

PRESS



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The New York Times

By NATE CHINEN DEC. 9, 2015

MUSIC

Review: Samuel Blaser Quartet's 'Spring Rain' Recalls a Ghost

Samuel Blaser Quartet
“Spring Rain”
(Whirlwind)

The free-thinking American composer, clarinetist and tenor saxophonist Jimmy Giuffre was already a bit of a ghost when he died in 2008, at 86. His career had stalled out decades earlier, reaching its commercial peak in the late 1950s, when he was leading a sparse but stylish trio with the valve trombonist Bob Brookmeyer and the guitarist Jim Hall.

The spontaneous flair and chamber-like cool of Mr. Giuffre’s music have brought him back into favor in recent years. One of the contemporary artists tapping into his legacy is Samuel Blaser, an intrepid, Swiss-born trombonist living in Berlin, whose new album, “Spring Rain,” is a thoughtful and energetic tribute.

Because Mr. Blaser plays trombone, it’s only natural to assume his interest in Mr. Giuffre starts with Mr. Brookmeyer. But “Spring Rain” bears more affinity with a later edition of the Jimmy Giuffre 3, the spikier trio Mr. Giuffre led in the early ‘60s, with Paul Bley on piano and Steve Swallow on bass. This album includes compositions from that group’s repertory, like

the lonesome fanfare “Cry, Want,” and two durable tunes by Carla Bley.

Mr. Blaser explores this music, and the terse angularities of his own originals, with a smartly elastic rhythm section: Russ Lossing on piano and keyboards, Drew Gress on bass and Gerald Cleaver on drums. (He’ll have a different lineup on Friday and Saturday at Ibeam in Brooklyn: Mr. Lossing, the

bassist Masa Kamaguchi and the drummer Billy Mintz.) The band’s interactions give the impression of an alert and contingent poise.

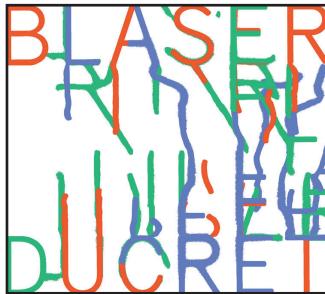
Mr. Blaser has a precise, expressive style on trombone and he’s an ace with multiphonic techniques, which enable him to growl chords on the instrument; one track, “Trippin’,” finds him in solo reverie, calmly deploying garbled effects. (That title suggests a nod to the Giuffre tune “Trudgin’,” also found here.)

Mr. Blaser’s focused interiority and dauntless self-possession point toward Mr. Giuffre even when the connection is otherwise unclear. The same can be said for his sidemen. One original, “The First Snow,” has a solo by Mr. Lossing that evokes the limber scrawl of a graffiti artist, played on both acoustic piano and Minimoog synthesizer. It’s a moment that ducks any direct emulation, but its bristling composure recalls Mr. Giuffre’s ideals, especially a focus on originality.



NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

AUGUST 2022



Voyageurs

Samuel Blaser/Marc Ducret (Jazzdor Series)

by Steven Loewy

Swiss trombonist Samuel Blaser, who spent time in New York and now resides in Berlin is well known for a considerable discography of recordings featuring his unique style and advanced techniques. Performing mostly in a free vein, the trombonist has been quoted as eschewing the phrase “free jazz” as too political to describe his music, instead saying he prefers being “spontaneous” without intellectualizing the music. Anchored by a strong background in jazz and classical music and due to his imposing abilities, Blaser has been particularly adept at working with small groups of carefully chosen collaborators and as a soloist.

For *Voyageurs*, recorded in Plougras, France in 2019, the trombonist performs with one of his favorite partners, guitarist Marc Ducret (turning 65 this month), whose distinctive and diverse approach coordinates beautifully with the trombonist, producing a series of deeply felt conversations, conveying a thoughtful, deliberate approach.

Blaser is one of the most technically proficient trombonists performing today, wedging clear tone and exquisite intonation with a superior technique. He avoids histrionics, focusing instead on close listening, soft tones, pure sound and close interaction, so that guitar and trombone almost play as an extension of each other. It is never easy listening, as both provide an almost unending bucket of tasteful tonal manipulation, Blaser offering pedal tones, rumbles, long-drawn-out drones coupled with circular breathing, muted notes, extended range, growls, multiphonics and more, Ducret, a willing and compatible partner, anticipating his moves with uncanny zestful prescience. Mostly, the

two cover the middle and lower ranges, sometimes at very slow tempo.

With so much at work, it is not surprising that highlights abound. “Morse” features soft muted trombone against lovely atmospheric guitar sounds, all at a turtle’s pace, while “La vie sans toi” places the full lower depths of trombone against gentle chords, confounding expectations. The fleeter and jazzier—though still thoroughly abstract—“Des états lumineux” focuses again a bit more on the lower register of the trombone, with guitar featured and sometimes taking on the characteristics of a second horn.

For more information, visit jazzdor.com



SAMUEL BLASER MONOLOGHI ELASTICI

SECONDA PARTE

Prosegue, e si conclude, la lunga intervista al multiforme trombonista svizzero, uomo dalle mille frequentazioni musicali e autentico vulcano di idee

di LUCA CIVELLI foto di ALEX TROESCH

INTERVISTA

Samuel, ripartiamo da «*Early In The Morning*», penultimo disco del tuo quartetto. Hai detto che il «suono limpido» di Wallace Roney ti ha ricordato un po' Skip James. E Oliver Lake? Ti ha ricordato qualcuno in particolare?

Fammi pensare... In realtà Oliver è così unico che non mi ha ricordato nessun altro, a parte lui. Wallace si presta al gioco delle influenze, possiamo intrecciare tanti legami con altri musicisti. Oliver, invece, suona solo come sé stesso. Dopo l'ultimo concerto che abbiamo fatto assieme, al Peitz Jazz Festival, vicino a Berlino, Oliver si è scusato perché non riusciva più a suonare – veloce? immagino – come un tempo. Che umiltà! Un vero gentiluomo.

Visto il tema dell'album, hai avuto modo di chiedere a Roney e Lake che idea avessero del blues?

No. Con Wallace ho conversato poco, se non qualche parola sulla tromba di colore blu che portò in studio. Soltanto la sera, quando tornai a casa, mi resi conto che si trattava dello strumento di Miles Davis! Oliver non è una persona loquace. Comunicavamo attraverso la musica.

Ci eravamo lasciati con un rapido accenno a un nuovo gruppo a cui stai lavorando, un po' ragtime un po' Fats Waller: a che punto sei?

Al punto che devo lavorarci su perché le idee non mancano, sgorgano di continuo. In effetti vorrei fare qualcosa attorno al *ragtime*, a Jelly Roll Morton, fino a toccare Waller. Mi affascinano tanti elementi di quelle musiche: melodie, forme, ritmi, inizi, code, ma soprattutto *breaks* e finali. Trovo che

compositore franco-argentino Oscar Strasnoy intitolata *The End*. L'orchestra scandisce l'apertura di parentesi armoniche e timbriche che si chiudono di continuo. Molto stimolante.

Un altro periodo che hai particolarmente a cuore sono gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta. Sapendo che hai già lavorato attorno a un protagonista «nascosto» di quegli anni, Jimmy Giuffre («*Spring Rain*», Whirlwind, 2015), pensi che un giorno guarderà di nuovo indietro a quel ventennio?

È probabile. Forse per suonare la musica di J. J. Johnson: il centenario della nascita cade nel 2024. Per tornare al blues, esce in questi giorni un'altra pubblicazione della serie *lock-down* sulla mia etichetta, Blaser Music. È un *live* al Moods di Zurigo, registrato lo scorso 30 ottobre con il mio quartetto: Marc Ducret alla chitarra, Masa Kamaguchi al contrabbasso e Gerry Hemingway alla batteria. Interpretiamo versioni infuocate del blues di «*Early In The Morning*»; il live è un esempio perfetto per ascoltare Marc nel suo elemento naturale.

Con Ducret e Pierre Favre suoni regolarmente in duo; con Hemingway hai anche registrato («*Oostum*», No Business, 2018). Il duo è una formula che ti piace proprio assai, immagino.

Molto. Mi fa sentire a mio agio, soprattutto quando suono con un batterista. Senza i vincoli di uno strumento armonico posso lasciarmi andare, viaggiare nella musica, dare un senso alle melodie. Però con Marc è tutto molto veloce. Raramente c'è il tempo di fissare una tonalità o un ritmo regolare.

