

A great start

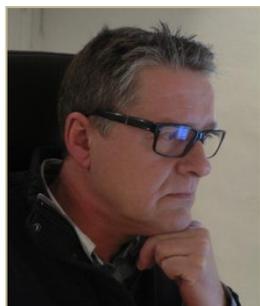
Welcome to the second edition of JLN. We've had a great response to the first issue, and to the launch of the Friends of Jan Lundgren. People have signed up for membership all across Europe and in places further afield, including the United States.

Many of you have also been kind enough to email me with your thoughts and questions, and with quite a few personal stories about Jan's recordings and performances. You'll find some of the feedback I've received on page 9.

Jan has been keeping up his usual frenetic pace. Since the October edition of JLN, he's done numerous concerts throughout Sweden, and he's performed in Denmark, France, Italy and Germany, as well as some more unusual locations like Turkey, Moldova and Russia. He had two releases in the run-up to Christmas – *I Love Jan Lundgren Trio* and *Jul På Norska* – and he's found the time to produce no fewer than three albums by new young Swedish artists (see the story on page 5).

Jan spent the first half of January in Los Angeles working on something that's going to be very exciting (although JLN is sworn to secrecy about the details), and there was a major recording session in France last month. We'll tell you more when we're allowed to. You can also expect the release in April of another new Trio album, *Flowers Of Sendai* – see page 2.

In the meantime, please do keep your emails coming. It's exactly the 'conversation' that JLN was set up to encourage, and it's great to hear from you.



Guy Jones

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Photo: Warner Music Sweden

Melodic development

Hard on the heels of last November's *I Love Jan Lundgren Trio*, the end of April sees the release of another new Trio album, *Flowers Of Sendai*. Jan talked to JLN about the recording, and how the music that he creates with Mattias Svensson (bass) and Zoltan Csörsz (drums) has developed.



“We recorded the album in Italy last summer when we were on tour there” explains Jan. “We went back to the same studio, Artesuono in Udine, that we used for *European Standards* in 2008. We also had the same sound engineer, the great Stefano Amerio.”

Flowers Of Sendai is produced by Jan's manager, René Hess, and it's on the French label, Bee Jazz, which also released *Man In The Fog*.

“Four of the tracks were composed by me, and there are two new songs by Mattias Svensson” Jan adds. “We also did a composition each by Richard Galliano, Paolo Fresu and Georg Riedel – three people I've collaborated with very closely over the years and whose work I admire immensely.”

Jan says there's no conscious theme to this latest album, unlike *European Standards*. “I realised while we were recording, though, that the songs have a strongly melodic character, both in terms of their original composition and our improvisation.”

This is the third album that this particular Trio line-up has made and it's been nearly seven years since it was formed. How has their music developed in that time?

“Mattias and I have been playing together for over two decades, so Zoltan was always going to get stuck with the 'new boy' label!” jokes Jan. “Obviously, he's had a hugely positive impact on the way the Trio sounds.”



Photo: Luca d'Agostino

“Zoltan's developed so much as an artist, and as a person. He was barely 30 years old when we started, so he was nowhere near as experienced as he is now. It's been amazing to follow him on that journey. At the same time, Mattias has been developing as a composer, and it's a real pleasure to play his songs. In fact, we've all progressed.”

“You know, in any musical ensemble it takes several years before you feel totally relaxed with and confident in each other. But now I think we're finally getting there...”

Musicianship matters

Joakim Bergdal has been Jan's agent for the Nordic region since 2007. JLN asked him how their co-operation came about and what his work involves.



“Jan Lundgren is a genius at what he does” says Joakim firmly. “His musicianship is simply outstanding: the technique, the phrasing, the sense of harmony, and the colouring and shading of the chords. And he can play in a large range of styles – everything from ‘contemporary’ jazz to the great American songbook. He’s extremely agile.”

Stockholm-based Joakim first met Jan when he was recording *Magnum Mysterium* for ACT. In fact, as a member of the Gustaf Sjökvist Chamber Choir, Joakim actually sings on the album.

“As well as performing, I was working as an agent at that time for artists like Barbara Hendricks and Lill Lindfors. Jan knew this, and asked me whether I had the time to help him too. Although he already had an international agent based in Switzerland, René Hess, Jan needed someone more local in Sweden to look after the Nordic countries. He’d been doing a lot of the bookings and concert organisation himself, and it was starting to wear him out.

