

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

WILL VINSON

Lage Lund

Aaron Parks

Orlando LeFleming

Kendrick Scott



Criss Cross Jazz 1330

CRISS 1330 CD

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME WILL VINSON

1. **SQUEEZE**
(W. Vinson) 5.45
2. **DEAR OLD STOCKHOLM
SYNDROME**
(W. Vinson) 6.41
3. **LATE LAMENT**
(P. Desmond) 7.27
4. **DEAN STREET RUNDOWN**
(W. Vinson) 9.24
5. **ICRONIC**
(W. Vinson) 5.31
6. **YOU WON'T FORGET ME**
(K. Goell-F. Spielman) 3.02
7. **EVERYTHING I LOVE**
(C. Porter) 6.26
8. **PARTY OF ONE**
(L. Lund) 7.11
9. **SHOW TYPE TUNE**
(B. Evans) 8.09

TOTAL TIME: 60.12

WILL VINSON alto & soprano sax
LAGE LUND guitar
AARON PARKS piano
ORLANDO LeFLEMING bass
KENDRICK SCOTT drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano
Mixing: Max Bolleman
Mastering: The Masters
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Stockholm Syndrome

Even as he juggles artistically rewarding gigs with the likes of Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Ari Hoenig and Jonathan Kreisberg, **Will Vinson** has never ceased building on his accomplishments as a bandleader. Sure, he's one of the most imaginative, technically adroit and in-demand alto saxophonists on today's jazz scene, but he's also a composer of ever-evolving depth, with a clear sense of priorities and excellent taste when it comes to putting together a group. All these qualities come to the fore on **Stockholm Syndrome**, Vinson's debut outing for **Criss Cross** (and fourth release since 2004).

Though he's based in Brooklyn as of 1999, Vinson is a London native. And there's no mistaking that dry wit — the English way of aloof understatement — when Will talks music. "I'm finding it very difficult to get bored of playing with these guys," he says in reference to the first-class roster heard on **Stockholm Syndrome**.

"Pianist **Aaron Parks** was one of the first people I met in New York, at Manhattan School of Music," Vinson notes. "He was about eight years old and coming out of the advanced rocket science program in Seattle, Washington [laughs]. I managed to convince him that I was an OK pianist, so we played duets and from the beginning we were bouncing a lot of compositional ideas off each other. Even now, in my writing you can hear elements of the things he and I have gotten from one another. Aaron knows exactly where I'm coming from as soon as he starts." A Blue Note artist, Parks brings to the table a wealth of experience gigging and recording with Terence Blanchard, Kurt Rosenwinkel and others.

Vinson's countryman and bassist **Orlando LeFleming** boasts sideman experience with Hoenig, David Sanchez and more; his prior **Criss Cross** appearances are

with Lage Lund on **Early Songs** (Criss 1307) and Seamus Blake on **Way Out Willy** (Criss 1288). "I didn't know Orlando in London," Vinson says, "but I heard he was moving to New York and needed somewhere to stay, and I needed a roommate. We started playing and I've learned an enormous amount from him over the years. He was a particularly strong influence on me, in fact, because he's amazingly self-possessed. He had very definite ideas about music, and he was very vocal and critical about them, which was great for me at that time. It's a pain in the ass now, but great at the time [laughs]." Asked whether their common origin accounts for their simpatico in music, Will remarks: "I never used to have any English friends in New York and I wasn't unhappy about that. But I think it would be dishonest if I said our friendship wasn't at least partly based on that."

Acclaimed guitarist **Lage Lund**, another of Vinson's closest musical associates, has added to his **Criss Cross** tally recently with **Unlikely Stories** (Criss 1321) and Seamus Blake's **Bellwether** (Criss 1317). "I met Lage a little bit later playing with Ingrid Jensen," Will recalls. "I love his harmonic sense, his unique and very individual approach to voice leading, his ability to see beyond the changes and come up with something else harmonically that still fits the framework of what I've written. And obviously as a soloist he's incredible."