LE IDEE NON MI MANCANO, SGORGANO DI CONTINUO. RAG, DIXIELAND, BLUES OGGI NON VANNO DI MODA, MENTRE IO AMO PROPRIO CIÒ CHE DI MODA NON È

oggi la musica manchi di sorprese, mentre allora erano una costante. Rag, Dixieland, blues non vanno proprio di moda, e a me piace tutto ciò che non va di moda. Sono musiche molto moderne che ho ascoltato tanto. Il trombone in quei contesti è spesso sorprendente, nessuno suona più in quel modo: perché non trarne ispirazione? Vorrei anche scrivere un repertorio di danze (foxtrot, *ragtime*, tango) per una nuova formazione con Oscar Strasnoy, Pablo Marquez e Matthieu Ogier.

Nel corso della puntata precedente avevo citato il trio di Ellery Eskelin, ma di gruppi che si sono riappropriati di quegli idiomi ce ne sono altri: pensiamo, per restare ai trii, agli Air di «*Air Lore*» o a BassDrumBoone. Quali strategie cerchi di adottare per evitare uno stantio effetto di revival?

Si possono utilizzare le stesse ricette di allora ma adattandole al contesto del momento. Con Robert Sadin, direttore artistico con cui collaboro da diversi anni, cerchiamo di dare forma a gruppi e dischi che possano suscitare interesse sia per la musica proposta sia per la particolare combinazione di musicisti. Ho tentato di far mia l'idea di *break* nel primo «movimento» di *Worksongs*, una composizione per soprano e dieci strumentisti. Si trova su YouTube. Rispettando una data periodicità, a mano a mano si aprono rapidamente delle finestre per strumenti (clarinetto, trombone), cambi armonici, melodie e via dicendo, un processo che dà respiro alla musica. Vorrei fare lo stesso con il *ragtime*. Per questi procedimenti mi rifaccio anche a una magnifica composizione del



Appunto: veniamo alla fruttifera collaborazione con Ducret.

Ho cominciato a suonare con Marc dopo lo scioglimento del quartetto americano. Non avevo né opinioni né pregiudizi su di lui, e forse è stato un bene. Il rapporto tra di noi si è costruito in modo sano, siamo riusciti col tempo – o almeno credo – a sviluppare un vocabolario comune, ci siamo mossi uno nella direzione dell'altro, ma i passi più lunghi penso di averli fatti io.

Di sicuro hai fatto dei passi verso il Ducret compositore. Prendiamo «*Taktlos Zürich 2017*»: tre brani su cinque sono a nome suo.

Suonare brani suoi piuttosto che miei è diventata un'abitudine. Non so sia una forma di rispetto inconsca nei suoi confronti o se dipenda dal fatto che i brani di Marc abbiano più forza dei miei, non saprei bene come dire e non mi interessa più di tanto. Conta invece l'interazione che si è venuta a creare fra di noi, quel punto di fusione fra chitarra e trombone. In «*Taktlos*», insieme a Peter Brunn, siamo già allo studio di puro gesto musicale, e più suoniamo più il gesto si afferma. Quando sono con Marc mi sento a casa, credo sia una sensazione reciproca. Di recente abbiamo registrato in duo in un magnifico studio analogico sperduto in Bretagna, costruito da un tizio che ha fatto tutto da solo. La sala di controllo sembra la cabina di pilotaggio dell'*Enterprise* di *Star Trek*. È un bel disco, si intitola «*Voyageurs*»: non vedo l'ora di pubblicarlo. Stiamo pensando alla possibilità di pubblicare un 45 giri in edizione limitata con un codice

download per ottenere l'intera registrazione. La copertina sarà curata da Sarah Lefèvre, la compagna di Marc.

Tu fai parte del nuovo quartetto di Ducret, *Ici*, e anche del sestetto di «*Métatonal*». Com'è la sua musica vista dall'interno?

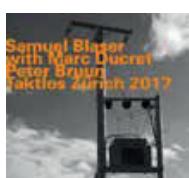
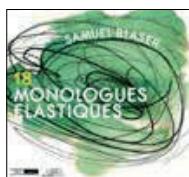
Molto scritta e molto organizzata, con larghi spazi per l'improvvisazione. Dentro le partiture non ci si muove mai senza saper dove si va a parare. Marc è un perfezionista, molto esigente. Ma non rappresenta un problema perché lo sono anch'io. Possiamo passare delle ore a provare un passaggio. Inoltre, Marc è un fan del trombone e cerca di piazzarlo dappertutto.

Oltre alla serie di pubblicazioni *lockdown*, a cosa stai lavorando in questo momento?

Con Alex Wilson sto preparando due singoli per il Don Drummond Tribute. Il primo è un arrangiamento di *Green Island*, composizione di Drummond, per cinque tromboni e sezione ritmica. Gli altri trombonisti sono Steve Turre, Glenn Ferris, John Fedchock e Jennifer Wharton: sono molto contento di riunirli per l'occasione. Posso contare su una superba sezione ritmica formata da Alex Wilson, dal percussionista venezuelano Edwin Sanz e dal batterista Dion Parson. Il secondo singolo è una canzone che sto scrivendo con Carroll Thompson, la «Queen Of Lovers Rock»: sarà lei a interpretarla.

Per cambiare discorso: ogni tanto ti capita di sostituire Nils Wogram nel quintetto di Michel Portal. Qualcuno mi ha suggerito l'idea che potresti ricordargli Vinko Globokar. Che ne pensi?

Penso che la risposta si presti a diverse considerazioni. Ho l'impressione di suonare con Portal perché qualcun altro ha deciso per lui, non ho mai ben capito se Portal apprezza quello che faccio. Dalle smorfie che fa quando suono, non si direbbe, ma visto che gli capita di farle a tutti, mi sono



detto che forse è solo un suo modo di essere. Non so, più volte mi è venuto il dubbio che non sia Portal a scegliere i suoi gruppi, men che meno i sostituti. La seconda considerazione coincide con un ricordo. Ho passato un intero pomeriggio a casa di Globokar, a Parigi, per studiare la *Sequenza V* di Luciano Berio. Non dimenticherò mai quelle ore. Ero seduto accanto a un innovatore dello strumento che aveva conosciuto Berio e lavorato assieme, registrato la *Sequenza V* per trombone solo, fatto parte, insieme a Portal, del New Phonic Art. Globokar fu molto disponibile. Mi mostrò i suoi arrangiamenti giovanili per big band e ascoltò la mia registrazione fatta con Paul Motian. Fu molto disponibile. Dopodiché non penso di assomigliare a Globokar, però il suggerimento che ti è arrivato all'orecchio è interessante. Gente come Portal trova sempre delle relazioni con i musicisti con cui ha suonato, avverte degli aspetti che ci sfuggono. Una volta, dopo un concerto, John Surman mi disse che gli avevo ricordato lo svedese Eje Thelin, uno dei miei trombonisti preferiti, purtroppo molto poco conosciuto.

Perché hai deciso di pubblicare «*18 Monologues élastiques*»? Sembra provenire da un altro mondo rispetto al trio di «*1291*»...

Ero nel pieno dello studio della *Sequenza* – di lì a poco sarei andato da Globokar – e soprattutto nel pieno della mia fase Albert Mangelsdorff, un'influenza maggiore, dalla quale ho dovuto prendere le distanze per evitare il rischio dell'omologazione. Mi è sembrato significativo pubblicare quel disco perché segna una tappa del mio percorso, fotografa la ricerca fonica di quel periodo, i modelli di riferimento (Mangelsdorff resta sempre in un angolo della testa), la volontà, chiara e netta, di interagire con l'acustica della Funkhaus Nalepastrasse, uno degli obiettivi di quella registrazione. J



MUSICA JAZZ

Dal 1945, jazz, blues e altre belle musiche per l'anima

SEPTEMBER 2020

INTERVISTA



SAMUEL BLASER

1291

Il trombonista svizzero non è molto conosciuto in Italia, mentre da tempo si è affermato come uno dei musicisti più attivi e originali del panorama europeo. Aveva quindi molte cose da raccontare, e di conseguenza la nostra intervista è stata divisa in due parti

di LUCA CIVELLI foto di JEAN-BAPTISTE MILLOT

Samuel, di recente ti sei dato un gran da fare per pubblicare alcune registrazioni attraverso la tua etichetta Blaser Music. Avremo modo di parlare di alcuni di questi lavori ma vorrei cominciare questa chiacchierata con due parole su un disco ben preciso, «1291», pubblicato da Outhere, che di fatto sancisce la tua collaborazione con Daniel Humair.

