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INTAKT AT THE VORTEX

Photo by Stefan Postius



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INTAKT AT THE VORTEX

From April 16 to 27 London's Vortex Club hosts a remarkable festival dedicated to the music of Zurich's Intakt Records. Concerts each evening consist of at least double bills, some presenting as many of four different groups or performers. As Patrik Landolt of Intakt explains, the label had similar exposure in New York four years ago when, at John Zorn's invitation, Intakt took over the programming for two weeks at The Stone, described as 'a not for profit performance space dedicated to the experimental and avant garde.'

An initial reaction to Intakt's catalogue might also use words like 'experimental' and 'avant garde', but Patrik stresses the importance of tradition in the music:

'The scope of our music is great, based on the jazz tradition. All this comes from America, in the meeting of African Americans and white Americans. Then in the 1970s and 1980s different types of music had an influence, including European classical music. Jazz is an open music and everyone fights for different music.'

Intakt Records was founded by Patrik Landolt in 1984 and is described on its website as a small independent label, but has issued more than 250 albums. Among the first artists to record for the label was British bassist Barry Guy, with a 1986 release of compositions by him and Anthony Braxton. Barry's musical background includes working with early music groups such as The Academy of Ancient Music.

Now living in Switzerland, his list of albums for Intakt includes several with the London Jazz Composers' Orchestra.

During the festival Barry Guy celebrates his 70th birthday and the first evening is devoted to celebrating that, with Guy appearing in four different settings. With violinist Maya Homburger he re-visits his ancient music heritage, exploring the ninth century hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* and Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's rosary sonatas as well as contemporary music. The Howard Riley Trio is described as the group that took the piano trio into the realm of free exploration, then it's back to duo format, with legendary saxist Evan Parker, before the final trio set unites Guy and drummer Lucas Niggli from the Riley Trio with saxist Jurg Wickihalder.

The following evening Niggli is in action again, with saxist/bass clarinetist Jan Galega Bronnimann and Aly Keita. As Patrik explains, Aly Keita plays the balafon, a wooden xylophone from West Africa which sounds not unlike the marimba. Coming from a family of balafon players in Cote d'Ivoire, he has developed the balafon, with new scales and half notes, to give it the flexibility to adjust to Western music, blending traditional African repertoire with jazz and improvisation. Though both Niggli and Bronnimann were born in Cameroon, growing up with the rhythms of West Africa, they are now Swiss citizens.

Any suggestion that Intakt's artists are mostly Swiss, either by birth or relocation (like Guy,

Niggli and Bronnimann) is rejected by Patrik who reckons that about a third of Intakt's artists are Swiss – and he is particularly proud to have some major talents from the United States on the label, David Murray, now domiciled in Paris, Reggie Workman and Oliver Lake.

These Americans are not on the bill for The Vortex, but a saxophonist very familiar to London audiences, now hitting the headlines in New York, makes two appearances on April 22 and 23. Ingrid Laubrock was born in Germany and launched her career in London, but has been based in New York for nearly a decade. She plays at the festival with the trio (Liam Noble and Tom Rainey) who worked with her on the award-winning album, *Sleepthief*, and then in a duo with Japanese pianist Aki Takase.

One of the features of the festival is the ingenious and creative programming that gives audiences the chance to hear the same musicians in different settings: Aki Takase goes on to play in a duo with another saxophonist, Rudi Mahall; Evan Parker appears in various different groups; and then there is Louis Moholo Moholo! One of his appearances is with pianist Irene Schweizer, an event that Patrik sees as of significance morally and politically as well as musically. In the 1986 Zurich Jazz Festival South African music was a main strand of the programme. The concert by Schweizer and Moholo became a protest against apartheid and also the Zurich bankers who colluded it with it. The Intakt album, *Free Mandela*, documents this event. Schweizer and Moholo also team up with Zurich-based saxophonist Omri Ziegele under the name of Where's Africa. Singer Sarah Buechi is another to be presented in different settings. Accompanied by an oddly conventional line-up of piano/bass/drums, Sarah presents music from her Intakt CD, *Shadow Garden*, but has also been paired with fellow-singer Lauren Kinsella and cello and bass accompaniment. Buechi and Kinsella have both studied South Indian music in Bangalore while sharing links with Dublin.



Ingrid Laubrock

Louis Moholo Moholo is only one of a dozen or so drummers at the festival. Asked what features will surprise London audiences, Patrik cites the Swiss drumming tradition. Perhaps the most remarkable example of this is two concerts by Pierre Favre where other instruments are omitted and the drums have to explore the whole sound palette. Pierre Favre Drumsights (with fellow drummers Valeria Zangger, Markus Lauterburg and Chris Jaeger) is followed by a solo set from Favre.

Other big names appearing on an excitingly complex and varied programme include, among many others, pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach who plays a solo concert of Thelonious Monk's music, singer Maggie Nicols, saxophonist Trevor Watts, the piano/violin duo of Sylvie Courvoisier and Mark Feldman and the groups Noisy Minority (led by Omri Ziegele and with trumpeter Percy Pursglove) and Christoph Irniger's Pilgrim.

In these days when the record industry is so hard-pressed, it's good to find a label as buoyant as Intakt. Releases over the past few months have included two albums by Ingrid Laubrock, with different groups, a collaboration between Aki Takase and David Murray and the Schlippenbach Trio's Warsaw Concert featuring Evan Parker and drummer Paul Lovens (who play The Vortex on April 21).

www.vortexjazz.co.uk
www.intaktrec.ch



Barry Guy

Photo by
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