossjazz.com

All rights reserved. Unauthorized duplication is a violation of applicable laws. Made in Holland



Criss Cross Jazz 1321

Unlikely Stories

"I'm not sure I have ever seen anyone play the instrument that well."

We jazz critics try to avoid hyperbolic praise. But I stand by the above assessment, which I wrote in March 2009, after hearing guitarist **Lage Lund** with the David Sanchez Quartet at the Village Vanguard. Even more than his relentless, technically brilliant solos, what struck me was Lund's tonal clarity and unerring sense of proportion, his ability to fill the charged space of Sanchez's music with harmonic gestures of the most modest, pianistic sort. With spare two- or three-note voicings, as unobtrusive as they were weighty and resonant, Lund could make a tune feel complete, even overflowing. Here, it seemed, was a musician of limitless resources and unflappable cool, very much responsible for the aural thunderstorm around him yet somehow unfazed by it.

I'm hardly the first to be awed by the calm solidity and effortless swing of this 32-year-old, Berklee- and Juilliard-trained Norwegian native. Having won the prestigious Thelonious Monk Guitar Competition in 2005, Lund has gone on to perform with Sanchez, Jimmy Greene, Jaleel Shaw, Marcus Strickland, Will Vinson, Ingrid Jensen and more. He appeared on Seamus Blake's **Way Out Willy** [Criss 1288] and **Bellwether** [Criss 1317]. He also made his own **Criss Cross** debut in 2008 with the quintet session **Early Songs** [Criss 1307], which focused on exactly that: early Lund compositions, along with classics by Cole Porter, Bud Powell and Denny Zeitlin.

"I was already working on this new music at the time," says Lund of the material heard on **Unlikely Stories**, his worthy follow-up effort. "So this one is more a representation of what I've been doing compositionally for the last few years. Also, lately I've been playing more with a quartet instead of a quintet. That setting is very dependent on the piano player, and I knew it could really work with **Ed Simon**." A compelling bandleader in his own right, Simon can be heard on **The Process** [Criss 1229], **Simplicitas** [Criss 1267] and **Océanos** [Criss 1289 with co-leader David Binney], as well as three **Criss Cross** titles by the fine guitarist Adam Rogers.

"I've always been a huge fan of Ed's playing, even though we'd only played together one time before the session," Lund continues. "But he was the obvious choice, especially when I thought of the combination of **Ben Street** and **Bill Stewart**. I've played a lot with Ben over the years, with David Sanchez and others, so I know his playing really well. And I've been playing with Bill quite a bit with Seamus and some other bands. I hadn't really gotten to play with the two of them together that much, but I knew that was a very good combination." Stewart's **Criss Cross** appearances date back to the early 1990s, although interestingly, this is the first **Criss Cross** session to feature the in-demand Street.

Beginning alone, Stewart establishes the medium swing tempo of **Swagger** to lead off the program. Lund and Simon voice a serene melody in unison, but soon there's a shift of emphasis, as a dark, syncopated

6/4 figure for bass and piano emerges. Lund soon soars into flight, but when the baton passes to Simon, the tempo drops out and a brief, wide-open rubato dialogue ensues. "I play over the whole form and it's very involved harmonically," says Lund, "so after having that happen, I wanted just E minor, where it could be anything. It worked out just as I was hoping. It's one of my favorite moments on the record, a piano solo that's really a collective group thing."

With the staccato bass jabs and angular shapes of *Folly*, Lund wades into odder territory at first, adding some distorted bite to his sound, although he varies the texture with the spacious straight-eighth feel of the solos. (The tune is "somehow related to the trouble that ambition can get you into," he says.) Of the memorable sashaying figure in the main theme, then underlying the beginning of the piano solo and reentering just after it, Lund explains: "I wanted each part to have spaces built in where other parts would cover. It's almost like one really busy part broken up into three different ones, for different instruments. I was trying to experiment with the space, the placement of different functions. I wanted to get away from, 'Here's the chord, here's the melody.'"