Negli ultimi tre anni abbiamo suonato assieme diverse volte. La prima è stata all'Opera di Lione per celebrare gli ottant'anni di Daniel: m'invitò lui stesso. Bella serata con un bel gruppo di musicisti: Michel Portal, Bruno Chevillon, Stefano Di Battista, Stéphane Kerecki, Vincent Lê Quang. Tra me e Daniel c'è stata subito una bella intesa. Poi ci siamo ritrovati a Losanna con Louis Sclavis e Heiri Känzig. Infine a Francoforte per un omaggio ad Albert Mangelsdorff. Il risultato delle chiacchierate fra un concerto e

l'altro è proprio «1291».

Titolo del disco e anno importante per gli svizzeri.

Sì, è l'anno in cui i cantoni Uri, Schwyz e Unterwalden siglarono il patto del Grütli, documento fondante della Confederazione Elvetica. Ci piaceva l'idea di fornire con questo lavoro qualche informazione sul nostro Paese, creare un contesto storico con la musica e attorno ad essa. L'altro musicista del trio è Känzig, suggerito da Daniel. Tre musicisti svizzeri e altrettante generazioni per un omaggio al nostro Paese: trovo che sia una bella idea.

Veniamo al repertorio. Alcuni brani «locali» contribuiscono a definire il «conto storico», ma poi incontriamo del dixieland, High Society e Where Did You Sleep Last Night. Ho pensato per un momento che ci fosse un'analogia tra «1291» e i dischi del trio Ellery Eskelin-Christian Weber-Michael Griener pubblicati dalla Intakt.

Conosco Eskelin ma non i dischi di cui parli. Posso dirti che tutto il repertorio è stato definito con Daniel. Anche gli arrangiamenti (e persino le questioni pratiche), di cui mi sono in larga parte occupato, sono stati rivisti con lui e Heiri. Daniel sogna da sempre di suonare il trombone e conosce bene il dixieland, New Orleans, le *second lines* e via dicendo.

E tu che rapporto hai con il jazz delle origini?

L'ho suonato parecchio, soprattutto con il trombettista Roland Hug, che fece parte dell'orchestra di Sidney Bechet e nacque nella mia stessa città, La Chaux-de-Fonds. Hug mi insegnò molto sugli stili di Kid Ory, Trummy Young, Jack Teagarden. L'idea del disco era di rielaborare in chiave moderna brani tra loro agli antipodi, inserendo momenti di improvvisazione. Con Daniel ci siamo trovati su un terreno comune.

Quindi sei stato allievo di Hug?



INTERVISTA

No, non proprio. Secondo me, invece, lui ne era convinto: forse mi considerava una specie di discepolo. Detto ciò, andavo nella sua villa – dotata di un Hammond B3 a ciascun piano, tre in tutto, e dove potevi ammirare un autentico Van Gogh! – una volta alla settimana per provare il repertorio dei Roland Hug All Stars. Suonavamo soprattutto hits di Louis Armstrong e Sidney Bechet, e nel frattempo imparavo le parti di Teagarden e Young. Ai concerti Hug mi rimproverava spesso di prendere il posto del clarinetto, così dovetti imparare a suonare di meno, a essere meno invasivo. Suonavamo sulle cassette, un lavoro molto interessante. Fu un'ottima scuola.

Che effetto ti fa suonare con Daniel?

Due esempi simili: Daniel e Pierre Favre. Con ambedue provo la stessa sensazione, ovvero quella di suonare con musicisti ancora molto energici. Non sento la differenza di età. Daniel e Pierre sono due vecchi guerrieri dotati di grande forza interiore. Un altro «grande vecchio» con cui ho suonato è Oliver Lake. Mi ricordo ancora cosa mi disse dopo l'ultimo concerto che fece con il mio quartetto. Oltre a ringraziarmi per averlo invitato, Oliver si scusò del fatto di non riuscire più a suonare come un tempo, e per questo pensava che fossi deluso. Mi toccò molto la sua umiltà, ma francamente ero tutto fuorché deluso, anzi!

E Favre?

Pierre è un esempio. Mangia e beve correttamente, pratica yoga, studia ancora lo strumento come fosse agli inizi. Due o tre ore al giorno. A 83 anni non è da tutti! Lui e Daniel hanno due approcci lontanissimi. Il Daniel di oggi è conciso, limita i brani a pochi minuti. Con Pierre, invece, si può suonare per ore, ma sa benissimo quando è il momento di smettere. Più passano gli anni, più io e Pierre avvertiamo l'esigenza di inserire dei tempi, delle melodie all'interno delle improvvisazioni, possono essere scampoli di Monk o di Ellington. Ci servono per dare una direzione. Abbiamo registrato un disco in duo che uscirà il prossimo anno.

Chiudiamo il discorso su «1291». Sei soddisfatto del risultato finale?

Sì, mi sembra che questo disco racchiuda tutte le mie influenze musicali. Per me era molto importante fare un lavoro di questo tipo perché ancora troppi addetti ai lavori – e parlo soprattutto dei promoter – mi considerano un improvvisatore; l'immagine che hanno di me si basa sulle prime registrazioni e sulla proficua collaborazione con Marc Ducret. Invece «1291» contiene di tutto: temi, melodie, arrangiamenti, improvvisazione. Spero di riuscire a scucirmi di dosso l'etichetta di «improvvisatore sperimentale». Vorrei anche che si incominciasse a intendere il trombone per quello che è, cioè uno strumento molto elegante, fra i più importanti della storia del jazz: pensiamo al ruolo che occupava nel jazz delle origini. È un bene per lo strumento che ci sia un bel gruppetto di trombonisti attivi oggi in Europa come Gianluca Petrella e Nils Wogram o, tra i più giovani, Fidel Fourneyron, Filippo Vignato, Robinson Khouri. Essere po-

chi ci garantisce più opportunità, ma ciò non toglie che il lavoro promozionale sia sempre molto impegnativo e occupi fin troppo spazio. **Trovi che il tuo modo di suonare sia cambiato negli anni?**

Mi ha molto sorpreso una registrazione con Paul Motian del 2011. Un concerto dal vivo registrato con uno Zoom H1 nel chiasso conviviale del Cornelia Café. Facevo delle acrobazie cui non sono più abituato, certi passaggi erano davvero arditi. Direi che il tempo mi ha aiutato ad ammorbardirmi, a essere più lineare, anche se la melodia è sempre stata un aspetto molto presente nella mia musica. Ai tempi di quel live ero convinto che bisognasse scrivere e suonare linee spigolose, cercare l'atonalità. Mentre oggi mi dico che è possibilissimo suonare contemporanei limitandosi a usare le sole terze maggiori. György Kurtág lo faceva a meraviglia.

Forse risentivi dell'influenza newyorkese?

Certamente. apro una parentesi: ho l'impressione che da quelli parti si suoni sempre nello stesso modo. Non riesco più ad ascoltare certa musica che proviene da lì, mi annoia da morire. E non sono nemmeno più così convinto che ci sia ancora grande interesse nei confronti di quel jazz volutamente complicato. Per me è più stimolante poter ricorrere a tutti gli ingredienti a disposizione e dosarli al punto giusto, e non limitarsi a una sola e unica ricetta. Se no la musica suona sempre nello stesso modo e ci si stanca. Con il sette- reggae suoniamo un brano che si intitola *The Great Tommy McCook*. L'ambito è tonale, tutto ruota attorno a una semplice melodia. Ci divertiamo a variarla in mille modi diversi, come se ogni esecuzione fosse un mezzo per riscoprire di continuo quella linea melodica.

Perché hai deciso di pubblicare il concerto con Motian?

Nella mia discografia ha un valore storico. Credo sia stato uno degli ultimi concerti di Paul e l'unico concerto che ho fatto con lui, il release party di «*Consort In Motion*». La qualità della registrazione è mediocre però ci tenevo lo stesso a pubblicarla, perché l'etichetta non mi ha permesso di recuperare il disco.

Dopo quella sera ho saputo che Motian aveva intenzione di assumermi nel suo gruppo: me lo confidò Russ Lossing. Mi confidò anche che al termine del concerto Motian scrisse sul suo taccuino: «Great music». Aveva l'abitudine di annotare le impressioni sulla musica che suonava, soprattutto quella dal vivo.

Ho riletto di recente una recensione piuttosto negativa del disco sulle pagine di *Jazz Magazine*.

Sì, mi dice qualcosa. Forse il disco era acerbo. Arrivare a New York fu un incubo. A cause delle tempeste di neve rimasi bloccato tre giorni a

Francoforte. Quando arrivai ero esausto. Feci in tempo a fare una mezza prova con Russ e Thomas Morgan, e l'indomani registrammo. Non ripeterei più un'esperienza del genere ma sono contento di averla fatta, perché mi ha dato l'opportunità di registrare con Motian.

