

New Norwegian contemporaries

Norway's music scene, long known as centrestage for ECM's nordic cool is, with the emergence of a new generation of musicians, recreating itself. This Margins of Music looks to the edges of the North, how impro-jazz is colliding with electronics, and the influence of sea, sky and skyline on the thin air ambient worlds coming out of the capital of the Arctic Circle, Tromsø.

David Rothenberg goes in search of Rune Grammofon, Norway's twenty-first century answer to ECM. Here he outlines the label, and on page 24, talks with its founder, Rune Kristoffersen.

In the last issue of *Fourth Door Review*, I waxed on about the importance of the ECM Record's aesthetic in European and world jazz from the 1970s to the present. Arctic canyon reverbs; free improvisations that were lyrical not jarring; the blend of world rhythms; spacious foreign folk musics; and transglobal virtuosity is now known as a fundamental force in music today, from jazz to classical, improvised to all planned out. To some, the spare, delicate, clean packaging that marks ECM LP and CD covers is as important as the music, to suggest a whole look and visual aesthetic that combines with the music to build a

I took up the rune; beyond ECM

Rune Grammofon



clear label identity, so that the customer knows that what this company puts out will be consistently of meticulous quality.

ECM. The initials of Manfred C. Eicher, impresario and mastermind, spelled backwards. The company's influence is sealed in the annals of our musical century. Their work is important. Many musicians and listeners I know have deep respect for ECM, want to buy the records, want to be on the records, want to find a way in to what the initials really imply.

But lately we've all been asking: could there be a new label with as strong an identity and as interesting a music for the new century? The next generation perhaps? Not to deny the achievements of the last, but to build on them?

That label seems to have arisen, also from the cool, perceptive, careful climes of Northern Europe. In Oslo, home once to Talent Studios and then Rainbow Studios, where engineer Jan Erik Kongshaug perfected the technology of reverb to build the ECM sonic geography, a new sense of sound is arising. Something blending free jazz and extreme classical with the new listening and performing possibilities of pure electronic sound. This is Rune Kristoffersen's company Rune Grammofon, and their impressive roster of mostly Norwegian, ever unclassifiable artists.

'If you're going to do something marginal, you have to do it in the best possible way,' says Kristoffersen as he plots the philosophy of his enterprise. Rune