The lively *Worms* begins with another sonic departure: Stewart fulfills a percussionist's role, marking out an off-kilter rhythm on the wood of the drums. "It's in nine, or three bars of triplets," says Lund, "but the basic idea is a grouping of five and then four. I was trying to find an alternative to the regular way of breaking three into two, so it has that strange

crookedness. That's what Bill is playing, and that's what I wrote for the bass, but when we played it I decided to take the bass out completely on the A sections and just have Bill and Ed refer to that rhythm." And the title? "The way the melody moves, it's very stepwise and it reminded me of a worm's motion. One movement at a time. On the A's I was asking Bill to play no cymbals, and Ed to play voicings really low and murky. So the A section is almost like being in the dirt, and then when you get to the B it's all cymbals, chords are voiced higher, so it's like coming out of the dirt and into the light."

In some ways, *12 Beats* is a straightforward blowing tune with a peppy Brazilian lilt. Lund follows Simon in the solo rotation and both play with fire. But there are surprising offshoots built in, like the tight figure that the whole band must execute — the one that ultimately supports the drum solo toward the end of the take. "It's almost like a pop hook," notes Lund. "Those ideas come from playing with David [Sanchez] so much the past few years. They tend to come out in these bizarre rhythms." And the title speaks to another subtle detail: "For no particular reason it's got these 12 beats of C major at the end of the form. I guess it's my Christmas song [laughs]. That's what I really enjoy about it, when it finally gets to the home key it stays there for this strange amount of time. So even though it settles, it never really settles."

Lund introduces *Truck Stop Queen* with an unaccompanied solo, setting the mood for the haunting rubato that prevails on this tone poem.

The band joins and the melody begins to flower, as brush and cymbal sonorities, probing bass patterns and sweeping piano harmony fill the space around Lund's initially solitary voice. There's a solemnity to the tune that belies its humorous origin. "My wife's name is Joy and her middle name is Darlene, and she made this little song about herself that went, 'Joy Darlene, the truck stop queen.' She was also complaining that I hadn't written a song for her. So I wrote this, and it was very easy, one of those where you sit down and it's almost already there. A good truck stop ballad."

The foundational bass line of *Drum* suggests something dark and ominous. "The title came from the rhythm of the melody, which is the first thing I heard," Lund remarks, "and I thought of it being played on a drum." Guitar and piano state the melody an octave apart in the A section, which is an odd 11 bars in length. The B section lifts the darkness with ethereal pedal-point harmony, and the form ends on a strongly resolving cadence — not what we expected from the low-register fog at the beginning. Street solos first, paving the way for Simon and then Lund, entering at full steam as the rhythm section bears down. "It's really a very straightforward medium swing tune," Lund says, "but the harmony is a bit unusual for that context. It's more triadic and voice-led in ways that aren't all that common."

Life at the Bottom of a Lake, a ballad, finds Stewart highlighting the legato beauty of the melody with airy cymbals, maintaining a steady pulse while preserving a loose, floating feel. "This was one of the things I wrote

specifically for the session," says Lund. "I was on tour in Chicago for a week and didn't have too much access to a piano. I found one that wasn't very good but it sounded nice in the really low registers. So I started to write the whole thing in this murky, dark area of the piano. That led the harmony to have a certain quality, and the melody was very specific rhythmically. The range of the harmony made me think of the bottom of a lake."

Of *What We See*, the closing track, Lund recalls: "I wanted to try and write something that had sections from completely different worlds and see if I could make that work, but still have that abrupt shift from one to the other. So the main A section is a very loose 12/8 triplet feel, and the harmony is kind of functional and more conventional. Then the B section I like to call 'the German section,' because I hear this almost militaristic, highly regimented rhythm. It's basically in two keys at once at all times, so there's a lot of tension. This is one we'd been playing on gigs a few times with Bill before, so it was pretty familiar to us."

The melodies and motifs of *Unlikely Stories* have a way of burrowing into the ear, and they highlight Lund's gift for simple communication — even if the surrounding details are anything but simple. "Usually I'll tend to write away from the guitar, either on the piano or even away from an instrument," he says. "A lot of times I'll start to hear a certain bass line, or a figure or rhythm rather than a specific chord progression. Also, when I write at the piano, just having that left and right hand, I can break it up a

bit more. At the same time, I try not to go too far in one direction, so that it's still fairly open and people don't have to stick to one part. I try to write as little as possible."

This leaves a band free to fulfill the goal Lund had in mind when he called this collection **Unlikely Stories**. It speaks to "the shape of the compositions, the way they're played," he says. "The idea of trying to end up somewhere other than where you originally planned."

David R. Adler

New York, January 2010