Poi, a quanto pare, avresti potuto finire nel suo gruppo?

Motian chiamava spesso Russ per avere dei consigli sui giovani musicisti. Se non ricordo male, Ross gli fece anche i nomi di Michaël Attias e Loren Stillman. Devo dire che, nonostante la qualità del *live* non sia un granché, si percepisce che i brani erano già stati eseguiti in studio. L'interpretazione rispetto al disco è più convinta.

Con il citato *The Great Tommy McCook* arriviamo all'omaggio a Don Drummond, trombonista giamaicano e colonna portante degli Skatalites. Come ti è venuta l'idea di questo lavoro?

Il lato nascosto della mia carriera. Devi sapere che a Neuchâtel, città da dove provengono, a un certo punto circolavano molti *rastamen*. Alcuni si stabilirono proprio qui. Non mi chiedere il motivo perché non saprei come risponderti. Solo per darti un'idea, una personalità importante come il trombonista Rico Rodriguez, primo allievo di Drummond, veniva regolarmente da queste parti perché ci lavorava il suo dentista. E ogni volta che veniva portava con sé della musica. Ho suonato per cinque anni in uno dei tanti gruppi reggae che si formarono. Era un gruppo con un certo seguito, giravamo parecchio per la Svizzera romanda. Facevo parte del giro. Ho fatto sedute per quel genio di Lee «Scratch» Perry, tra le altre cose produttore di Bob Marley, e ho collaborato con Dennis Bovell, altro produttore che si occupava della *backing band* di Linton Kwesi Johnson, il poeta *dub* giamaicano. Anche con il batterista di LKJ ho collaborato attivamente. A un certo punto ho abbandonato il reggae perché volevo invertire la tendenza e riempire l'agenda di concerti jazz.

Per tornare a «The Don Drummond Tribute», tutto nasce da una conversazione fortuita con Juhamatti Kauppinen, direttore artistico del Tampere Jazz Happening. In pratica lui mi

disse di essere non solo un fan ma anche un musicista reggae. Gli proposi di barattare la partecipazione a un suo disco, «*Dub One*», con l'omaggio a Drummond. Accettò subito. Abbiamo presentato «The Don Drummond Tribute» alla scorsa edizione del festival, e se tutto va bene registreremo il disco a gennaio.

In sintesi, che ne pensi del Drummond trombonista?

Una figura chiave del jazz giamaicano e dello ska. Maestro di molti, anche jazzisti, imprescindibile per tanti trombonisti, da Rico a Vin Gordon, soprannominato «Don Drummond Junior». Un tromboni-



RITORNO AL TROMBONE

«Sarebbe l'ora che il trombone avesse il giusto ruolo: è uno strumento molto elegante, tra i più importanti della storia del jazz: pensiamo al ruolo che occupava nel jazz delle origini»



«TROPPI ADDETTI AI LAVORI, SOPRATTUTTO TRA I PROMOTER, MI CONSIDERANO ANCORA OGGI SOLTANTO UN IMPROVVISATORE»

sta classico troverebbe innumerevoli difetti nello stile di Drummond e per certi versi li trovo anch'io, che punto sempre al suono pulito, all'intonazione perfetta. Ma in realtà ho sempre amato la poesia, il mistero dietro quel trombone carico di *charme*. Ricordo che i primi mesi a New York ascoltavo senza sosta Drummond e gli Skatalites.

Immagino allora che ascolti ed esperienze ti abbiano facilitato a concepire questo omaggio.

Sì e no. Mi sono reso presto conto che, nonostante tutto, non conoscevo così bene la musica giamaicana, o almeno non abbastanza da poter elaborare un intero repertorio per sette. «The Don Drummond Tribute» è stato propedeutico perché mi ha permesso di fare ricerche in più direzioni. Ho ascoltato parecchia musica tradizionale, *folk songs* giamaicane, preso spunto da canti ecclesiastici, simili ai gospel, per aiutarmi a scrivere temi e melodie. Quando sondi la musica tradizionale giamaicana voli dritto in Africa. A

me la Giamaica ricorda il Sudafrica. Un altro aspetto stimolante di questo omaggio è stato la possibilità di lavorare con un gruppo di musicisti che ammiro molto, da Dion Parson, che ha suonato con Monty Alexander e conosce molto bene le musiche caraibiche, a Soweto Kinch, che attraverso i dischi riscrive pezzi di storia utilizzando tante musiche diverse, fino a Michael Blake, musicista di grandi vedute. Michael non ha atteggiamenti pregiudiziali nei confronti dello ska e del reggae; musiche ricchissime che troppo spesso vengono ridotte a banali *divertissements*.

La Giamaica non è solo reggae ma tante altre cose. Joe Harriott e Alexander vengono da lì. Tommy McCook sognava di essere John Coltrane; Don Drummond non aveva mai messo piede fuori da quell'isola, eppure si considerava il miglior trombonista del mondo. Quando lesse per la prima volta i *polls* di *DownBeat*, disse che al posto di J.J. Johnson avrebbe dovuto esserci lui. Storie divertenti. Ce ne sarebbero tante da raccontare.

Per chiudere tornerei a «Early In The Morning», omaggio del tuo quartetto al blues, con ospiti Oliver Lake e Wallace Roney. Perché scegliesti proprio loro?

Cercavamo personalità forti che potessero integrarsi facilmente con trombone e repertorio. Oliver è perfetto come *bluesman* e Wallace aveva quel suono limpido che mi ricordava un po' Skip James. Che sezioni, con loro due! Sembravano accostamenti improbabili, e invece funzionarono bene.

Dopo il blues e il dixieland, è la volta del ragtime. Queste musiche «antiche» ti piacciono parecchio?

Mi stanno bene addosso e mi stimola interpretarle. Per ora posso dirti che John Ellis è uno dei musicisti di questo nuovo gruppo, con cui intendo spingermi fino a Fats Waller. Per il resto sto valutando con Robert Sadin, produttore con cui lavoro da anni, quale potrebbe essere la combinazione ideale di musicisti.

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[Continua sul prossimo numero]

JAZZ

MAGAZINE

WINTER 2018/2019

AUDITIONS

Samuel Blaser

Early in the Mornin'

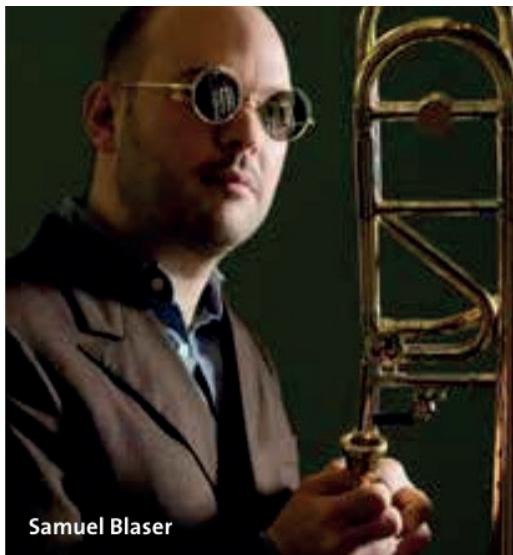
(Out Note)

Swiss trombonist Samuel Blaser is an important, relatively new voice on his instrument who boasts gifts as a mature but curious bandleader and composer. Still, the general jazz world — especially Stateside — has yet to pay due attention, partly for lack of exposure. For a fine introduction to Blaser's world, proceed to his impressive new *Early in the Mornin.'* Over the malleable course of 10 tracks, and with cameos by alto saxophonist Oliver Lake and trumpeter Wallace Roney, Blaser states his case as an organically broad-minded musician who finds no contradiction in blending his fascination with the blues — of the country, Southern and also jazz-related kind — and experimental, avant-garde thinking.

Grounding the project is Blaser's solid, empathic group, with Russ Lossing on keyboards (piano and the

'70s-nostalgic timbres of sometimes distortion-smudged electric piano, as well as clavinet, Minimoog and Hammond B-3); Masa Kamaguchi on double bass; and Gerry Hemingway on drums. Blaser asserts his presence as a leader, but he's a benevolent and collaborative one, giving the other players due expressive space.

Veteran Lake, conversant with the matchmaking of abstraction and tradition, literally starts the proceedings with an angular solo-sax intro on the blues-basted, kick-off title track. He returns to join Roney on "Levee Camp Moan," another blues with a twist or three that utilizes snaky three-part horn writing to thicken the musical plot. Blaser's solo moves seamlessly from blues riffs and bebop backflips to multi-phonics and Mingus-esque colors. He plumbs a richer palette and lends a mournful cast to the swampy ballad "Tom Sherman" and conjures up an elastic sonic range on "Black Betty."