“I accepted Jan’s offer because he’s such a high-quality musician, and I wanted to work with him. It helped, too, that I knew a lot of the older Swedish musicians Jan had been playing with, so we had a mutual interest in and knowledge of the industry.

“We even have similar interests in records, although Jan’s collection is vast compared to mine. I can assure you that there’s nothing Jan doesn’t already have in his personal library when it comes to jazz recordings or even sheet music. You’d never be able to surprise him!”

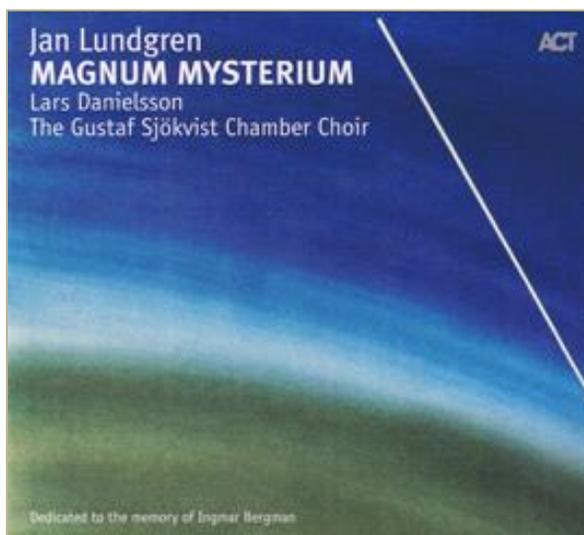
Joakim continues to sing professionally. He also plays the piano for his own enjoyment. This sometimes includes doing the pre-performance sound check for Jan’s gigs, “even though I tend to hit the keys rather harder than Jan” grins Joakim.

What’s the advantage to a professional musician of having an agent? “The main reason why it’s risky to represent yourself is that there will always at some point be a problem or disagreement between the artist and the concert organiser. This will inevitably affect your performance. My role is to take these problems away.”

Joakim has been an agent for over a decade now. “I still enjoy it” he says. “It’s not all about business. It’s about being personally involved in music.”

“But this is a tough industry which has become highly competitive. As a musician, you have to be so skilled today. That means really mastering your instrument, otherwise there’ll always be someone better than you who gets the offers and the work. So you need to practise, practise, practise – which is exactly what Jan does.

“It’s like being an athlete. You have to work out and train to stay on top.”



Concert news

For definitive dates and locations of Jan's performances, always check the 'Concerts' page of www.janlundgren.com. But here are some events to look out for in 2014.

Project	Location/timing	What's happening
2014		
Tribute to Bengt Hallberg	Eight locations across Sweden/14-24 March	"Our salute to a true Swedish master" says Jan. "Fabulous fellow performers, too: George Riedel, Jan Allan, Erik Norström and the Bohuslän Big Band."
Ystad Sweden Jazz Festival	Ystad, Sweden/ 30 July-3 August	"We're still putting the finishing touches to the programme, but I can promise it's going to be great." Register for updates at www.ystadjazz.se .
Jan Lundgren Trio	Europe, Japan & southeast Asia/autumn	"Essentially a promotional tour for <i>Flowers Of Sendai</i> – although I'm sure we'll be slipping in some old favourites as well..." Specific dates and locations to be confirmed.



Photo: Luca d'Agostino

How it happens: Part II

Less is more

In Issue 1 of JLN, we talked to Jan about how he composes. For Part II, we promised we'd go behind the scenes at a recording session. So JLN took a trip in November last year to STC Studios in Copenhagen.

STC Studios is in a decidedly unglamorous, semi-industrial suburb of Copenhagen. "I must have recorded here at least 15 times" reflects Jan. "But it's in such an unexpected location that I always think the taxi's come to the wrong place!"

Once you're inside the studio, it's a calm oasis of instruments, microphones, cables, speakers and all the other technical paraphernalia needed for recording. There's a large main room with a Steinway grand and several other pianos and organs, together with a number of much smaller glass-fronted 'booths' for each of the other musicians.



