Jan Ciglbauer

THERE IS A SPACE BETWEEN RHYTHM AND MELODY

A MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF JAN ERIK VOLD'S PERFORMANCE STYLE

Introduction

Singing a melody with or without a text is an inherent part of every music culture in the world. In the majority of past or present musical cultures a singing human voice is the most venerated musical instrument. The association music – voice – singing is so strong that we usually do not question it. Within any one particular musical tradition, the evolution of singing styles and techniques seems to be mighty and continuous, so that there is always some kind of singing practice in a given music culture. In addition to singing there is also another way to use the voice as a part of the musical flow. It is a number of techniques that abandon distinct tonal pitches and in which their melody is very close to speech. Nevertheless, the rhythm of the spoken word has to be subordinated to the music, otherwise it is not perceived as part of it. Unlike singing, this other type is quite rare in terms of overall popularity and absolute number of performing artists. While the development of singing practices is evident and permanent, the existence of a spoken word practice resembles an underground flow of possibility which, from time to time, emerges in different incarnations and different musical cultures and styles. It can, however, build a temporarily striking cultural phenomenon which gains broad attention. In other words, the numerous forms of spoken word seem not to create con-

tinuous traditions, but rather, the possibility of combining the spoken word with music is latent and ubiquitous, laying there waiting to be explored. This is exactly what happened in the late 1950s with the birth of jazz & poetry (J&P).

Langston Hughes and other representatives of the Harlem Renaissance explored the rhythmic qualities of the black-American diction and introduced them to the sphere of poetry. The original hipster subculture, brought to life through bebop in the 1940s, spread to circles of white university students on the west coast of the USA. The beat generation admired bebop musicians and they carefully followed the development of the avant-garde jazz. Charlie Parker and Miles Davis were their heroes. Both jazz and poetry, moreover, lent itself to experimentation at that time. With the contemporary exploration of a poem as a time object, the way for a connection with jazz was paved. As Rexroth states, J&P spread from The Cellar to American cities in 1956 (Rexroth 1987: p. 71). Poets from the beat generation read their poems to recordings or with the live accompaniment of a jazz combo. After a relatively short period of in bloom at the turn of the 50s to 60s, the popularity of J&P began to fade out. However, this does not mean it disappeared completely. At the latest, from the mid-60s we can observe the development of performance poetry in two different branches. African-American poets like Amiri Baraka and The Last Poets or Gil-Scott Heron explored a style a few years later. This style was based on sharp rhythm with almost no melodic content and was accompanied by drums. This is the style that most likely nurtured the development of hip-hop. The other direction -the San Franciscan J&P -became attractive to European poets. It was not much longer before for this branch was established among European students and intellectuals and the seeds of small national traditions were sown. It eventually even found its way into countries under communist rule. In the revolutionary climate of the 60s J&P flourished and the performance style stabilized. Nowadays, there are two distinctive spoken

word idioms which originate in black culture as a result of developments since the 60s. In contrast to the treatment of text in rap, the text flow in J&P remained loosely pined to the main accents of the music. It depends on the performer's ability to close the gap, melt the word with the music, and make the listener believe they are hearing a convincing artistic flow, which always proves to be a challenge.

Our attention now turns to the main question of this study: How can the spoken word be part of a jazz performance? We will explore answers to this question through analysis of one exemplary performance by Jan Erik Vold. Vold is one of the most diligent representatives of the European J&P reception since the 60s and he is, unlike other performers, active to this day. He developed a very rich and unique style of spoken word that demonstrates the abundance of creative possibilities J&P offers. Based on a complete transcription of Wigwam, we will discover the ways the spoken word, despite many challenges, becomes a potent weapon in the careful hands of a musically gifted performer.

Theory and practice of J&P

The poet Langston Hughes is believed to be the first to read his poetry to music (Baumgartner 2002, p. 95). His poems have specific musical qualities that make them suitable for performance with music. He was probably present at the first J&P recording ever. The first track, Scenes in the City, on Charles Mingus' LP A Modern Jazz symposium of Music and Poetry with Charlie Mingus contains a narration by Lone Elders performed by the actor Melvin Stewart. Hughes «helped» Elders to «put it into shape» (Hentoff 1957). In 1957 and 1958, the first albums dedicated to J&P were released. Among them was The Weary Blues produced by Leonard Feather featuring Langston Hughes. Hughes recorded his poems separately and Feather pasted them to recorded music which was partly composed and partly improvised. A similar approach was also adopted by Kenneth Patchen. The musical

