

JYOTSNA SRIKANTH, MATS EDÉN, DAN SVENSSON & PÄR MOBERG

Nordic Raga Riverboat TUGCD1108

A fusiony, grant-getting on-paper concept project – that’s how it might appear from the title. But not so; this is magnificent, played by musicians who really know what they’re doing, music with a real focus.

In the opener Mats Edén’s viola d’amore on the left of the stereo bows slow winding phrases, Jyotsna Srikanth’s fiddle on the right answers in keening, Carnatic style while in the centre Pär Moberg’s soft soprano sax and deep low sax enter. The viola d’amore picks up tempo into Edén’s wild, double-stopped halling *Vildhonung (Wild Honey)*, the d’amore’s deep pitch and ringing sympathetic strings giving it a rich density of sound, as Dan Svensson’s big single-headed hand-drums boom and splashing, jingling metals clash. The Carnatic fiddle takes an ecstatic raga break, before all return to the halling.

It makes so much sense, and so does the whole album. There are high, cascading wordless vocals from Svensson, shifting, edgy fiddle drones, solkattu vocal raga mnemonics, traditional Swedish dance tunes meeting the shapes and twists of raga as if they were made for one another.

The quartet was put together by multi-percussionist and vocalist Svensson (of ensembles often praised in *fR* reviews, including Alla Fagra, Tarabband, Yölariis, and with Emilia Amper), and saxist and flautist Moberg, whose brilliant soprano sax soars over or sits right in the middle of the dance tunes, tracking, harmonising or counterpointing with the fiddles or, in Srikanth’s composition *Folk Dreams*, deeper saxes multitracking with percussive honk and velvety depth-plumbing lines, switching in *Slängpolska Efter Munkberg* to breathy wooden whistles and harmonica. I saw him in masterly duet with Norwegian accordeonist Jo Asgeir Lie at the first Vaka festival in Iceland, but generally Moberg is not as famous outside Sweden, or even perhaps in it, as he deserves.

To make this perfectly-balanced quartet they invited UK-resident Bangalore-born virtuoso of the Carnatic violin Srikanth, and on viola d’amore Edén, a musician and composer who’s been hugely influential in Sweden’s folk music for decades in Groupa and much else. All three Swedes have clearly long absorbed a lot of Indian music, and Srikanth’s facility with Swedish tunes is flawless and spirited. There are no cultural collisions, just empathy, mastery and sense of shared direction.

It’s powerful, subtle, glorious and, indeed, culturally significant.

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