Samuel Blaser



Photo by Baptiste Millot

Echoes of Miles Davis saunter through the album, as channeled naturally by Roney's searching, Miles-tinged trumpet on "The House Carpenter," or via the sly paraphrasing of "All Blues" on "Klaxon" before the piece fragments and reshapes itself. In the end, fragmenting, reshaping, testifying and probing propel *Early in the Mornin'* to fascinating, artful ends.

— Josef Woodard

OCTOBER 2018

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Blowing the blues with Samuel Blaser

• By BARRY DAVIS

Samuel Blaser follows his own path. Considering he tends decidedly to the freer side of the jazz tracks, that is something of a prerequisite. The 37-year-old Swiss trombonist will unfurl some of his unfettered sounds Tuesday evening at Levontin 7 in Tel Aviv (two sets – 8 p.m. and 10:30 p.m.) in the company of his quartet, and revered septuagenarian American avant-garde saxophonist Olive Lake.

It promises to be a musical tour de force, with the foursome including Swiss-based American drummer Gerry Hemingway, who has delighted Levontin audiences in the past with his infectious rock-informed melodic and energized playing. With American keyboard player Russ Lossing and Barcelona-based Japanese acoustic bassist Masa Kamaguchi also in the mix, the gigs promise to delight jazz fans of various stripes.

The show playlist will be largely based on cuts off the quartet's latest release, *Early in the Mornin'*, which came out on OutNote Records earlier this year. Lake guests on the album, as does seasoned trumpeter Wallace Roney. Blaser evidently has a lot to say, and *Early in the Mornin'* is his 16th offering as co-leader in the last 11 years. That's some going, and the list of his brothers in musical arms over the years includes late iconic drummer



SAMUEL BLASER: I think the trombone should be a bluesy instrument because it is close to the human voice. (Jean-Baptiste Millot)

Paul Motian, who played on the *Consort in Motion* record in 2011.

Blaser clearly keeps his melodic and rhythmic options open, but he would also like as many of us as possible to give ear to his ever-expanding output. "I've been working hard to try to do that, because it's a nice way to play avant-garde music, it helps us to relate to something that we actually all know – melodies or harmonies or rhythms."

The Swiss has had his career path pretty clear in his mind, basically, since he could walk and talk.

"There is a legend in the family that I wanted to start on trombone when I was two years old," he laughs. "I saw a marching band in my hometown [La Chaux-de-Fonds on the French border]. The infant spirit was willing, but lack of progress on the verbal skills front got in the way. "I couldn't make my parents understand what I want-

ed," he adds. "I had to wait until I could explain to them that I wanted to play the trombone."

That finally happened when he was nine, although the unwieldy elongated instrument proved to be a bit of a logistical challenge. "I wanted to start when I was seven, but it was too big and too heavy. So I started on the recorder. But when I started on trombone, that was it for me, my only instrument."

The youngster quickly got

himself to a music school, and dived into the intricacies of classical music. Fortunately the school was pretty liberal-minded, so Blaser could get into some extraneous, less structured sounds, too. Thankfully, that included jazz.

Blaser later furthered his musical education in Paris, and then landed himself a Fulbright scholarship, which helped him get Stateside, to New York. Although, as it happened, he studied with a mostly classically oriented trombone teacher, he was able to catch all kinds of jazz and blues gigs in New York. He also met a lot of like-minded jazz artists, including drummer Gerald Cleaver, who later recorded with Blaser.

The trombonist also developed his ear for the blues and blues-based sounds, including gospel and spirituals. As the Levontin crowds will hear this evening, the blues form a major part of Blaser's mind-set to this day. "I have always listened to the blues, since I was a kid. I think the trombone should be a bluesy instrument, because it is close to the human voice."

Since *Early in the Mornin'* came out, Blaser has recorded an opera written by avant-garde jazz guitarist Marc Ducret, which is due for release in spring 2019, and there is a ska-based project in the offing, too. Watch Blaser's space.

For tickets and more information: (03) 560-5084 and <http://www.levontin7.com/>

jazz JOURNAL

Profiles

JUNE 2016

Trombonist **Samuel Blaser**, vibraphonist **Roger Beaujolais** and singer

Darv Sherman

SAMUEL BLASER

"I clearly remember first hearing Art Blakey, Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond. Gave me goosebumps. I still try to relive that feeling when I discover new music"

On the rear cover of Spring Rain, his luminous 2015 debut with Whirlwind Recordings, Samuel Blaser had his face inside the bell of a dismantled trombone, like a man quaffing a yard of ale. One suspects this is how the young brass master likes to imbibe his music, thirstily and deep. Spring Rain was a label debut, but hardly his first release. "Since 2006, I have recorded and produced 13 albums as a leader." They were issued by a variety of labels, but Blaser admits that he prefers the continuity and team spirit of a longer term relationship. That became possible when he bumped into Whirlwind's Michael Janisch at Jazzahead in Bremen.

"Two years ago, my manager and I agreed to reduce my recording activities in order to focus on one project and really invest in promotion and development with one record label behind us." They were, as everyone is, impressed by Janisch's dynamism. Spring Rain, with its thoughtful programme of originals, Jimmy Giuffre and Carla Bley themes, repaid the mutual trust and respect. Great though previous recordings have been – Solo Bone on Slam, One From None on Fresh Sound New Talent, As

The Sea on Hatology – the wanderer seems to have found fresh purpose.

The young Swiss started out in his hometown school big band with two of his brothers. "The three of us were listening to a wide variety of music but our favourites were (and still are) Harry Belafonte, Ray Charles, Louis Armstrong and Count Basie. I clearly remember first hearing Art Blakey, Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond. Gave me goosebumps. I still try to relive that feeling when I discover new music. Then came Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderley, Curtis Fuller, Chet Baker, J.J. Johnson, Albert Mangelsdorff and Glenn Ferris. I was a huge fan of the Beatles and Beach Boys, and thanks to my parents lots of classical music, reggae and folk music."

J.J. Johnson is sometimes said to have given the trombone a "saxophonic" articulation, but there's no sense that Samuel has much interest in going down that Beatles-endorsed route of making any given instrument sound like anything except itself. "That's right. I'm not interested in reproducing what a saxophonist or a trumpet player can play. I don't mean that trombonists shouldn't try to get inspired by the way other instruments are being played and push the technical boundaries, but there are other ways to explore the instrument. I'm particularly interested in varying the tone with extended techniques as well as articulations, and trying to incorporate glissandos in an elegant way." Blaser also takes inspiration from contemporary composers like Luciano Berio, Giacinto Scelsi and Iannis Xenakis. Listen to his delicate read of Carla Bley's *Jesus Maria*, though, and you'd never believe he dabbled with the chewy stuff.

So, is his music better suited to a concert hall than a club? "To me, what really matters is the acoustic and the audience. I really need people to listen to the music while we are creating it and not become distracted. That can be a problem in big venues. I have to connect." What draws him to Giuffre is the freedom he hears expressed through the music; "it's not a style, it's a quality of the music itself", and it's one that Samuel, and pianist Russ Lossing, his co-star on Spring Rain, clearly shares.

Blaser is currently studying with French-Argentinian opera composer Oscar Strasnoy, putting together a fascinating trio with DJ Mathieu Ogier (who only plays 78s) and writing a piece for the Nouvel Ensemble

Contemporain with solo parts for guitarist Marc Ducret and himself. And he's written a kids' story about the alphorn which should be coming out on an audio CD. There's the exciting prospect of a second solo trombone album, 18 Monologues Elastiques, which is coming out this year with a book of drawings inspired by each piece, and a documentary about the recording. And there's a project inspired by the blues. And another outing from collaborative trio Fourth Landscape with pianist Benoit Delbecq and percussionist Gerry Hemingway. And that doesn't exhaust the diary for the year ahead. The great thing about Blaser is that he drinks deep but seems constantly refreshed.

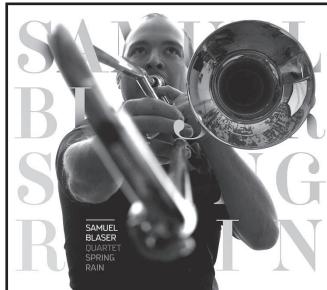
Brian Morton



Samuel Blaser

THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

DECEMBER 2015



Spring Rain
Samuel Blaser Quartet (Whirlwind)
by Ken Waxman

Like the bird that is able to replicate others' songs, Swiss-born, Berlin-based trombonist Samuel Blaser adopts particular musical personae for each project. On his recent *A Mirror to Machaut* (*Songlines*), he sophisticatedly reimaged early Renaissance motifs for the 21st Century while *Spring Rain* honors clarinetist Jimmy Giuffre's early '60s trio with pianist Paul Bley and bassist Steve Swallow by recording five of its tunes, plus seven originals in that chamber-jazz style.