accompaniment to his recitation, made by Allyn Ferguson's Chamber Jazz Sextet, was composed as well but left room for solos. The text was set in the score in order to make musical references function. Kenneth Rexroth and Lawrence Ferlinghetti performed differently. In their first release, Poetry Readings in the Cellar, they read to the accompaniment of live jazz music by The Cellar Jazz Quintet. The wide variety of forms J&P can sound like is demonstrated on the anthology Jazz Canto which seems to have played a very important role in the European reception of J&P. Jack Kerouac chose more intimate accompaniment carried out by one pianist on Poetry for the Beat Generation or two saxophone players in the case of Blues and Haikus. The beat generation poets also recorded without any musical accompaniment. The recordings Selected Poems of Kenneth Patchen, Kenneth Patchen Reads His Love Poems, Readings by Jack Kerouac on the Beat Generation and Howl are solo performances.

From Kenneth Rexroth (1987) come some of the theoretical foundations of J&P. He aimed to justify recitation of poetry to music in addition to singing as an equally valuable practice. J&P does not mean only reciting with background music. He also provided us with a concrete definition:

> The voice is integrally wedded to the music and, although it does not sing notes, is treated as another instrument, with its own solos and ensemble passages, and with solo and ensemble work by the band alone. It comes and goes, following the logic of the presentation, just like a saxophone or piano. (p. 69).

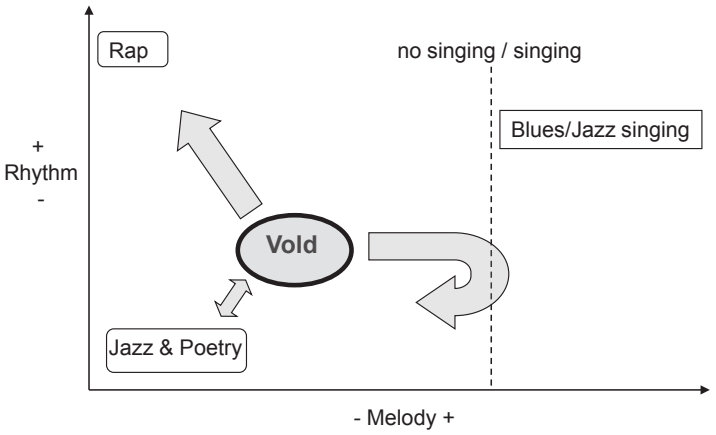
In addition to theory, Rexroth went after the social consequences of the composite form of J&P. Jazz can attract new audiences for poetry, and vice versa, only if the performers anxiously care for the fragile relationship of music and text by avoiding both shallow performances and feeding the fad. In fact, early performers would predominantly use a slow musi-

cal texture as a base. A minority of them, e. g. Bob Dorough on Jazz Canto, dared to read to fast moving compositions and experiment with tempo changes. The voice intonation does not exceed the boundaries of speech melody. Emphasis is, on the other hand, the natural text rhythm of the poems with its specific accents. A practical connection of music and text is executed through occasional congruence of musical and textual rhythms. Additionally, both musical and textual phrases can simultaneously begin to support the feeling of unity. In some of the J&P performances, music and text are interpolated. After a text phrase there always comes a musical comment. Another type of connection between music and text is the use of musical onomatopoeia. Creating a sound association with the text meaning is a common practice not only within J&P. This can range from various roaring, moaning, and other trumpet sounds on the word trumpet, to quotations from famous Christmas songs while reciting Christmas poems (Ginsberg 1989; Burrougs 1993). Although there seem to be many methods for music-text interconnection, without a truly varied rhythmic (and musical) approach, J&P is perceived as recitation with musical background, i.e. what Rexroth was worried about. Perhaps it was the rather experimental and chaotic circumstances of the few years that the J&P bloom lasted that prevented poets from developing their styles in more subtle ways. Regardless, there were great achievements from the 60s onwards. They, however, were made elsewhere and in different contexts. In general, more intense involvement of the text and music has been explored among black poets since the very late 60s. Even the original San Franciscan J&P style has been cultivated further in Europe and the development has tended towards a detailed working with rhythm. It is in the presence of these developments that the young Norwegian poet Jan Erik Vold starts his performing career.

