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Tore Brunborg / Kirsti Huke: *Scent of Soil*
Hubro

That *Scent of Soil* opens exclusively with the crystal clear voice of Kirsti Huke says much about this splendid debut collaboration with Norwegian saxophonist Tore Brunborg. It's first and foremost a vocal-based album and one that's considerably more song- than jazz-oriented. Joined by Petter Vågan (electric guitar, acoustic guitar, lap steel), Rune Nergaard (electric bass), and Gard Nilssen (drums, percussion, vibraphone), the duo presents a solid, nine-song set that finds the singer augmenting her own lyrics with texts by revered American poets Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson; in keeping with the album title, all of the songs express a connection to nature, and bolstering the recording's appeal is the ease with which the quintet deftly moves from a rock style to ballads and bluesy settings.

The opening piece "Breeze" is distinguished by much more than the fact that its lyrics are by Frost. There's Huke's vocal, of course, which not only honours the poet's text with a clearly enunciated performance that might remind many a listener of Susanna Wallumrød (of Susanna and the Magical Orchestra), but also the group's restrained acoustic rendering of the song. Another pleasure is hearing its gently soaring vocal melody intertwine with the purr of Brunborg's sax. In its restrained, electronically treated arrangement, "Necklaces" likewise gives full exposure to the beauty of Dickinson's words. Stepping away from the opener's dreamy ballad style, "Ocean" begins in funk mode with the band digging into an earthy attack that Huke's nevertheless able to nimbly navigate. "Go Charm!" even finds the band letting loose with a few moments of free improv in between the more structured albeit raucous episodes that comprise the song, as Huke sings with wild abandon during a roaring second half that's powered by Vågan's raw shredding. In marked contrast, the closing title track opts for an acoustic vocal ballad treatment that eases the listener out gently.

Echoes of Jan Garbarek are sometimes detected in the blustery playing of Brunborg, who is known for his work in Masqualero and recently contributed to Mats Eilertsen's superb *Sky Dive* release, while Huke brings a background in rock and jazz to the project, as heard on the 2007 *Deloo* (which includes jazz standards plus covers of Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here" and Bob Dylan's "Not Dark Yet") and the 2009 *Kirsti Huke* albums. While a number of Brunborg spotlights do lend the album a jazzier flavour (the extended solo in "Floating," for example), *Scent of Soil* is not, as stated, a jazz recording. If anything, it's rather reminiscent of the recordings Joni Mitchell made so many years ago when she brought musicians such as Jaco Pastorius and Tom Scott into the fold to help stretch her music into adventurous new areas.

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