

PETER RÜEDI

Liner Notes

MICHAEL JAEGER KEROUAC

MEETS GREG OSBY + PHILIPP SCHAUFELBERGER

In 'n' Out

“Outdoors” – the piece that was namesake to the latest CD of Michael Jaeger, the group Kerouac and guests Greg Osby and Philipp Schaufelberger was first of all and tritely produced “outdoors”. In Vienna. Jaeger put himself on leave from his job as a music teacher he holds down in Winterthur in order to earn a living. He doesn't perceive the job to be a drag. It grants him the relative luxury that he does not have to compromise hastily. Yet he experienced “outdoors” – in Vienna, in New York, in Berlin – a new kind of freedom. That doesn't mean inside to be all the opposite. It means not only captivity, but also familiarity and comfort. One entails the other.

But liberty is something you have to take (and the Swiss sometimes have a problem doing so). Creative spaces though have to be claimed. “Space” is a very important notion to Michael Jaeger, in many respects. But first of all it means something that is as simple as fundamental. It relates to the situation of the artist in a society that is not necessarily and naturally sympathetic to art. Jaeger is a reserved, sensitive but determined man. He does not attack the real existing circumstances with clenched fists. But he also knows that you don't get leeway for nothing. He has to fight for it. “We define the spaces that give us the possibilities to move ourselves. If we

don't manage to do this by ourselves, nobody will do it for us. The society does not wait for us ears wide open. There is a public for our music, but it is a minority that takes the time you need essentially for this music.”

There was a time when jazz was not only a young music but (at least in the special department for intellectuals) also music for the young. Someone born in 1976 has not experienced that. When they got to the age of rebelliousness the potential for protest had vanished even from rock music. When the young clarinetist and saxophonist began to take interest in the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, then in Coltrane, jazz had very “little revolutionary potential”. The “roughness, the absolute” hit him, he perceived what he first merely sensed then recognized as an authentic attitude to life in jazz, he was struck by the translucency of this music more than by any binary rock grooves. With his brother, the drummer Chris Jaeger-Brown, he had improvised already as a child on the bamboo flute, now they soon were permanent residents in the Zurich WIM (Workshop for Improvised Music). There he got to know freer ways of playing than he knew from Dizzy and Santana (whom he also admired). It was pure coincidence that later, looking for a band name, he came across “Kerouac”: He found the title of a mostly unknown composition that Dizzy Gillespie had dedicated 1941 to the author, at that time altogether unknown, who after the war would be the icon of the beat generation (On the Road). Mere chance, but in retrospect it does make sense.

It is all about space for Jaeger, in his music too. In the quartet with the pianist Vincent Membrez, the bassist Luca Sisera and the drummer Norbert Pfammatter he keeps looking since 2005 persistently and with more and more success for the labile balance between self-fulfillment and control. Between freedom and structure. Between individualism and the collective. Today Kerouac is on such an advanced level of the collective consciousness (and even more of the collective unconscious), that the four can launch each other almost telepathically into creative spaces. More than that: the collective understanding generates such a pull that even new partners or guest are

integrated almost on the spot, almost as if they were members of the band for years. Greg Osby, alto saxophonist from St. Louis is a star since the early nineties (as much a star as anyone can be playing jazz), with more than ten own titles at the famous label Blue Note.

Yet *Outdoors* is definitely not one of these productions where a more or less apocryphal local band basks in the glory of a big name. Osby is not only by reputation one of the leading contemporary alto saxophonists. He himself is a nonconformist and a structured mind, a woodwind player with a clear shape, with derring-do and of radical disposition. Yet again he is no more responsible for the success of this CD than Philipp Schaufelberger on the guitar, who is marvel-ously contained, open-minded and eclectic. Not to mention the regular cast of Kerouac

They make most inspired improvised or composed music that does not aim to anything but itself, let alone any ideology whatsoever. Their music is even allowed to swing every now and again, it often develops a bewitching melodiousness yet goes audaciously to the borders of the atonal or noise making. In other words: It roots in the centre of “jazz” and at the same time far outside any cliché, thus really happen-ing in the very moment. So this is what Whitney Balliett, the doyen of jazz criticism, used to call this music: “the sound of surprise”.

It is not necessarily easy to follow (you’ll have to engage in skating on so thin ice) and even harder to describe. Maybe this will do: Jaeger & Partner struggle less for musical coherence itself, they work to facilitate it. The most important in their structures are the free spaces in between; in and from which those things grow you cannot plan. Which is also the reason for this beautiful reflectiveness in their music. That again is, if you take it as a brooding component, a very Swiss trait (emotions and liberties that settle into the collective meaning they’re always aware of the others rather than just mill-ing along – this sort of collective consciousness that gives to every individual as much freedom as possible is according to Jaeger “a political

idea".) But it also has a fundamental side to it. Just as if time and again we'd catch those involved in the process of collective invention how they themselves contemplate surprised what they've just come across.

As for the interplay with the two guests, Outdoors has the electric potential of a coup de foudre between partners who meet for the first time and take their chances, without reserve but with acuteness of mind, ceaselessly. The unpredictable, planned judiciously. Now isn't that the star turn in improvised music? It's not about shutting down the mind; it's rather about liquescent thinking.

Peter Rüedi, February, 2010 / Translation: Sigrun Andree