

## Terje Rypdal Conspiracy

**Terje Rypdal:** electric guitar; **Ståle Storløkken:** keyboards; **Endre Hareide Hallre:** electric basses; **Pål Thowsen:** drums, percussion

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The sonic signature of Terje Rypdal is unmistakable. The yearning, skywards-slanting sustains which introduce his new album could not be anyone else. On *Conspiracy* the Norwegian electric guitarist – Terje likes to emphasize the *electric* - reconnects with the inspiration that fuelled such early masterpieces as *Whenever I Seem To Be Far Away*, *Odyssey* and *Waves*, exploring the potential of his instrument with both a rock improviser's love of raw energy and a composer's feeling for space and sound-colour. *Conspiracy*, recorded at Oslo's Rainbow Studio is Terje's first new ECM studio album in two decades. His other 21<sup>st</sup> century recordings have, to date, drawn upon live sources. The clarity and depth of the new production, and the panoramic sweep of the music, invite the listener to explore the grain, the detail and the texture of its enveloping sounds up close.

*Conspiracy* is here an album title, a composition, and the name of Rypdal's current ensemble, one of his very best. Keyboardist Ståle Storløkken, who contributed to *Vossabrygg* and *Crime Scene* and was also a member of Terje's Skywards group, is an ideal co-conspirator, perpetually thickening the plot with his own intuitive feeling for complementary shades and washes. The sound of the Hammond organ blending into and surrounding Terje's Fender Statocaster can seem both nostalgic and futuristic.

*Conspiracy* also marks a welcome return for Pål Thowsen, whose subtle, detailed drumming was first heard on ECM with Arild Andersen's 1970s groups. As Terje observes Thowsen is the Norwegian drummer whose feeling for time and dynamics is coming from the Tony Williams's end of the percussive spectrum; his differentiated cymbal-playing is exceptional throughout. Rypdal and Thowsen first played together more than 40 years ago, when Terje guested on a collaborative recording session led by Pål and fellow drummer Jon Christensen (*No Time for Time*). The Conspiracy band is completed by gifted young bass guitarist Endre Hareide Hallre, whom Terje features as principal soloist on "By His Lonesome".

When Conspiracy started out Terje envisioned out it as a project that would re-examine and develop material from the repertoires of his groups Odyssey and the Chasers, but it soon moved past this blueprint stage. The compositions here are all new, "some played for the first time in the studio," including the final sound-painting "Dawn" which shares its title with an unrelated Odyssey piece: this is a new "Dawn", in other words.

"As If The Ghost...Was Me" introduces the project, the guitar stretching out over tracery of cymbals, pellucid pools of keyboard sound, and free-roaming fretless bass. "What Was I Thinking", meanwhile, is a rubato ballad that marshals a lot of feeling and still retains an experimental flair as the ensemble rallies behind Terje's impassioned guitar. Title piece "Conspiracy" is the closest to rock, taking off from Thowsen's drum patterning against

growling keyboards, and throbbing bass - all of which inspires Terje to take off on a characteristically ecstatic solo, soon followed by Ståle Storløkken with urgent statements of his own... The sounds of Storløkken and Rypdal are also intertwined and juxtaposed on the floating “Baby Beautiful”, where highlights include an extended organ solo with brushed drum accompaniment gradually overtaken by squalling guitar.

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Terje Rypdal, was born in 1947 in Oslo. After early studies in piano and trumpet he took up the guitar at 12 and by 15 was playing with the Vanguard, a Norwegian beat group originally modelled on the Shadows and the Ventures. Subsequent decisive impulses for his future direction came from hearing music of Jimi Hendrix, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Ligeti and Penderecki, from playing and studying with George Russell, and taking composition classes with “neo-serial” composer Finn Mortensen. This medley of disparate influences has continued to play upon his imagination, inspiring a unique body of work.

Rypdal first came to ECM as a member of the Jan Garbarek Quartet on *Afric Pepperbird* in 1970, recording his leader debut for the label the following year. He has since appeared on a further 40 ECM albums, at various times closer to jazz, rock and classical idioms while always being true to himself as an improvising guitarist and composer.

Recent releases hint at the range of his work. *Vossabrygg*, for instance, is in part a tribute to Miles Davis and *Bitches Brew*, while *Crime Scene*, a collaboration with the Bergen Big band, was inspired by John Coltrane’s *Meditations*. *Melodic Warrior*, with texts drawn from Native American poetry sung by the Hilliard Ensemble, brings together Terje’s soaring electric guitar and the Bruckner Orchester Linz under the direction of Dennis Russell Davies, creating what the *Independent On Sunday* called “startling shamanic soundscapes.”

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*Conspiracy* was recorded at Oslo’s Rainbow Studio early last year, and mixed there in January 2020 by producer Manfred Eicher, Terje Rypdal and engineer Martin Abrahamsen.

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