Jan Erik Vold's Performance Style

Jan Erik Vold builds his performance style upon the theory formulated by Rexroth but he applies it with even more intensity than the San Franciscan poets and, surprisingly, more literally than the creator himself. What places Jan Erik Vold in another light is his broad knowledge of jazz history and a deep understanding for this music as well. On his visits to America in the late 1950s he was deeply moved by the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk. Another cause of impact on his musical preferences was the Norwegian concerts of Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday in the 1950s and John Coltrane's in 1963 (Tucker 2000, p. 190). Although, Vold's most conspicuous sympathy belongs to Lester Young (Baumgartner 2000, p. 219). This fact should not surprise us because Lester had an enormous impact on the melodic style and sound of the cool jazz movement as well as west coast jazz, a branch J&P was closely related to. Subtle hints to Lester Young's music can be found throughout Vold's discography. Lester's most famous solo -over Fine and Mellow from the CBS broadcast The Sound of Jazz -appears in the poem St. Paul og alt det der (1:32) on Den Dagen Lady Døde. Jan Erik Vold's decision to shape his reading in a style that is more compatible with improvised music than a loose reading with just poetic accents makes him from a practical point of view another equal improvising voice within a jazz performance. He stresses the rhythmic aspect of his performing. He also carefully watches over his use of melody so that his style is still distinguishable from singing. In other words, the border to singing is never fully crossed. He uses transitions to melodic performing to create contrast to his usual diction or, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, in order to create balance when the presence of melody from other players ceases. Vold's musicality, unusual among poets, becomes evident in the rhythm of his reading. Jan Erik Vold's lifetime hero Lester Young developed a distinctive light-toned musical language which seemed sometimes lazy or detached.

From time to time though, he played a perfectly timed phrase in order to prove that he was there and knew what he was doing, in case his lazy and detached style had caused anyone to question his talent -especially in the first years of his carreer when his style was often compared with the heavier playing of Coleman Hawkins. This is a rhythmic approach that Jan Erik Vold also extensively works with. He recites with a swinging triplet feel, sometimes using even beat divisions. The usual nature of Vold's performing can be described as a relaxed speech utilizing a rhythm that is in accord with the general metre and rhythm of the music, and similar to the way it is carried out by the beat generation performers. The speech melody he uses does not have perfect pitch like one that is sung but, at the same time, it does not disturb the overall flow. The most defining characteristics of Vold's approach are occasional excursions from his basic style, either to sung melody or towards more sharply executed speech. Both excursions, moreover, have a structural function. His ability to choose a type of execution in the moment, and one that depends directly on the musical flow at a particular moment, places his ability as a performer on an extraordinary level of complexity.



Jan Erik Vold's regular meetings with performance poetry began after he met Jan Garbarek at the Molde festival in the summer of 1968. In the following year, this encounter resulted in Jan Erik's first album Briskeby Blues. During the next ten years Vold and Garbarek released a few other albums and all share a similar musical approach. Those albums were HAV, Ingentings Bjeller, and the 7" vinyl Trikkeskinner/The småg Ting. Jan Erik reads alone, with drums, or his reading flows in rather experimental soundscapes based on simple vamps. Jan Garbarek's remarkable sound refers to the serenity introduced to jazz by the late John Coltrane and the soft free jazz sounding double LP Ingentings bjeller makes it a particularly great example of acoustic European jazz of the 70s. After ten years, Vold's collaboration with Garbarek found its end peacefully. Since then, Jan Erik Vold has been searching for new ways of expression. Perhaps as a consequence of neo-bop tendencies in the late 70s (Keepnews, 2000), Vold returned to the jazz idiom right before the modal and free jazz revolutions. He focused his attention on jazz standards in cool jazz or bop settings. They let him «dispose of the text better than the loose form on the first recordings» (Van Der Hagen 1993, p. 205), as solid forms they offered more support for this. Only recently on the album Blackbird Bye Bye, Vold partly returns to loosened forms.

The jazz standard period and Blåman! Blåman!

After a short collaboration with Kåre Virud, Jan Erik Vold recorded the album Den dagen Lady Døde with his own translations of Frank O'Hara's poems on which he had realized new ideas. The songs are adjusted to fit the poems. If the original is too long it is played only once. Shorter compositions contain a standard improvisation structure with both theme and solos. The album Blåman! Blåman! is a landmark demonstration of this new approach.

