



CHRISTOPH IRNIGER PILGRIM

Italian Circus Story

Christoph Irniger: Tenor Saxophone **Dave Gisler:** Guitar
Stefan Aeby: Piano **Raffaele Bossard:** Bass **Michi Stulz:** Drums

All compositions by Christoph Irniger (SUISA). Recorded March 16 & 17, 2014, at Timbuktu Studios, Lisbon, by Luis Candeias. Mixed and mastered by Andy Neresheimer. Liner notes: Rolf Thomas. Cover art: Danny Gretscher. Graphic design: Jonas Schoder. Photo: Jonathan Heyer.

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The coolest liner notes of all time can be found on the back of *Miles Davis' Greatest Hits*. They are by the journalist George Frazier. The title was already something of a brag as strictly speaking Miles hadn't had a single hit to date. Frazier's text topped this however. It's much longer than this one, and there is no mention of music in it. Instead Frazier writes solely about the stylish clothes Miles wears, and how well he wears them: "he glitters when he walks." Frazier concludes his essay with the immortal words "when not selecting additions to his wardrobe, Miles Davis is a professional trumpet player. People who know about such things tell me he shows a lot of promise."

In 1969 that was indeed a bold statement. And it provides my link to the music of Christoph Irniger: people who know about jazz will confirm that he is one of the most promising musicians in contemporary Swiss jazz. Seven years ago, on the CD *Chat Noir*, he created daring, intricate sounds with the help of his simple jazz quartet, then including the famous pianist Chris Wiesendanger and the accomplished bassist Patrice Moret. With the trio *Cowboys from Hell* he played music to "scare your granny", as one German paper put it.

New, disturbing sonic worlds, softer and subtler, were also central to *Mt. Tongario*, the 2012 CD he released with his quartet Pilgrim, featuring Vera Kappeler, Christian Weber and Michael Stulz. The latter, one of the best young Swiss percussionists around, also plays drums on this album – luckily, as he is a magician with sounds, who sometimes seems lost in his world but always knows exactly what he is doing in fact. Stulz also plays in violinist Tobias Preisig's band, and in pianist Stefan Aeby's trio. Aeby also features on this CD; born in 1979 like Christoph Irniger, he has led his own trio for five years but is also a member of bands such as Sarah Buechi's *Flying Letters*, and plays piano in Tobias Preisig's group. The rest of Irniger's band members are even younger. Bassist Raffaele Bossard studied under Patrice Moret, see above, and guitarist Dave Gisler, recently turned thirty, has already played with musicians such as Lucas Niggli, Claudio Puntin and Samuel Rohrer.

As I have no idea how well these five young Swiss men dress, I am obliged to write about their music. Pilgrim is now a quintet, but the name still fits like a glove. "Anyone who hopes to survive a pilgrimage needs to have faith," as I wrote in the magazine *Jazz thing*, reviewing *Mt. Tongario*. Faith can also stand for healthy self-confidence, and Irniger's five-piece has that. On this, their second album, Pilgrim do not barge in like a squad; they creep in on tiptoes. The opener, 'Jake The Snake' builds very slowly, beginning with a few deep notes from the piano and a restrained saxophone, while Michi Stulz sends atmospheric snippets of sound on their way, masterfully generated on the cymbals. Finally the sounds intensify and fan out into an almost spiritual ballad. Dave Gisler then takes the musicians on a very different journey.

Christoph Irniger's teachers include the saxophonist Christoph Grab. ("Grab showed me everything, sharpened my perception and my self-observation," he says.) On this album Irniger is on top form. It is unclear why it is called *Italian Circus Story*, and the bandleader says this isn't important, but a certain languid Mediterranean flair can certainly be detected. Let's just let Pilgrim carry us off into their world.

George Frazier, who incidentally introduced the first jazz column to a daily newspaper back in the 1940s – 'Sweet And Low Down' in the *Boston Herald* – unfortunately died in 1974. He would undoubtedly have liked the music of Christoph Irniger's Pilgrim however, not only due to its stylistic drive.

Rolf Thomas, Berlin 2014, Translation: Steph Morris



CHRISTOPH IRNIGER TRIO

GOWANUS CANAL

Christoph Irniger: Tenor Saxophone, Bass Clarinet
Raffaele Bossard: Bass / Ziv Ravitz: Drums
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