

# Barry Guy

## ***Vortex Jazz Club, London***

The Swiss label Intakt Records was ensconced at The Vortex for 12 days in April, presenting at least two sets every evening. The opening session was dedicated to veteran bassist Barry Guy, celebrating his 70th birthday and highlighting different musical zones, featuring various long-time colleagues. The Howard Riley Trio has included Guy from its very beginning, in 1967, though there has been a deliberate turnover of drummers down the decades. Now, for this ultra-rare appearance, the Swiss sticksman Lucas Niggli completes the line-up, moving from palms to brushes to bullrushes, always maintaining sensitivity. Guy's five strings allow for an extra toughness when he hits low, and a sweet voiced precision when aiming high. The trio billow a roiling mist, out of which Riley's flourishes emerge, phrases steadily accruing tunes by stealth. Guy scribbles with an iron fist, the three players having a staggered relationship, as dominance passes between them. Niggli picks up puffball sticks to assist in the suspension, a probing tension as Riley reaches inside his piano, or compresses phrases into a microscopic handful of keys, making winding, tightly phrased explorations.

Guy has also been working beside Evan Parker since the mid-1960s, when they met on the Spontaneous Music Ensemble scene. They operate at a level of extreme tension and intensity

throughout, with an intuitive rapport built up over decades. Guy bows harshly, while Parker spouts rivulets on tenor, curtailed gobbets, with sudden outbreaks of mellow tenderness. Guy uses his wah-wah pedal to reserve full volume for the moments when the pair of them begin their tussling in earnest. Guy bows with a knitting needle inserted between his strings, then fast-taps a drumstick, stitching high notes with great dexterity, zooming his fingers up the neck to create speed-sliding pitches. The duo continue each other's conversations, Guy applying a paintbrush, making soft scratches, while Parker opens up a circular-breathing tunnel.

The night closed with a newer formation, the Beyond trio with Guy, Niggli and saxophonist Jürg Wickihalder, who added to the vigorous delivery already expected from his partners, rattling streams of intricate notes off on his soprano, making sudden racing blurs. Niggli uses hard drumsticks, splinters flying dramatically, one of which lands neatly on Guy's shoulder. Wickihalder blows into his bell and Niggli whips out his egg-whisk, sharp flecks of sound turning into a low, throaty emission from the 'right' end of the soprano. Guy makes savage bass eruptions, needled by pinpoint saxophone, a detailed, ranting chase ensuing. These last two sets were equally dynamic, one for its improvised tension, the second for its careening, complicated arrangements.

**Martin Longley**