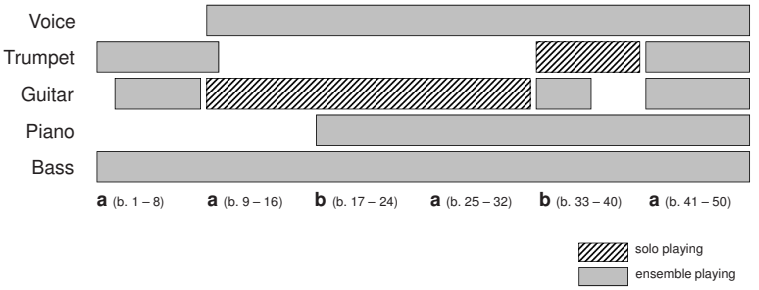
The recordings for Blåman! Blåman! were made on the 17th and 18th of February 1988 at the studio Sysmo in Paris.

Along with Jan Erik Vold were the famous trumpet player Chet Baker and the Belgian guitarist Philip Catherine. Chet Baker was a shadow of his former glory at the end of the 80s, but on this album he apparently performed one of his finest late performances. The band was completed by Egil Kapstad on piano and Terje Venaas on double bass. Jan Erik Vold depicted the circumstances of the recording in detail (1988). According to his description, the atmosphere in the studio was miraculous in a certain way. In some cases, only a single take was necessary to make a recording. All of the musicians could read the poems prior to recording sessions. There were also English translations for Baker and Catherine so that everyone knew the theme and atmosphere of each poem. With knowledge of the content, they were encouraged to think about how the text could be underlined and where and how they could interact with the words. Two facts may have contributed to the success of those two recording days. Chet Baker – as a prominent west coast jazz man – was already familiar with J&P thanks to his early stay in San Francisco in the 50s. Chet and Philip Catherine also knew each other very well because of their previous collaborations in the 80s. At the end of the sessions Vold and Baker agreed on further collaboration which, sadly never happened because of Chet's death in Amsterdam three months later.

Wigwam

One of the tracks on Blåman! Blåman! is the piece Wigwam. The musical basis for this poem, published in the collection S (1978), happened to be Johnny Green's ballad Body and Soul – one of the most played jazz standards of all time and a classic example of the 32-bar song form aaba. The length and structure of the improvisation is adapted to the poem Wigwam. In a mainstream jazz performance a standard improvisation scheme is used: head – choruses – head, which is not the case here. After the first eight bars, where the intonation of the theme begins, Vold enters reading the poem and

continues until its end without any major interruptions. The whole performance does not exceed 50 bars and there is only one full chorus and a second shortened chorus consisting of just ba. The scheme describing this particular performance is therefore aaba-ba. There is also not a piano or bass solo. The trumpet and guitar switch between soloing and comping, trying to communicate with each other and with Jan Erik's diction or the semantic flow provided by the poem. A graphic depiction of the performance is shown below.



The music is played in a relaxed cool jazz or quiet bop idiom with a second harmonic instrument instead of drums. Chet Baker brings typical cool jazz phrasing where a heard melody originates as a countermelody to the unheard theme. A similar approach in Lee Konitz's playing was extensively analyzed by Charles O. Hartman (1991, pp. 14-28). The presence of two harmonic instruments allows Philip Catherine to function more as a melodic voice. He is also the one that most frequently makes attempts to create musical onomatopoeia. The rhythm section complements the performance in a quiet way. Terje Venaas leads the bass line in the walking bass style. Egil Kapstad comps with only occasional stand outs.

The last musician to bring up is the poet. To become an integral part of this performance without melody, Jan Erik has various possibilities and tools which have to be used carefully. A base for every attempt at making recitation musical results from the common qualities of music and speech.

The most important are rhythm and melody. The problem is that the rhythm and melody of casual speech are usually not perceived as musical. Thus, without any change to the speech they seem to be barely compatible. Nevertheless, Jan Erik adjusts the rhythm of his recitation so that it naturally melts with the rhythm of music, at least from a strict musical point of view. This is the reason why Vold's recitation sounds more stylized than mere speech. There is also a possibility to sharpen the rhythm when needed. Creating contrast between highly rhythmical segments and passages where the recitation escapes from the rhythm became the trademark of Jan Erik's performance style. Regarding melody, something similar happens. The Norwegian language is by its nature melodious. Although the usual melodic nature of the Norwegian is preserved from time to time, the poet draws it nearer to the song, so that the reciting tones comply with the actual harmony. Therefore, significant tones in Body and Soul suddenly emerge at important places during the performance to support the melodic instruments. With the already mentioned changes in rhythm from triplet to even and unique phrase beginnings, he achieves what most jazz musicians aim to do. In addition to this strong musical base other common features of reciting with jazz do not appear to be important. In Wigwam it is possible to find examples of these simple musical characteristics as described further in the detailed analysis.