Russ Lossing plays far more Fender Rhodes, Wurlitzer and mini-Moog than piano and drummer Gerald Cleaver's rhythmic skills, alongside bassist's Drew Gress' sympathetic prodding, invest the tunes with just enough bottom so that they swing subtly while staying true to Giuffre's elaborate clockwork-timed concepts. These classics continue to resonate, yet, like a new engine inserted in a classic chassis, pieces like Bley's "Temporarily" are souped up, with drum rolls adding to the stop-time arrangement. "Trudgin'", a Giuffre line, is stretched past its initial theme with elastic-band tautness, as Lossing tints the result with baroque-like filigree from electric piano. Even a respectful reading of Giuffre's "Cry Want", which meanders as if the band is motoring along a rural Texas trail, has its surface smoothness disrupted by raucous trombone snorts and percussive piano key clips.

Blaser's compositions broaden the mood with uncommon methods. The pensive performance of "Missing Mark Suetterlyn" is serrated with in-the-pocket drum beats and splattering glissandi from Wurlitzer. "The First Snow" may swirl with tones, courtesy of Fender Rhodes, more akin to '70s electric jazz, but the narrative's tough center hardens the performance to hail-like consistency. "Umbra", a piano-trombone duo, is a relaxed ballad while two solo tracks showcase Blaser's exquisite instrumental command. *Spring Rain* uniquely salutes a jazz hero while showcasing the skills of improvisers who propel the tradition in their own manner.

For more information, visit whirlwindrecordings.com. Blaser is at Nublu Dec. 10th, Ibeam Brooklyn Dec. 11th-12th and 15th with Max Johnson and Cornelia Street Café Dec. 13th. See Calendar.

AUGUST 2015

SPRING RAIN

JAZZ

SAMUEL BLASER QUARTET

ffff

Que font exactement les musiciens qui se lancent dans une improvisation atonale et sans tempo continu ? Steve Swallow explique très bien dans les notes de pochette de ce *Spring Rain* qu'ils s'écoutent, et qu'ils sont d'autant plus eux-mêmes et créatifs qu'ils comprennent ce que les autres sont en train de jouer pour aller dans le sens de l'ensemble. Samuel Blaser est un tromboniste suisse de 30 ans bien décidé à poursuivre dans le jazz un projet novateur. Il a des exemples pour cela, dans les années 1960, principalement Jimmy Giuffre et Carla Bley qui étaient d'intrépides inventeurs de musique. Il leur reprend des thèmes qui n'apparaissent souvent qu'au terme d'un parcours improvisé. L'exubérance joyeuse de son jeu de trombone rappelle parfois Roswell Rudd par le son plein de vigueur qu'il déploie, encouragé par le claviériste Russ Lossing, le contrebassiste Drew Gress et le batteur Gerald Cleaver. On sent qu'ils ne sont entrés en studio qu'après avoir longuement exploré ensemble leur inconscient, instruments en main, et avoir discuté un concept qui allait structurer la session. On hésite à parler de free jazz au sujet de cet album, tant l'appellation fait encore peur, alors que la musique de *Spring Rain* a justement quelque chose de si rafraîchissant et de formidablement encourageant. — *Michel Contat*

1 CD Whirlwind Recordings/Bertus Distribution.

jazz

JOURNAL

JUNE 2015



SAMUEL BLASER

SPRING RAIN

Cry Want; Missing Mark Sutterlyn; Temporarily; Homage; Umbra; The First Snow; Scootin' About; Trudgin'; Spring Rain; Trippin'; Counterparts; Jesus Maria (50.03)
Samuel Blaser (tb, solo on *Homage*); Ross Lossing (p, elp, Wurlitzer, syn); Drew Gress (b); Gerald Cleaver (d). Hoboken, January 2014; Berlin, December 2015 (sic - presumably 2014!).

Whirlwind 4670

★★★

Blaser has successfully negotiated a path from avant-garde to mainstream-modern and with a dream group produces the record of his career so far. His great gift is that he can alternate a low, almost toneless growl with a sound so fat and unctuous you'd think the horn must be buttered. In Lossing he has a kindred spirit, a restlessly inventive improviser and composer (they share the credit for *Umbra*) who likes to explore, but also know the tradition, as he demonstrates on *Temporarily*, and who furthermore isn't afraid of new technology. Along with Matthew Shipp and Craig Taborn, he's about the most exciting piano player around.

Blaser programmes three Jimmy Giuffre numbers and the closing Carla Bley tune (which Giuffre also loved) among the originals and they make perfect sense in this context, opening up the harmonic texture and tempting Gress and Cleaver into unusual rhythmic configurations. Bass and drums are watertight at every stage. Gress isn't just a Mr Reliable; he thinks on his feet and in every measure. Cleaver takes chances and makes them work every time.

A great modern record and a delight to hear the trombone regaining some of its old authority in the music.

Brian Morton

THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

JUNE 2015

ARTIST FEATURE



PETER GANNUSKIN/DOWNTOWNMUSIC.NET

SAMUEL BLASER

BY KEN WAXMAN

Swiss-born trombonist Samuel Blaser maintains strong North American ties that extend far beyond the musicians on *Spring Rain* (Whirlwind), his newest CD. While the disc, dedicated to late clarinetist Jimmy Giuffre, features all-American backing from keyboardist Russ Lossing, bassist Drew Gress and drummer Gerald Cleaver, one of his frequent trans-Atlantic trips bring him to NYC this month for gigs with other longtime associates like drummer Harris Eisenstadt, bassist Michael Bates and tenor saxophonist Michael Blake—all Canadians. “It’s like a big family,” says Blaser, 33. “I like to draw upon the same members in many of my bands.”

Blaser, who also maintains an as-yet-unrecorded European working trio with French guitarist Marc Ducret and Danish drummer Peter Bruun, has kept up close ties with this continent since the period in the mid-aughts when he lived in Brooklyn while studying, courtesy of a Fulbright Scholarship, for a Master’s degree in music at Pace University. The trombonist doesn’t limit himself to any one style either. In Berlin he writes advanced compositions and plays in new and early music ensembles. Recent CDs reflect this as well. Before *Spring Rain*, the trio album *Fourth Landscape* (Nuscope) consisted of originals by Blaser, French pianist Benoit Delbecq and American drummer Gerry Hemingway while *Mirror to Machaut* (Songlines) featured his original pieces influenced by early Renaissance composers.

Part of a music-loving family, he grew up listening to his family’s record collection, which ranged from opera to Harry Belafonte and Ray Charles. He became fixated on studying the trombone (“it was shiny, it had a slide and it made funny noises,” he recalls). Entering the local conservatory at nine, he graduated with a degree in classical trombone in 2001. Along the way he was introduced to jazz. “I wanted to be a bebopper and spent time transcribing J.J. Johnson solos,” he remembers. “The first records I bought were by Dave Brubeck, [Art Blakey and] the Jazz Messengers and Herbie Hancock.” After graduation he freelanced, learned about section work and phrasing while in the Swiss Jazz School Big Band, attended master classes taught by the likes of Jimmy Heath and did two tours with the Vienna Art Orchestra. Even as far back as when he first played a blues, he was told it sounded like he was playing free. “So gradually I realized that I had more fun playing open music than anything else,” Blaser notes. “But there was no one in Switzerland doing that.” That translated into a desire to become part of the freer New York scene.

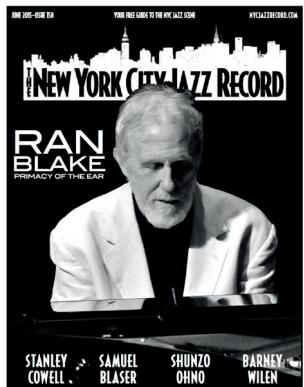
In retrospect, he admits, there were some advanced improvisers in Switzerland and later on Blaser established an ongoing relationship with one. For years, via his jazz-fan aunt, he had been hearing about drummer Pierre Favre, now 77, who was playing free jazz in Zurich in the ‘60s. “In 2008 I got in touch with him and said I’d like to play with him,” Blaser recalls. “He said set up a gig, we did at a local museum and we’re still playing together seven years later.”

