Heikki Sarmanto Quintet – Counterbalance (2008)

01. Azure Skies (Lance Gunderson) - 6:57 02. Jai Guru Dev - 7:05 03. Counterbalance - 9:04 04. Moonflower - 8:03 05. Seagull - 6:11 06. Wolf - 4:33 Personnel: - Heikki Sarmanto - Fender Rhodes (electric piano) - Juhani Aaltonen - flute - Lance Gunderson - guitar - Pekka Sarmanto - bass - Craig Herndon – drums

Heikki Sarmanto, born 22 June 1939, Helsinki, Finland. Sarmanto studied languages and music at Helsinki University and Sibelius Academy before going on to the Berklee College Of Music (1968-71). He was named the best pianist at Montreux in 1971. He led his own bands from 1962 and in 1976 a workshop group he ran became the big band UMO. He has written New Hope Jazz Mass, a jazz ballet and a jazz opera, and was chosen by saxophonist Sonny Rollins to arrange and orchestrate his Saxophone Concerto (1986). He continues to write vocal, orchestral and theatre works in a most assured style.

Heikki Sarmanto is something of a legend in Scandinavia but not (yet) well known in the USA. The belated American release of COUNTERBALANCE may change that, as it features a warm, harmonious fusion of jazz, rock, and elements of Finnish folk music, using both electric and acoustic instrumentation. Before ECM Records, before the concept of world music, before fusion became a popular concept, Sarmanto was there, with an approach both user-friendly and forward-looking. ---Rovi

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