As a base for the analysis of Wigwam, the author of this text created a complete transcription of the piece which can be found enclosed. In the first 8 bars, Chet, Philip and Terje begin with the presentation of the theme. In bar 9, Jan Erik comes in with a diction based rhythmically on triplets until bar 16 where the first phrase -right before the b section is closed by a group of straight quavers on usynlig stige (invisible ladder). We can only ask if those straight quavers should remind us of the rungs. But, the expression of himmelens blå (the blue of the sky) with a rise to the highest pitch so far is unambiguous. An archetypical association with sky -to

sing on high pitches when singing about the sky is common practice in almost all cultures. In bar 17, with the beginning of the b section the triplet feel is reestablished. Later, at the end of bar 18, dramatic pauses interrupt the flow until står der de står (stand where they stand) which is delivered in a very weighty manner, perhaps a postponed echoism of ryddig satt opp mellom de… (orderly strung between houses…). Philip picks up that rhythmic movement creating a bright phrase consisting of Dmaj7 arpeggios. In bar 22 the expression stummende mørket (deafening darkness) occurs, illustrated by a deep pitch. Two bars further, Dén veien, dét mørket (That road, that darkness) is a good example of how Vold makes a gradation. Both phrases are expressed with the same rhythmic figure, but in the second the interval between notes is larger.

Bar 25 brings a complex of allusions. The phrase Vägen som ingenstans för (the road without direction) is in Swedish and the tone pitch is a minor second higher than would be appropriate for E flat minor and sounds peculiar. The German phrase Der Weg zu Dir (the way to you) on the contrary, has a clear melodic line based on A flat harmony. Even og så veien tilbake (the way back) is special – the melody returns mirror-like with the word tilbake (back). Jan Erik also plays with a different stylization of selected phrases. The exclamation vi lurte så på hvor det ble av deg (we were wondering whatever became of you) resounds in a significantly higher pitch because the speaker of this sentence is a woman. In the whole Wigwam performance such a high pitch appears only three times. The first moment was the already mentioned himmelens blå and the last can be found at the beginning of bar 37 over the words funklende øyne (sparkling eyes). This moment serves as the closure of a very striking section in bars 33-37 which will be considered next. It is the second b: aaba-ba.

Chet begins a solo with a powerful cantilena. Jan Erik attunes his diction to it, creating the longest sung phrase in the piece. He moves only in steps of small interval size, slowly

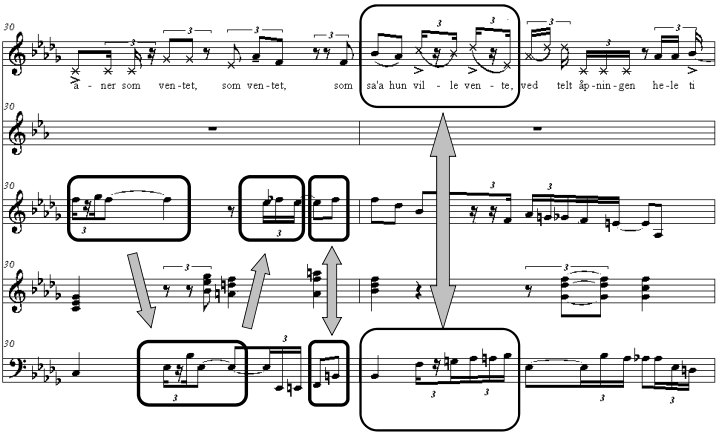
coming under Chet's melody so that Chet can stay in front. Chet, on the other hand, uses Jan Erik's pauses for melodic movements while holding notes during the poet's phrases, most clearly in bars 34 and 35. The poem contains a semantic triad bålet på peisen – flammene frå bålet – ilden inne i de flammene (the fire burning, the flames of the bonfire, the blaze of those flames) in bars 35 and 36. The musical expression underlines the semantic gradation. Each of the further two phrases begins gradually on a higher note. The third has more accented diction. Another triadic moment occurs within bars 37 and 38. This second example serves as a good demonstration how a natural speech cadence is applied to the song melody. var der brune? var de blå? blanke var de,… (were those eyes brown? were those eyes blue? all aglow is what they were) – both questions have an ascending melody whereas the answer is descending – all that happens within actual harmony.