Canadian clarinetist François Houle and Ducret are two of the musicians for whom Blaser is writing concertos as part of his heightened interest in composition. He’s also composing a chamber piece for two violins. He doesn’t want to limit himself, he explains. Although he was a full-fledged jazzer in the conservatory, once he relocated to the U.S. to study jazz he wanted to play Baroque and new music. *Mirror to Machaut* was an outgrowth of that baroque interest, he explains, but presenting early Renaissance-styled sounds in a unique way. *Spring Rain* is more of the same. He had played Giuffre’s “Four Brothers” in student big bands, but when he later discovered the reedplayer’s other interests, “I went crazy,” he recalls. “I can relate to him because he did all kinds of things.” Although the five compositions by Giuffre and Carla Bley were originally recorded by Giuffre’s trio with pianist Paul Bley and bassist Steve Swallow, Blaser’s instrumentation, arrangements and approach are nothing like the those versions. “There’s no point in playing anything that’s too close to the originals,” he declares. “That’s why I asked Russ to play all the keyboards available in the studio.”

Blaser’s two solo trombone tracks on *Spring Rain* are part of an avenue he plans to pursue further. He already has a new solo trombone CD album ready for release. Plans are to link the 18 compositions and improvisations with a documentary plus drawings. “It’s hard to play solo on a trombone because it’s a monophonic instrument,” he reveals. “It doesn’t have sustain and it can’t play more than one note unless you use multiphonics. If you play for an hour you have to attract the ears of the audience without tiring them.” He has studied advanced technique with a respected trombone teacher in Paris and performed works by Vinko Globokar and Iannis Xenakis plus Luciano Berio’s “Sequenza” for trombone. “I think everybody likes to play ‘Sequenza’ but the piece is known to be the hardest one in the trombone repertoire. It takes time to read the part and memorize it. The plunger is a difficulty, but it wasn’t one for me since jazzers use it more than classical players.”

Blaser stays in touch with his audience and, as part of a pre-order campaign for *Spring Rain* on his website, used t-shirts, album downloads, CDs, autographs and even private solo and band performances as lures. So far, however, no one has come up with the cash for the private concerts. “You have to be a big name,” he laughs.

Big name he may not be, but after nine albums, many concerts—100 in the past two years alone with Ducret and Bruun—and his involvement in different musical styles, he’s busy and fulfilled. “I like playing Baroque trombone; I like to perform with symphony orchestras; and I like jazz and improvisation,” he declares. His attention may sometimes be drawn elsewhere but he insists “I’ll always play jazz and improvised music. I have too much fun playing it to give it up.” ♦



STANLEY COWELL SAMUEL BLASER SHUNZO OHNO BARNEY WILEN

For more information, visit samuelblaser.com. Blaser is at Ibeam Brooklyn Jun. 7th with Michael Blake and 10th, Cornelia Street Café Jun. 14th with Sébastien Ammann and Delroy’s Cafe and Wine Bar Jun. 15th. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Samuel Blaser – *Solo Bone* (SLAM, 2007)
- Pierre Favre/Samuel Blaser – *Vol A Voile* (Intakt, 2009)
- Samuel Blaser/Paul Motian – *Consort in Motion* (Kind of Blue, 2010)
- François Houle 5 + 1 – *Genera* (Songlines, 2012)
- Samuel Blaser/Benoit Delbecq/Gerry Hemingway – *Fourth Landscape* (Nuscope, 2013)
- Samuel Blaser Quartet – *Spring Rain* (Whirlwind, 2014)

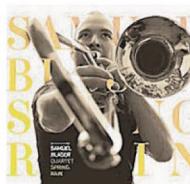
JAZZ

von CHRISTIAN BROECKING

Der Posaunist singt

Der Posaunist Albert Mangelsdorff hatte die Multiphonics, das zeitgleiche Singen und Spielen auf seinem Instrument, mit großer Virtuosität zu seinem Markenzeichen entwickelt. Der 34-Jährige aus La Chaux-de-Fonds stammende und heute in Berlin lebende Posaunist Samuel Blaser hat konsequent die Multiphonics in sein Spiel integriert und gehört bereits zu einem der weltweit Anerkannten auf seinem Instrument. Der zeitgenössische Ansatz eines Luciano Berio reizt ihn, und das eher selten zu hörende Glissando-Spiel auf der Posaune will er nicht den Mainstream-Typen überlassen. Blaser sucht nach neuen Wegen, singt nicht nur oberhalb der Posaunenlinie, sondern auch darunter, und wenn Mangelsdorff das Jazzgefühl bewahren wollte, um ein Jazzmusiker zu bleiben, sagt Blaser: Der andere Weg ist meiner. Auf „Spring Rain“ widmet er sich nun einigen Kompositionen des Klarinettisten Jimmy Guiffre, der Anfang der Sechziger den kollektiven freien Moment im kammermusikalischen Jazz definierte und einflussreiche Experimente mit Paul Bley und Steve Swallow aufnahm. Vor fünfzig Jahren, schreibt Swallow nun in den Liner Notes, hätten sie die Musik mehr geprobt und diskutiert als aufgeführt, doch es habe sich gelohnt. Genau die von ihnen damals angestrebte Improvisationshaltung höre er heute bei Blasers amerikanischem Quartett. Samuel Blaser möchte mit diesem Album zeigen, dass es in seinem Leben mehr gibt als Free

Jazz. Melodische Ausdrucksstärke ist spürbar und ein Plädoyer für umfassende Grenzenlosigkeit.



Samuel Blaser Quartet:
Spring Rain (Whirlwind
Recordings/Indigo)

THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

JANUARY 2014



A Mirror to Machaut

Samuel Blaser Consort in Motion ([Songlines](#))

As The Sea

Samuel Blaser ([hatOLOGY](#))

Fourth Landscape

Samuel Blaser/Benoit Delbecq/Gerry Hemingway ([Nuscope](#))

One From None

Michael Bates/Samuel Blaser Quintet ([Fresh Sound-New Talent](#))

by Robert Iannapollo

Blaser and Delbecq and three by Hemingway. Blaser's "Couleurs" finds each musician carefully placing each note in the playing field, subtly changing the timbre and texture of the music from phrase to phrase. His "Outremer" moves along on a pulse by Hemingway with Blaser and Delbecq stating the unusual theme, an elongated series of lines that shouldn't seem to fit the rhythm but do. While the music tends to be quieter and more circumspect, it does not preclude an energy that gives it its forward motion. And this trio finds a satisfying level of freedom within its structures.

Finally, a co-led quintet with bassist Michael Bates is featured on *One From None* (Blaser and Bates had previously worked together on records by François Houle and Peter Van Huffel). Lossing is back on keyboards, Michael Blake on tenor and Jeff Davis on drums. This quintet has an almost retro feel to it, perhaps due to Lossing's Fender Rhodes. Compositions are by both leaders. Bates' "Van Gogh" sounds like it could have been in the book of Miles' second quartet while his title track rides along on a loping Coltrane-ish groove. Blaser's "Recurring Dream" is carried by Lossing's elegant (almost Paul Bley-ish) acoustic piano work and the blend of Blaser and Blake on the plaintive melody gives the music a feeling of suspension. For complexity, there's Blaser's "Rising Moon" with its lengthy tricky head. The soloing is muscular and this group achieves an impressive level of communication.

For more information, visit [songlines.com](#), [hat hut.com](#), [nuscope.org](#) and [freshsoundrecords.com](#). Blaser is at ShapeShifter Lab Jan. 2nd, Legion Bar Jan. 5th, Korzo Jan. 7th and Michiko Studios Jan. 10th. See Calendar.

Swiss trombonist Samuel Blaser has to be one of the busiest young musicians in Europe. In the past year he has toured the world with his various projects and worked with Pierre Favre, Baldo Martinez and the collective group J.A.S.S. as well as participating in a Blaise Cendrars theatre piece. And 2013 saw the release of the four records under consideration here. One has to wonder if Blaser sleeps very much.

A Mirror to Machaut is the second release by his band Consort in Motion but there have been major changes. The redoubtable Russ Lossing is still on keyboards but drummer Paul Motian died in 2011. Gerry Hemingway is an excellent replacement, having a similar subtlety in transforming rhythms but with a stronger drive. Bassist Drew Gress replaces Thomas Morgan and Blaser has added a partner to the frontline, multi-reed player Joachim Badenhorst, fortuitous when the latter is playing bass clarinet to Blaser's trombone. The two horns sound made for each other, especially on the opener "Hymn". On the previous recording Blaser chose the music of Monteverdi as his source but here reaches back to the 14th century and Guillaume de Machaut. While there's always a danger when improvised music tries to merge with classical forms, Blaser is able to avoid the pitfalls of preciousness and pretension. His originals capture the flavor of Machaut's linear approach but sound modern while the Machaut material adapts well to contemporary performance. At times somber and brooding, the music also touches on free improvisation and Miles-ian grooves, especially when Lossing switches to electric piano and Hemingway kicks in a backbeat.