Photo: Torgil Rosenberg

Two heavy sliding glass doors lead to the control room, which is dominated by a huge solid state mixing panel with over 50 channels. "A big band could record in this studio" says an impressed Jan. The panel has hundreds of knobs and sliders, although the engineer, Andreas Hviid, uses hardly any of them.

"Digital technology means that I can control virtually the whole lot through this mouse and computer screen" explains Andreas, who sits at a separate and much smaller desk at right angles to the mixer.

The music coming through each input channel shows up on his screen as a series of sound waves. "I've been doing this for 13 years and, after a while, I started to see sound waves in my sleep!" says Andreas. "So now I try to avoid looking at the computer screen while the musicians are actually playing – just when we're reviewing the tracks afterwards."

So what is everyone doing here? We're at STC Studios courtesy of the Swedish label, Volenza, for which Jan has made three previous albums as co-leader of the Artistry Jazz Group. It's Day 2 of a six-day session to record a full-length CD each for three young up-and-coming Swedish acts: the Fanny Gunnarsson Quartet, the John Venkiah Trio and singer Hannah Svensson. Today is the second and last day for Fanny's recording.



Photo: Torgil Rosenberg

Left to right: Karolina Almgren (soprano sax), Fanny Gunnarsson (piano, vocals), Jan, Kristian Rimshult (bass), Hannes Olbers (drums)

A number of the artists are Jan's current and former pupils at the Academy of Music in Malmö, Sweden. "I'm only playing on Hannah's album" says Jan. "My main job here is to produce. Normally, other people produce me, or I'm producing myself."

"This is the first time I've been a producer for someone else. Fortunately, it's made a lot easier by the fact that I've taught some of these musicians and so I've known them for some time. There's less risk of anyone taking offence.

"Most producers are pretty hands-off, but things can get quite heated in the studio. I had sessions when I was younger where I wasn't sure if one of the other guys was going to turn up the next morning. I've seen some big, big disagreements during recording."

How it happens: Part II (contd)

But there aren't any arguments here. Jan's goal is to end the two days with 12 or 13 tracks by Fanny's quartet from which they'll pick the best 10 or 11 for the album. "It's always good to have more than you need" he says. "Some tracks will inevitably be better than others." Fanny is both a pianist and a singer, and has composed all the songs being recorded herself. She and the band have been rehearsing the material for months beforehand, often with Jan present. "That's when the songs really changed and improved" says Fanny. "They haven't actually altered that much since we've been in the studio."

Although situated in different rooms, the four musicians play their instruments in 'real-time' with each other. The only thing they do separately is Fanny's vocals, since it's unnecessarily demanding in a studio environment to play and sing at the same time.

As the band plays the instrumental parts of Fanny's song *Remember*, Jan listens intently in the control room and interrupts from time to time. Jan thinks the track is a bit too long, so he suggests shortening a passage, which the band then gets wrong. So they start again.

At another point, Fanny gets stuck on a detail in the piano arrangement. Jan leaves the room and goes to talk to her in the main studio. What does he tell her? "We discussed some technical stuff and then I said 'Keep it simple – less is more'." It's a very Jan Lundgren comment.

After the fourth take, Jan puts his thumbs up and announces "Very beautiful!" Everyone in the control room claps, the band members leave their booths and now it's time for Fanny to complete the track by recording the lyrics.

She gets up from the piano and enters a booth with just the hand-written lyrics. Fanny sings to the instrumental being played in her headphones. Then she stays where she is to listen to and change various passages.

This part of the process is extremely stop-start, because the attention to detail is phenomenal. Jan is determined to make the vocal as good as possible, which means Fanny having to sing small sequences over and over again. "It's so hard!" she sighs at one point. "No, you're doing great" says Jan encouragingly. The final step is to listen to the entire track again and correct any mistakes that may have been missed. It turns out that Fanny has made small deviations from the English lyrics she wrote, she took a breath in a strange place, and she occasionally got her pronunciation wrong.



All these little errors need to be changed – either by Fanny singing passages again, or by Andreas doing clever things with his computer. Like the part when Fanny sings "which" when she should be using the word "what". Andreas finds another place in the song where she sings "what", and then he replaces every "which" with this particular "what". Where the pitch is different, he uses the computer to change that too. "Yes, the technology is amazing" smiles Andreas. "But sometimes it's better not "to tell the musicians what you're doing with it!"

