



Near Gale

Alboran Trio | [ACT Music](#) (2008)

By [Chris May](#)

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Since 1995, when they began recording for the ACT Music label, Sweden's Esbjorn Svensson Trio (e.s.t.) has played a key role in rejuvenating the acoustic piano trio tradition, along with its audience. Svensson and his crew have liberated both from—or at least offered an alternative to—an overly familiar, standards-based repertoire and a precisely codified approach to performance. And if its own music, over the course of thirteen years, has itself become somewhat predictable, e.s.t. will always deserve a medal for opening the windows and letting a breeze in.



One of the younger European groups who've emerged in e.s.t.'s wake is Italy's Alboran Trio, whose debut—*Meltemi* (ACT Music, 2006)—offered a promise which is resoundingly delivered on its follow-up, the utterly delightful *Near Gale*.

Although actual stylistic similarities between the two groups are slight, it's hard to imagine the Alboran Trio existing pre-e.s.t. There are echoes in the Italians' swirling, volume-building group climaxes (though these are more moderate than e.s.t.'s can be), and, very occasionally, explicit acknowledgements (like Dino Contenti's bass figure on "Fuori Stagione"). But emotionally and atmospherically, the two groups share little.

Put crudely, in place of e.s.t.'s Nordic seriousness and melancholy, even gloom, the Alboran Trio offers southern warmth and light; in place of bulk and muscle, a more nimble athleticism.

For *Meltemi*, pianist/composer Paolo Paliaga wrote nine originals whose varied and explicit inspirations took in the entire Mediterranean basin, from the Maghrebi, through Spain and Italy, onto the Balkans. On *Near Gale* he's rolled these influences into a more finely integrated whole. Overt references to other traditions and cultures are rare—Gigi Biolcati's west African-influenced percussion on "Also Sprach Raul" (and, unexpectedly, Native American drumming on "Pow Wow"); Contenti's contemporary-classical bowed bass on "Invariable Geometries."

Paliaga's tunes are sunny and often very pretty, and are brilliantly complemented by Contenti's sumptuous, singing bass and Biolcati's melodic approach to his drum kit. Paliaga's own playing is lyrical and supple, and its mellifluousness disguises a degree of substance which isn't, perhaps, immediately apparent.

The predominant flavor is indefinably, but distinctly, Latin—a certain playfulness, a love of life and color.

A lovely album, with depth and integrity, and just the thing with which to welcome spring.

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