

## Emil Viklicky & George Mraz: Mraz & Viklicky: Together Again (2014)

By IAN PATTERSON, Published: March 21, 2014

In European jazz the assimilation of folkloric influences has become commonplace as the American vernacular—or more specifically the Great American Songbook—exerts less of a hold. Czech musicians pianist Emil Viklický and bassist George Mraz's collaborations on *Morava* (Fantasy/Milestone 2001)—with drummer Billy Hart and singer Zuzana Lapcikova—and *Moravian Gems* (Cube-Métier 2007) with singer/violinist Iva Bittova and drummer Laco Tropp—explored the beauty of Moravian folk music in a jazz context. ACT Music's Siggı Loch was so captivated that he has made it his mission to bring the music to a wider audience. Thus, *Together Again* sees Viklický and Mraz revisit the tunes from the two aforementioned recordings in an intimate duo setting.



*Together Again* is undoubtedly a jazz recording, and little wonder, as both musicians have spent decades delving into the standards repertoire. Mraz made his name with pianists Oscar Peterson and Tommy Flanagan and in the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. Viklický has led his own small ensembles, including a jazz-funk quartet with guitarist Bill Frisell in 1979. However, Moravian folk has been ever-present in the pianist's music since his debut *V Holomóci městě* (Supraphon 1978). Viklický has also composed a significant number of classical works and it's these threads—the swing and blues of jazz, Moravian traditional melodies, and classical sensibilities—that largely define the music.

Five Viklický originals and his arrangements of six traditional tunes might suggest that this is a Viklický leader session in all but name. Still, Mraz's deeply sonorous tone and vibrant playing is as fundamental to the chemistry as bassist Georg Riedel's was to pianist Jan Johansson playing on *Jazz Pa Svenska*, (Megafon, 1964) perhaps the most outstanding example of traditional European folk music given the jazz treatment to this day. Viklický and Mraz's light steps on two traditional tunes, the vignette "Dear Lover" and the quietly compelling "U Dunaja u Prešpurka" come closest to the chamber intimacy of that Johansson/Riedel recording,

Viklický imbues 19th century Czech classical composer Zdeněk Fibich's romantic "Poem," with a gentle bluesy lyricism, which Mraz replicates in an extended solo. Fibich was a contemporary of Antonín Dvořák, Gustav Mahler and Leoš Janáček, the latter of whom is something of a muse for Viklický. Two of Janáček's compositions are arranged afresh by the pianist; "Theme From 5th Part of Sinfonietta" flows with a slightly stately melodicism, while the blues-based "Thank You, Laca" is more romantic at its core. Both tunes highlight the duo's intuitive interplay and the loose-limbed freedom in their improvisations.

The blues number "A Bird Flew By" shifts subtly through the gears, moving between reflective melancholy and a more buoyant mood. "I Saw Grey Pidgeon" [sic] is a traditional tune given the blues treatment in a straight-forward yet appealing arrangement. More compelling is the harmonically arresting and rhythmically dynamic, "Austerlitz"—one of Viklický's most strikingly original compositions. The soulful "Moon Sleeping In The Cradle," the lightly stated classicism of "Up On A Fir Tree" and the delightful, elegant blues of "In Holomóc Town"—with fine arco work from Mraz—round out the set.

*Together Again* is an enchanting recording of subtle charms and a fine addition to ACT's growing Duo Art series. Doubtless for some it will serve as a reminder of Mraz's exquisite playing and for many more as a tardy introduction to Viklický—one of Europe's most significant and yet unheralded jazz pianists/composers.

Track Listing: Dear Lover; Poem; Theme From 5th Part of Sinfonietta; A Bird Flew By; U Dunaja u Prešpurka; Austerlitz; Moon, Sleeping In A Cradle; Thank You, Laca; Up On A Fir Tree; I Saw Grey Pidgeon; In Holomóc Town.

Personnel: Emil Viklický: piano; George Mraz: acoustic bass.

Record Label: [ACT Music](#)

Style: [Modern Jazz](#)