What does Fanny think of being produced by Jan? "He makes things a lot easier for me by not having to deal with every little technical problem" she explains. "He's like a communicator between me and the engineer."

"It's hard for me as the musician to maintain focus on what's happening at the same time as playing or singing. But Jan remembers everything that we could change and make better. He also focuses on the big picture, so that when we in the band get hung up on details, he helps us to keep sight of the main canvas."

Achieving that 'less is more' sound is incredibly hard work. "Of course it is" says Jan. "If it wasn't, it wouldn't be worth listening to."

Editor's note: Volenza released all three albums at a launch concert in Malmö on 3 March. You can buy them at good record shops and online at www.volenza.se. We'd like to send a warm thank you to Volenza's Torgil Rosenberg and Lovisa Rosenberg for their co-operation and kindness in allowing JLN to be present at the Copenhagen recording.

Being Jan Lundgren

Practise, practise, practise

What's it like to "be" Jan Lundgren? No, we're not talking about where he buys his clothes or what he eats for breakfast. Rather, JLN thought it would be fun to start a new series of articles in which Jan tells us what being a professional jazz musician involves on a day-to-day basis. For example, does he still practise?



Photo: Luca d'Agostino

"You bet I do!" says Jan firmly. "You *have* to practise all the time as a professional pianist. If you don't, you'll lose your dexterity and your ability to play difficult things. You really can't afford your hands or muscles to feel stiff, so they need to be in permanently good physical shape."

"I practise almost every day, often for as much as three or four hours. That's not always possible, of course – perhaps when I'm on tour and the hotel doesn't have a piano I can borrow, or when there are other pressures of work."

"The other important thing about practising is that it helps me improve as an artist. OK, I'm not as young as I once was, but I'm still a long way from being an old man. Practising is part of getting better at my work."

What does Jan actually practise? "Well, I do scales, but that's only a small element of it – probably just 15 minutes or so. The bulk of the time I'm working at my playing and compositional skills."

"I always enjoyed practising as a boy. I just saw it as 'playing', not as a chore. It was, and it still is, pure fun."

Want to become a Friend of Jan Lundgren?

It's simple and it costs nothing. Just send an email to guyjones@friendsofjanlundgren.com, stating clearly in the subject line 'New member'. Please also make sure that the email includes your first name, last name, town where you live and country where you live. Then we'll log you on our database, ready to let you know when FoJL starts putting its plans into action.

We might also begin emailing this newsletter directly to the Friends, as well as placing it on FoJL's website. So why not type the email address above into your computer's address book? That way you can avoid the Friends' communications being treated as spam by your email provider.

You can come off our mailing list at any time by sending us an email with the word 'Unsubscribe' in the subject line. And make sure too that you let us know if you change your email address.



Photo: Luca d'Agostino

Collaborations (No2): Jan tells JLN why he loves working with...

...Scott Hamilton

Jan did two Scandinavian tours in 2013 with the great American saxophonist Scott Hamilton (plus Hans Backenroth on bass and Kristian Leth on drums). JLN went to one of their gigs in Sweden, and used the opportunity to turn the tables on Jan by asking Scott about their collaboration.



Photo: Telegraph.co.uk

“After my first recordings in the mid-‘70s, I found myself working more and more in Scandinavia” recalls Scott. “The albums had become popular and I was doing a lot of gigs there by the ‘80s and early ‘90s.”

“I used to hear quite a bit about this guy Jan Lundgren from the people I was playing with, but we never actually got together. Then in the early 2000s I did a kind of Scandinavian feature week in London, and one of the venues was the old Pizza Express joint in Dean Street.

“Jan simply walked in one night and offered to play. Because I’d heard such good things about him, I naturally said yes.

“There’s no-one quite like Jan. He has a unique ability, in fact. He’s one of the few pianists alive today who can play in a tradition that comes straight from guys like Hank Jones and Tommy Flanagan.