As The Sea is the second release from Blaser's quartet with guitarist Marc Ducret, bassist Banz Oester and drummer Gerald Cleaver. Like the first (2011's *Boundless*), it's a four-part suite with lengthy improvising during each section. Blaser and Ducret have developed into a great sparring team. Each seems to relish making unexpected detours and the themes seem designed for this. The opening five minutes of the piece consist of barely audible sounds from trombone, scrapings on guitar, Oester tapping his bow on the strings and subtle sounds from Cleaver. But this is a raucous quartet too, the rhythm section pushing things along with burly energy, especially during the middle movements when Blaser and Ducret joust with simultaneous solos. *As The Sea* covers the compositional spectrum nicely and this band sounds like it must be a killer live.

If the above quartet is the most bombastic of Blaser's groups, the cooperative trio with Hemingway and French pianist Benoit Delbecq is his most pensive. *Fourth Landscape* consists of 11 tracks: four each by

DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond Since 1934

JULY 2013



European Scene / BY PETER MARGASAK

Trombonist Without Borders

TROMBONIST AND COMPOSER

Samuel Blaser was born and raised in the town of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, and he's lived in Berlin since 2009. But if you scan Blaser's expanding discography, you might think he's American, or at least based in the United States. He credits the three years he spent in the States—starting with the Fulbright grant he earned in 2005 and his studies at SUNY Purchase under John Fedchock, Jim Pugh and Hal Galper—with significantly altering his conception of music.

"New York totally changed the vision I had for jazz and improvised music," Blaser said. "The energy there is unique and really inspiring. My playing and my writing completely metamorphosed."

Blaser, 31, was taken with the trombone at the tender age of 2, picking the instrument out of a local brass ensemble during a parade. Growing up in a musical household, he was exposed to opera, jazz and popular music. His two brothers also played instruments, so he had ad hoc bands during childhood. He ended up in the town's conservatory, where he played in the Swiss Jazz School Orchestra and shared the stage with titans such as Clark Terry and Phil Woods.

Blaser also played with the Vien-



Samuel Blaser

JOHN GUILLEMIN

na Art Orchestra and worked in various big bands and New Orleans-style groups, but it wasn't until 2006 that he formed the first band under his own name—a quartet with guitarist Scott DuBois, bassist Thomas Morgan and drummer Gerald Cleaver that played on his debut album, *7th Heaven* (Between the Lines).

That disc established the trombonist as a force to be reckoned with, merging post-bop fundamentals with heady exploration and an unerring ear for harmony.

"Those years were amazing be-

cause I got to meet so many great musicians and friends," he said, noting that most of those relationships have carried on. While his current quartet is an international affair, featuring Cleaver, French guitarist Marc Ducret and Swiss bassist Bänz Oester, he maintains a collaborative ensemble with the Brooklyn-based bassist Michael Bates, which just released the terrific album *One From None* (Fresh Sound New Talent).

Blaser said he has always liked adventurous players such as Eric Dolphy, Albert Mangelsdorff and Ray Anderson, "but it was only when I moved to New York that I really showed a strong interest for free music."

As *The Sea (Hatology)*, the strong second album by his quartet, vibrantly displays his penchant for extended improvisation within his own rigorous suite-based writing.

"I actually don't really have any specific aesthetic concerns," Blaser said. "My interests in music are manifold, and I would like to keep this open-mindedness as much as possible. In fact, I believe this flexibility contributes to the richness of my playing and writing."

Indeed, his band Consort in Motion employs a much different con-

cept than his quartet. The group's 2011 eponymous debut album featured Morgan on bass, Russ Lossing on piano and the late Paul Motian on drums, melding improvisation with the Baroque music of Monteverdi and Frescobaldi. A second album due this fall from Songlines Records—with Lossing, bassist Drew Gress, drummer Gerry Hemingway and Belgian reedist Joachim Badenhorst—moves the project toward the music of medieval French composers Guillaume de Machaut and Guillaume Dufay.

"Some of the works here are so far removed from the originals that it is impossible to recognize the source materials, while for other works I sought to remain faithful to the scores," Blaser said.

The project that most excites him, however, is a forthcoming solo effort made with Swiss producer Martin Ruch. Blaser cites Mangelsdorff, Conny Bauer, Paul Rutherford and George Lewis for their pioneering efforts with solo trombone music, but he sees his contribution as unique.

"The richness and the variety of different qualities of acoustics of [Berlin's Funkhaus Studio] offers an incredible playground for experimental recordings," he explained. "The characteristic of the recording was to include motion as an extended form of expression."

DB

jazzwise

JUNE 2013

Samuel Blaser Quartet

As The Sea

Hatology 718 | ★★★

Samuel Blaser (tb), Marc Ducret (g), Banz Oester (b) and Gerald Cleaver (d). Rec. 5 November 2011

This is the same quartet featured on the acclaimed 2010 release *Boundless* and it is equally impressive both in terms of group cohesion and richness of personalities. Guitarist Marc Ducret's input looms large. The spectrum of sounds he brings to the table is staggeringly wide – busy, prickly, crackly, crunchy high pitched chords; floating, wobbly low open notes; fleeting, discreet mandolin-like countermelodies – but the presence of double bassist Banz Oester and drummer Gerald Cleaver is no less crucial for their blend of propulsion and suspension. Indeed, Blaser's lengthy, suite-like compositions are equal parts soundscape and theme, and the alternation of ecstatic, hymnal fanfares and edgy, funk-rock grooves is bracing. Given Ducret's presence, it stands to reason that there is an echo of the vocabulary of his celebrated collaborator Tim Berne, and if one were looking for a pithy sales pitch it could be Small rather than Big Satan. But Blaser, the 31 year-old Swiss trombonist who has spent considerable time in New York, has his own strength of character. Absorbing and engaging. **Kevin Le Gendre**



DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond Since 1934

NOVEMBER 2011

Samuel Blaser *Consort In Motion*

KIND OF BLUE 10046

★★★★½

There is so much baggage attached to the concept of jazz-classical fusion, so many dead ends along the Third Stream, that it's almost a disservice to Samuel Blaser's brilliantly realized new CD to refer to it in those terms. The conservatory-trained Swiss trombonist reaches back to Italian composers of the Baroque and Renaissance, recontextualizing centuries-old themes and melodies via modern improvisation, more an act of resurrection than archaeology.

The austerity with which Blaser and his stellar quartet approach these pieces at times suggests that we're hearing the ghosts of long-forgotten performances, howling remembered scraps of melody amidst their laments. The graceful opening cascade of Russ Lossing's piano and Paul Motian's cymbals on Biagio Marini's "Passacaglia," for instance, is soon scarred by a brief knocking from Thomas Morgan's bass and Blaser's pained, breathy squeal, before the ensemble combines for a dirge-like procession.

The bulk of the album focuses on the work of Claudio Monteverdi; the "Ritornello" from his early opera *L'Orfeo* is visited twice, recalling the way in which its sweeping melody recurs throughout the original opera. The first instance abstracts the piece over seven min-



utes, Blaser growling over Motian's most bop-inflected rhythms while Morgan and Lossing walk over the keys. The pianist's solo, which follows a particularly crisp, resonant burst from Motian, merely suggests the actual melody, hinting at it cleverly in fragmented and refracted form. The brief, second iteration finds Blaser and Morgan trading the explicitly-stated melody back and forth in a stately duet.

This is such an expansive take on the source material that the quartet seems to occupy a space surrounding the compositions, intersecting and deviating from them and each other at will. Where Blaser can tend towards the morose in his plaintive moans, Lossing cuts through the darkness like vinegar, suddenly erupting in frenzied outbursts or dense clusters. Motian is an inspired choice at the kit, bringing his signature amorphous style to Blaser's open-ended interpretations, meeting the leader's multiphonic bellows with sharp bursts or carpeting a sparse Morgan solo with insistent snare rolls. The bassist proves an intriguing foil for the veteran drummer, able to slyly slip in and out of time and idiom. —Shaun Brady

Consort In Motion: Lamento Della Ninfa; Reflections On Piagn'e Sospira; Reflections On Toccata; Passacaglia; Ritornello; Si Dolce è l'Tormento; Balletto Secondo-Retrata; Reflections On Vespro Della Beata Vergine; Ritornello; Il Ritorno D'Ulisse in Patria-Atto Quarto, Scène II. (58:13)

Personnel: Samuel Blaser, trombone; Paul Motian, drums; Russ Lossing, piano; Thomas Morgan, bass.

Ordering info: kindofbluerrecords.com