From bar 40 onwards, the performance is coming to its end and the recitation calms down in a matter of abrupt style changes and dramatic pauses. Occasionally, text phrases overflow the bar boundaries and the first beat in bars 40, 41, 42 and 43 are emphasized even if in a natural diction there would not be such accents. At the very end, recitation and singing styles are switched several times but the changes have a calm character.

Concerning purely musical communication, most of the echoing and reactions are bound to the recitation line. There is a long passage filled with communication between Vold and Catherine in bars 9 -32. This long passage is a showcase of various interplay techniques. First, two independent lines -the guitar plays an inner dialogue with the Body and Soul melody – and second, a line-up in bars 15-16 for a homorhythmic closing of the second a on usynlig stige. Then with b, bar 17, Egil Kapstad finally enters with chords allowing Philip to be the melodic voice again, and this time, continue more or less homorhythmically with Jan Erik for another four bars

until bar 20. After a short use of chords in two bars 24-25, Philip returns with an even more rapid figuration in demi-semiquavers whose movement resembles spiralen mentioned in bar 26. Shortly after that he slows his motion to introduce Chet's solo which opens in bar 33. Before that, however, one of the tightest moments in the whole performance occurs.

In bar 30, as indicated in the picture, Terje captures Philip's riff, producing a very impressive interchange with a subsequent rhythmic unisono lasting the whole bar. Jan Erik must have noticed it and he immediately attempted something similar with Terje at the beginning of bar 31. Why did he succeed? Bar 31 is the second from last bar of the third a section: aaba-ba. In both previous a sections, Terje played this exact riff over B flat minor at identical points-see the beginnings of bars 7 and 15. Jan Erik correctly assumed that this a would not be different and managed to react -in a fraction of second.



Another place of touching rhythmic congruence can be heard in the second half of bar 36. Jan Erik lines up with the pianist's ascending chords played in triplets reciting glimtet i et par funklende øyne. During the last a section -bar 41 onwards -Chet and Philip lead a calm dialogue until the very end. To make a bop performance varied musicians have a

possibility to change their functions, i.e. what and how they play. Scott LaFaro demonstrated that even a bass player can become another melodic voice momentarily when he played in the Bill Evans Trio at the beginning of the 60s. Guitar and piano, the harmonic instruments, can play either chords or melodies. Melodic instruments like saxophone or trumpet can switch between an ensemble or soloing style. A poet has possibilities as well. Jan Erik, specifically, changes the melodic style. A speech melody whose pitches are not exact is used when there is an instrument playing the melody. In fact, in the first b part -bar 17 and onwards – there is a good example of this situation. However, when there is no other melody and the harmonic instruments are playing chords only, Jan Erik switches to singing melodically so that the melody is always present in some form. We can hear this in bar 15. Shortly after that -during Philip's solo, Jan Erik returns back to speech. A further example of this approach is found in bar 46. The melodic movement in both trumpet and guitar parts has already ceased in the previous bar and Jan Erik, after noticing this, sings the word himmelyset. It is not always necessary for the musicians to free up space for others. They can sing together like Jan Erik and Chet do in bars 33-35, at the beginning of Chet's solo.

Conclusion

A jazz player has to evolve his own personal voice by shaping rhythm, melody and phrasing in his own way. This will make him recognizable to the audience. A poet with ambitions to be perceived as a musician must therefore work on rhythm and phrasing. The effort to be a part of the performance while relinquishing the sung melody on the one hand characterizes J&P and creates its identity. On the other hand, it may prove to be a hard koan for everyone who tries to solve it. A common notion suggests that you can only be fully inside the music when you sing. Then, however, you are not a J&P performer anymore. This may lead to a frustrating feeling that, with a

limited amount of possibilities, you are soon short of ideas. As we can observe, Jan Erik Vold has found his own way to this koan. From a rhythmic and improvisational point of view he behaves as a musician and surprises the listener by bringing up new expressions and communicating with other players. In the main volume of his reading with music, though, he replaces the singing of melody with a speech based recitation. This guarantees that his performing is apprehended as recitation. He found a base from which he can go either towards pure rhythmic speaking or in the opposite direction, towards melody in the customary and universal sense. In European music singing is the unity of rhythm and melody. Jan Erik Vold found a pleasant space between them.

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