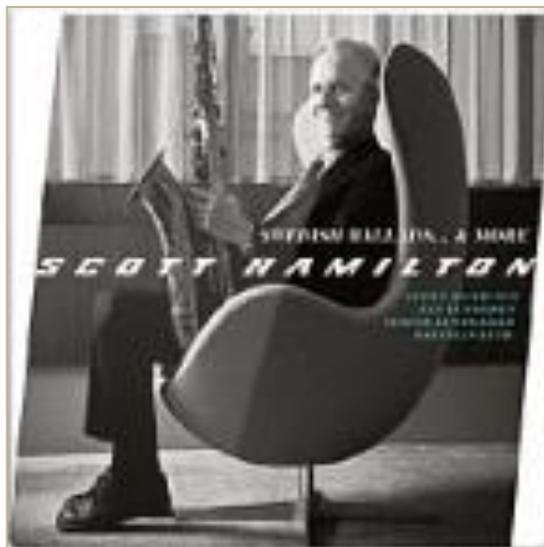
“Having said that, Jan’s not *imitating* anybody. He has an American approach in so far as the music we play is jazz. At the same time, I guess there’s a certain ‘Swedishness’ in his style – although not one that I can specifically define. The result is that Jan is very much his own man.”

Has any of this style rubbed off on Scott? After all, although he was born and brought up in the US and he lived in New York for 25 years, Scott has spent the last six years living in Italy and, before that, a decade in London.

“The musicians I play with nowadays are mostly Europeans. Yet I don’t know that I can see any discernible national characteristic to the way each of us plays.”

“What we actually have in common is the desire to play well. If you look at the recording I did last year with Jan and the boys, *Swedish Ballads ... & More*, I think we did a nice job and it got good reviews.

“But I guess we’ve done all we wanted to do with the Swedish theme. If I make another album with Jan – and I sincerely hope and expect that I will – it’ll be about something else.”



Some readers write

We had a range of kind and interesting responses to Issue 1 of JLN. Here's what some of you had to say.



Tord Alfredsson in Svedala, Sweden, emailed us with the observation that “I’ve been thinking many times: why isn’t there a fan club for Jan? And today I found it at Jan’s homepage!”

“I heard Jan for the first time at Malmö Academy of Music in early 1990. The students had started a jazz club and they arranged a lot of nice concerts. At the very first concert, a young and slightly shy Jan Lundgren said welcome and presented the star of the evening: Jesper Thilo, with Jan at the piano.

“I’ve followed Jan ever since, taking every opportunity to listen to him live. I always look for his albums at the music shops I go into, and I’ve got a lot of his records (except for some Japan issues). I found some new recordings in JLN that I’m going to order next week.”

Nils Nilsson in Svängsta, Sweden, wrote to tell us that he was born (in 1936) in the same town as Jan, and that he has heard “Jan playing the piano in his parents’ home... Jan is a very, very good piano player, and a fine man. He’s very well anchored across a range of musical forms and he has an incredible breadth. I’m really looking forward to his new records...”

We also had an email from Hajime Sato in Los Angeles, who congratulates us on setting up the new society and on “the wonderful newsletter”. Hajime runs Eastwind Import (www.eastwindimport.com), which is a California-based mail-order company primarily for jazz lovers, although it sells some classical and rock as well. If you prefer a CD (or an LP) to a download, Eastwind is a good source for some of Jan’s earlier albums – especially the recordings he did for Marshmallow in the 2000s.

Finally, we got an email from Giorgio Lacerignola in Italy (he doesn’t say which town). He politely asks us to send him a PDF of the sheet music to *Mare Nostrum*, which he describes as “one of the most beautiful pieces of music I’ve ever heard”.

You’ll understand, Giorgio, that the Friends of Jan Lundgren simply don’t have the resources to copy and distribute sheet music. Moreover, copyright laws make it a problematic area; the publishing rights for individual songs often belong to people other than the composer.

But your underlying question is a good one: is it possible to buy the sheet music for Jan Lundgren’s original compositions? Jan tells us: “There have been discussions in the past about publishing a collection of sheet music for my songs. But I’m afraid it’s never happened. I hope that one day we’ll actually get around to it!”

In the meantime, he’s kindly given us the sheet music for a piece called *Walking around*, written out by Jan in his own fair hand. You’ll find it at the FoJL website on the ‘Sheet music’ page.