Drummer **Kendrick Scott**, by this point a young veteran, has earned his stripes with jazz luminaries Herbie Hancock and Terence Blanchard. (He and Parks share the Blanchard experience in common.) Scott has also done fine work as a leader with **Reverence** (Criss 1316), not to mention his other **Criss Cross** sessions with Lund, Danny Grissett, Walt Weiskopf and Mike Moreno. "I played with Kendrick a fair amount a few years ago," says Vinson, "and I was very lucky to get him. It was really nice to play with

him again — it had been about three years and I think we've both grown. It's nice to have that element of surprise on the session, and Kendrick definitely brings it."

Vinson composes on the piano exclusively, and in the studio he aims for a balance of freedom and structure, giving sidemen their creative space but also exerting care and control in terms of orchestration. On this session the mix of piano, guitar and horn offered a great many options, and Vinson maximized them to beautiful effect.

Squeeze begins the album in a bright 12/8 feel. Vinson explains the title: "The exercise I set for myself was to squeeze everything onto one page. But it could also refer to the harmonic language, which is very dense and specific. I've been inspired by some of the sounds that Lage has been using, different ways to voice chords. Instead of having the fundamentals of the chord at the bottom and the extensions at the top, I've been figuring out ways to reverse that. You get this very sort of fragile sound, if you're lucky. So all those voicings are written out. But Lage doesn't really need to read that stuff because he has that vocabulary in his playing already." Also worth noting here is Will's choice of soprano sax, not his main instrument. "It makes me hear differently," he says. "And on this track you've got the really dense harmony, so you need a frequency that's going to cut through."

Dear Old Stockholm Syndrome, with its curlicue melodic opening and its pervasive structure of syncopated three-bar phrases, finds Vinson shifting back to alto as Parks works up to a remarkable unaccompanied solo, the tune's centerpiece. Again, Will helps us out with the title: "I've got everybody in very rigid roles that they're not allowed to break out of, like they're being held captive, and hopefully they'll learn to love their captors

and end up playing some great stuff, which I think they do." Avoiding the tried-and-true sonority of left-hand piano/bass unisons, Vinson opted to have Lund double the bass line instead of Parks, while Parks fulfills the role that a guitarist might — "playing closed harmonies in the middle of the range while Lage dances around it," as Vinson observes. It's one of many resourceful orchestrating moments on the date.

Being an alto player, Vinson readily admits being influenced by Paul Desmond, and his reading of *Late Lament* owes a debt to the version with strings heard on the 1962 album *Desmond Blue*. But Will's appreciation for Desmond goes beyond the alto sax. "He has an almost classical sense of symmetry in his lines. There's an amazing balance of range. Just as a melodic improviser, I think he's actually kind of underrated. Plus this is just a beautiful ballad." Will deploys piano and guitar in stark unison for the second half of the A section — an arrestingly simple texture, and a subtle spinoff from Desmond's arrangement. "I definitely wanted that sparseness," Vinson notes. "I didn't want any chords for the first half of the tune."

Dean Street Rundown, a dark yet quick-moving piece with a distinctively arcing melodic figure, appears in a quartet version on Vinson's previous album, *The World (Through My Shoes)*. Vinson once lived on Dean Street in Brooklyn, but more significantly, this was the location of Freddy's Backroom, an ill-fated club where both Vinson and Le Fleming recorded albums and workshoped material extensively. "Freddy's was a casualty of this monstrous Atlantic Yards development," Vinson explains. "It was always my local hangout, an old-school, pre-Prohibition bar full of bizarre characters, with this back room that sounded really good. The song is a tribute to that place, and with the title I'm also recalling Sonny Rollins's '*East Broadway Rundown*.'" Adding piano on this version allowed

for a bit more harmonic drama, "something a bit more austere," as Vinson puts it. "Aaron filled the gap brilliantly, and Kendrick was under explicit orders to go nuts the whole time. I told him to treat it as a kind of drum feature."

