

**Jakob Bro / Joe Lovano**  
**Once Around the Room**  
**A Tribute to Paul Motian**

**Joe Lovano:** tenor saxophone, tarogato; **Jakob Bro:** guitar; **Larry Grenadier:** double-bass; **Thomas Morgan:** double-bass; **Anders Christensen:** bass guitar; **Joey Baron:** drums, **Jorge Rossy:** drums

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A deeply felt and utterly original homage to a common inspiration and beloved colleague – the late, great drummer-composer Paul Motian – *Once Around the Room* is also the first album co-led by the Danish guitarist Jakob Bro and US saxophonist Joe Lovano. Bro conceived of a special band for the project, convening what Lovano calls “a mini orchestra” for the Copenhagen studio session, which took place 10 years to the date since Motian died in 2011, at age 80. The textured septet features three bassists (Larry Grenadier and Thomas Morgan each on double-bass, plus Anders Christensen on bass guitar) and two drummers (Joey Baron and Jorge Rossy), all players who have worked together in various combinations as well as recorded for the label in recent years. Along with two Motian-influenced originals each by Bro and Lovano, *Once Around the Room* includes a group improvisation and an especially dynamic rendition of a vintage Motian composition: “Drum Music.” The previous ECM work by both of the co-leaders has been widely praised, with *The New Yorker* declaring that “Lovano can render a musical phrase into a poem”, and *DownBeat* noting that “Bro’s guitar is luminous... his music both hypnotic and dramatic.”

Lovano – who toured and recorded in Motian’s peerless trio with guitarist Bill Frisell for three decades (1981-2011) – explains the new album’s title: “Paul would jog most every day around the reservoir in New York City’s Central Park, and he had a tune referencing that ritual called ‘Once Around the Park.’ And for our Copenhagen recording, we were all gathered together in a sort of circular situation in the studio, so it felt like we were going around the room as we played the pieces and took solos.” Musing on what he learned from working so intimately with Motian, Lovano added: “What I think about every time I’m on the bandstand or in the studio is something I really gleaned from Paul: that music should be about deep breathing and close listening. You should lead and follow at the same time, share the space and let the music carry you. It’s not about demonstrating your instrumental virtuosity as much as it’s about the art of improvising, being in the moment and really present with the music. “

Bro, who made his ECM debut on Motian’s *Garden of Eden* album, says: “What I loved so much about Paul’s music was its aesthetic sensibility, both in the way that he played and the way that he composed. Whether he was playing his own music or standards, it was always clear that it was Paul Motian. The way he put people together and organized his bands was also inspiring. Most personally, the harmonic universe of Paul’s compositions was vital in my search for something individual in my own song writing. Gradually, I moved from my tunes being directly related to Paul’s to where I could

connect his influence and ideas to more of a Nordic tone. I started relating to the music of my childhood, whether it was psalms or folk tunes, and began building bridges between the worlds of my various influences. Paul's inspiration helped lead me to develop my own voice."

Bro first worked with Lovano in 2009, when the saxophonist joined the guitarist's trio with Anders Christensen and drummer Jakob Høyer for a three-night stand at the Copenhagen Jazzhouse. "I had been fascinated with Joe for as long as I remember: his sound, his rhythmic feel, his sense of expression," Bro explains. "I always hear the deep history of jazz in Joe's playing. But at the same time, he has his own tone and approach to music. His world of harmony points forward, too." Lovano returns the compliment, referencing the younger guitarist's sound – the harmonic shimmers, tolling lines and looped atmospherics. "Jakob is in many ways a great disciple of Bill Frisell, but he has his own vision of music and of life," the saxophonist says. "He's not 'a lead guitar player,' as such – although he can definitely go there. His thing is more of an orchestral sound, very creative. And he really was instrumental in the conception of this album."

Lovano's compositions for *Once Around the Room* include the twelve-tone, drone-laced piece "As It Should Be" (whose title nods obliquely to "It Should've Happened a Long Time Ago," the classic title track to the Motian/Lovano/Frisell trio's first album, released by ECM in 1985). That tune, and Lovano's evocative tribute "For the Love of Paul," both make excellent use of roiling double drums to heighten the ensemble dynamism; the piece also includes some of Lovano's most affecting playing on the album, plus a pealing solo by Bro. The guitarist wrote the balladic "Song To An Old Friend" (with Lovano carrying most of the melody), as well as the folk-like "Pause," where Bro's intimate playing weaves within the undertow of basses. "Sound Creation," the group improvisation arranged from an initial idea by the saxophonist, explores the ensemble's orchestral sound in an atmospheric way, with all the interwoven melodies invented in the moment (and Lovano trading his tenor sax midway to add a line on tarogato, his Eastern European reed instrument).

For the album's lone Motian composition, "Drum Music," Baron and Rossy feature both alone and together; the performance also includes one of Bro's grittiest solos on record, which Lovano matches with a squalling solo of his own. " 'Drum Music' was something of a theme tune for Paul's trio with me and Bill," the saxophonist says. "We would usually play it at the end of a set, sometimes just the theme and sometimes leaping off from it. On this record, we really dig into it! It's a powerful piece of music."

Reflecting on the session for *Once Around the Room*, Bro concludes: "Given the number of musicians in the group and everybody's busy schedule, what are the odds, finally agreeing of on a date that we could all do and then it happens to be same date as Paul left us? It was miraculous that everyone made it to Copenhagen in the era of Covid – Joe flew in from Paris, Larry from London, Thomas from New York, Jorge from Switzerland and Joey from Berlin, joining me and Anders here. It felt almost surreal when we were all gathered and ready to record – and yet there was such a warm and open atmosphere in the studio. We all had a connection with Paul, and it felt like he was in the room with us somehow."

*Once Around The Room* was recorded in Copenhagen at The Village Recording studio in November 2021. The album was produced by Manfred Eicher.