



Mongrel – *thick as thieves*

A Norwegian band with a Japanese pianist, recording an album in the Spanish countryside, mixing American jazz and European art music with a touch of Latin – this quartet certainly lives up to its name! Generally used to describe cross-bred animals, particularly dogs, the word “mongrel” is often not a compliment. However, despite their rugged appearance, mongrels are often mild and caring creatures, full of personality and quick to become family favourites (speaking from experience!).

The mixing of genres characterizes many creative bands on the Norwegian music scene. With established genres so fully explored and virtuosity almost commonplace, today’s challenge is to combine existing influences in an original way (or maybe this has always been the case). Add your own personal voice and the courage not to hide your imperfections and you just might be on to something original.

Thick as Thieves is Mongrel’s second album but the first featuring Ayumi Tanaka on piano. The recording spanned three days at Studio Barxeta, set among oranges and clementines near Valencia, Spain. The album’s opener, *Strömningar*, was the session’s very first take, establishing the calm but energetic mood the band had envisioned. It also provides a good example of

Mongrel’s compositional method: a written framework with spaces left for spontaneous contributions and ideas. The album’s title tune *Thick as Thieves* was written by trumpeter Thomas Litleskare as a homage to long-lasting friendship – but could also describe the close teamwork and interaction within the band itself.

Offering a set of 9 subtle miniatures, mostly painted in minor, this album is a step up from Mongrel’s previous work and a very promising example of what these four musicians have to offer.

Hayden Powell

Thomas Husmo Litleskare is a 25-year-old trumpeter from Trondheim, Norway, currently based in Oslo. While studying jazz and improvised music at the Norwegian Academy of Music, he met his fellow Mongrels and became a part of the diverse and exploratory Norwegian improvised music scene. Also associated with the experimental rock band Karokh and the 50s cool jazz act Baker Hansen, he formed Mongrel as a creative playground for his preferred way of composing: the composition being a framework to operate within, a vehicle for improvisation. “Thick as Thieves” is Litleskare’s sixth album release, and Mongrel’s second.

Ayumi Tanaka (b. 1986) is a Japanese pianist and composer. Inspired by Scandinavian jazz and free improvised music, she moved to Oslo in 2011 to pursue her fascination for this particular art form. She quickly made her mark upon the Norwegian capital's jazz scene, and went on to form Ayumi Tanaka Trio with Per Oddvar Johansen and Christian Meaas Svendsen. Tanaka's first release in Norway was with the band Nakama in 2015, led by Christian Meaas Svendsen, that was quickly followed up by "Memento" with her own trio in 2016. "Thick as Thieves" is Ayumi's first album with Mongrel.

Stian Andreas Egeland Andersen (b. 1988) hails from Stavanger, Norway, and currently works as a bassist and composer in Oslo. After studying double bass with mentors such as Bjørn Kjellemyr and Arild Andersen, he has toured regularly and released records with bands such as Baker Hansen and Holum Trio. Being the other active composer in Mongrel, his tunes are often quirky and playful, as mongrels often are. The current album release is Andersen's fourth overall.

Tore Flatjord is a 29-year-old drummer based in Oslo. Mentors such as Thomas Strønen, Jon Ebersson and Pål Thowsen has made his background is versatile and eclectic; besides working with Mongrel, he also plays darbuka in the ragainfluenced band Moksha, 50s cool jazz with Baker Hansen and progressive rock with The Switch. Being one of the most active drummers in Oslo, "Thick as Thieves" is Flatjord's tenth album release as a recording artist, and his second with Mongrel

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