

Phronesis Walking Dark review, Jazz Journal **** 2012

Combining easy virtuosity with raw urban excitement, flowing melodies, elegant classicism and sophisticated polyrhythmic grooves, Jasper Høiby's Phronesis have been on a steadily rising arc since their formation in 2005. With successful European and North American tours behind them and several critical gongs including MOJO's Jazz Album of the Year for Alive (Edition, 2010), they're now back with regular drummer Anton Eger for their first studio release since Green Delay (Loop, 2009).

A fruit of Høiby's highly personal Pitch Black project, Walking Dark takes its inspiration from his visually impaired sister. Extending an idea first explored on Blackout (Green Delay), the trio have recently performed a series of concerts in total darkness. Forced to create music in an environment devoid of visual cues or distractions, the experience seems to have liberated hitherto untapped dimensions. Open-textured Scandinavian free-ballads seem to resonate with extra clarity (Passing Clouds), and heavy grooves which could easily overwhelm sensitive ears now appear that little bit more supple and yielding (Upside Down). The insistent pointillism of The Economist scoops the prize for high drama, and if there were a prize for song title of the year then the mesmerising shape-shifter Charm Defensive would surely win hands down.

Far from claustrophobic, Walking Dark is easily the trio's most varied statement to date. Long past the stage where they can be viewed with the suspicion rightly reserved for assorted flavours of the month, Phronesis have that rare combination of solid jazz credentials and zeitgeist. Highly recommended.

Fred Grand