



OWL Trio featuring Kurt Elling - Life of the Party

Musicians:

Will Vinson - Tenor Saxophone

Lage Lund - Guitar

Orlando le Fleming - Bass

Kurt Elling - Vocals on "Life of the Party" and "Perfectly Out of Place"

The general consensus is that, yes, it's possible to dislike someone, hate them even, and still make incredible music together. There are too many examples to cite of bandmates who ignore each other on tour but still create transporting music when they hit the stage. If this is so, then what happens when bandmates create music with people they're truly close to, when they've roomed together for years, when they've spent decades sharing drinks and meals and celebrating life's milestones together. This may not necessarily make the music *better*, but it must make the music *different*.

Orlando le Fleming, Will Vinson and Lage Lund all arrived in New York City near the turn of the millennium. Orlando and Will were from the UK and Lage from Norway. They met in New York, where they were all in-demand musicians and played together in various ensembles, often at Smalls or when Will played regularly at the 55 Bar. The trio eventually formed when Will got another gig at the tiny Bar Next Door, which demanded a quieter, smaller ensemble. Their first album, which made quite a splash in 2012, was recorded spur-of-the-moment in an abandoned church with no rehearsal or set list. Tension in the recording studio can keep everyone on their toes -- ears wide open, looking out for the next hairpin turn. But trust -- trust lets you close your eyes and fall.

Kurt Elling first heard the OWL Trio at a tiny bar in Brooklyn. According to Kurt, the bar seats about four people and he was one of them. He was immediately drawn to the trio, finding the music "very intelligent, very melodic...and it all seems so effortless to them, the way they play together and how they play at a really high level of intellect and emotion." Ever since then, Kurt has wanted to join them for a recording date. However, first he had to know about that gig in that little bar in Brooklyn where the OWL Trio was hiding. It turns out Kurt and Will know each other through the friendship that their wives, Jennifer Elling and Jo Lawry, have shared for many years. In fact, the first time that Lage Lund played with Kurt was as part of the ceremony at Will's wedding.

Everyone familiar with Kurt Elling's music knows he's an extraordinary story-teller.

Listening to him recite poetry, like the Corso poem on Lage's "Life of the Party" (whose lyrics were written by Joy Lund, Lage's wife), you can hear the narrative enthusiasm and charisma clearly. He could almost make the same impact without words altogether. But it's the trust these guys have for each other that allows Lage to ask Kurt to bring in a poem for this section of the song. It's the history the four men share that creates the environment where a record like this can grow. Kurt said that the feeling of making this record was unique. The trio sounds so intimate and exposed, with "nowhere to hide." "Oh, I don't need to make my voice so big. I can just whisper this," he said. The music on this record should not be separated from its conception. Kurt called the OWL trio "very much a thinking person's music." This strikes me as true, but what also excites me about this record is how deeply past the intellect it goes. This isn't music constructed in an ivory tower and unfurled in the studio. It's music born of a thousand connections -- late night conversations, friends in common, whole lives woven together... It's all in there if you listen closely.

- Elan Mehler