Ironic is Vinson's way of collapsing three very different words into one: "ironic," "chronic" and "iconic." "I wanted to write a straightahead-sounding tune, a medium swing thing," he comments. "Not to fill a quota, but I wanted something we could relax on. Although it's actually quite difficult." Vinson is back on soprano sax, and he gives the piano and guitar a prominent and carefully arranged melodic role. "I just don't think you need to hear the saxophone all the time," he notes, and indeed he does his utmost to keep the textural combinations in flux.

The late Shirley Horn interpreted **You Won't Forget Me** on a 1990 album of the same name ("I'm part of memories, too wonderful to die," she sang). Keith Jarrett's 1993 version on Bye Bye Blackbird contains what Vinson declares to be "one of my favorite solos on a ballad, ever," and that sentiment is what lays behind the loving treatment heard here. Lund, on a rapturous-sounding acoustic guitar, offers a prelude before Vinson enters and plays the tune down just once. "That was a spontaneous decision," he says. "We wanted to do something short, and I thought that playing a duet would be a natural way to do that without it sounding truncated."

Vinson begins Cole Porter's **Everything I Love** with a tense but fluidly swinging rubato solo introduction, after which the band enters, instrument by instrument, sparking dialogue that eventually heats up to a cooking midtempo. For Vinson, there's a Jarrett connection here as well — the pianist recorded this song for his 1968 release

Life Between the Exit Signs (with Charlie Haden and Paul Motian). Paul Desmond, too, included it on his 1975 album Pure Desmond (featuring unsung Toronto guitarist Ed Bickert). To keep it fresh, Vinson plays it in E-flat rather than F, and invites Le Fleming and Parks to initiate the solos with a round of trading. "The arrangement was formulated during the countoff," Vinson quips, "and it's pretty much an everyone feature."

It stands to reason that Vinson, a devotee of Lage Lund the composer, would ask Lund to contribute a piece, and thus we have **Party of One**. "It's not a tune anyone else could have dreamed up, and it was new to all of us," Vinson remarks. "It helped the vibe that we were all feeling our way around it." Shrouded in ambiguity, with a mellow two-beat pulse and odd pauses embedded in the form, the tune highlights yet more canny orchestration — hear how Parks outlines the melody over the bass solo and then the guitar joins. "I like that Lage is not a change-by-change guy," Vinson adds. "Every harmony comes out of logical and elegant voice leading. On the face of it they're simple inversions, but the way they move is very creative and very Lage."

Show-Type Tune, by Bill Evans, ends the set with a compelling twist: a trio setting of horn, piano and drums. One could see this as a nod to the 1930s and the work of Benny Goodman with Teddy Wilson and Gene Krupa. Vinson accepts that, but also cites the work of Paul Motian — not only with Bill Frisell and Joe Lovano, but also more recently with Jason Moran and Greg Osby. The song pick was inspired by Motian's 1990 album Bill Evans, with Frisell, Lovano and bassist Marc Johnson. "This tune is challenging for the same reason that a lot of Evans's tunes are challenging," Vinson elaborates. "It's completely packed with changes. And it's difficult to play it without playing all the changes. If you play it with bass, it locks you even more tightly into that. I thought if we free up

Aaron's left hand, we could come up with something. I wanted Aaron to play the whole piano, because he has such an imagination."

Recording can be a daunting and somewhat alien process for jazz musicians, who spend the vast majority of their time playing live gigs. Vinson, who's busy with tours in far-flung locations and ceaseless work in the bars and clubs of the local New York scene, is no exception. But **Stockholm Syndrome** reflects his maturity and growing command of the studio session, that highly specific art. It's his ability to capture the charge of the live encounter without being indulgent that makes this album cohere and swing as it does.

"In some way the best thing is to just let go and see what happens," Will muses. "As a general principle that's the right thing to do, but when you're doing a record it's good to be a little more hands-on. You have to know what you're aiming for." Happily, he's hit the target.

David R. Adler
New York, July 2010