

## Jakob Bro & Joe Lovano: With Motian as Muse

### The guitarist and saxophonist have joined forces to honor pole star Paul Motian with a special album

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On November 22, 2021, some of the late Paul Motian's close friends converged on the Village Recording studio in Copenhagen. Guitarist Jakob Bro and tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, miraculously aligning numerous calendars, had convened this collection of singular musicians to record an album saluting the influential drummer/composer. Completely by happenstance, that date marked the tenth anniversary of Motian's passing—a touch of synchronicity that seemed to place the gathering on a higher spiritual level.

The result of that timely congregation—Once Around the Room: A Tribute to Paul Motian (ECM)—is the first recorded collaboration between Bro, a former member of the drummer's Electric Bebop Band, and Lovano, who spent three decades working with the honoree in an inimitable trio with guitarist Bill Frisell. For both men, and the project as a whole, Motian's connective capabilities and philosophy offered great guidance. "Paul has truly been present for me since I played with him," Bro says. "So I had been thinking about making something that was related to his legacy. And Joe is one of my big heroes. I've been listening to him since I was a kid."

Having previously worked with Lovano—now his labelmate on ECM, the imprint of many notable recordings by Motian as both leader and sideman—the guitarist reached out and floated the idea. From there it developed organically. "The creation of this album happened in a very natural way, from our [affiliations] with Paul and hearing each other through the years and being inspired by the idea of creating music within the music together, which is what Paul was all about," Lovano says.

In forming a septet boasting Larry Grenadier and Thomas Morgan on double bass, Anders Christensen playing bass guitar, and Joey Baron and Jorge Rossy on drums, Bro and Lovano nod to Motian's penchant for building unconventional ensembles. But more importantly, they also acknowledge his enduring associations. "All of the participants had a connection to Paul," Lovano explains. "Even Jorge and Joey, who never played with him but were in his audience. And he was in their audience too. Paul was hip to everybody on the scene. And throughout his lifetime, I think that's what inspired him most: It was all the relationships that he had with everybody."

Drawing on those bonds, the co-leaders and their bandmates deliver a program influenced by Motian's mutable compositions and fluid mindset. Lovano contributes "As It Should Be," a brooding journey along the borders of serialism, and the lengthy "For the Love of Paul," opening on a vertiginous melody and evolving through sublime interplay. Bro brings out the tender side of the septet with his touching ballad "Song to an Old Friend" and the lulling "Pause." Collective improvisation comes into the picture for the spellbinding "Sound Creation." And the ensemble dials directly into Motian's writing by interpreting his "Drum Music." "That was kind of Paul's theme and our theme for the trio," Lovano notes. "And he used it throughout his lifetime [with other bands too]." With the release of Once Around the Room, Bro and Lovano forward and formalize their partnership while partaking in the joys of giving and receiving in the name of their mutual friend. And when this project goes live at the Village Vanguard in May of 2023, they'll have greater opportunities to create new dimensions in shared spaces. "I'm really excited to explore this music on a daily basis throughout that week," Bro admits. "I believe, with this instrumentation, that we can really move in so many directions."