

# **THE FINEST IN BELGIAN JAZZ**

Jempi Samyn & Sim Simons

## **Colophon**

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## Foreword

On top of De Werf's normal theatre and jazz activities, 2002 first and foremost means the première of *Jazz Brugge* (a festival of European jazz), the release of *The Finest in Belgian Jazz* (10 CDs of the most striking jazz musicians and groups in Belgium today, selected by 50-odd jazz journalists and promoters), and this jazz book.

*Brugge 2002* was both source of inspiration and challenge, but also a deadline for this book. A very tangible one indeed for Sim Simons and Jempi Samyn, its authors, the 3Js : photographers Jan Vernieuwe, Jos Knaepen and Jacky Lepage, translators Nadine Malfait (English version) and Philippe Schoonbrood (French version), Marijke Deweerdt of graphic studio Folio and for the entire team at *De Werf*. No two ways about it : this book would never have come about without the inspired and unflinching efforts of the entire team and a host of volunteers inside and around our 'building site' (*De Werf* means exactly that in Dutch). Nor, last but not least, without a number of sponsors who chose quality as opposed to the power of numbers. It is indeed a well-known fact that jazz is anything but a mass product.

Jazz, like all types of music, is a universal language, over and beyond linguistic and cultural borders - which occasionally clashes with the legal framework that is called borders. In that respect too, this book is unique : it came about thanks to the co-operation of *Muziekcentrum Vlaanderen* as well as its counterpart from Flanders' nearest foreign neighbours, *Wallonie-Bruxelles Musiques*.

There is such a thing as Belgian jazz : a potpourri of Walloons and Flemings and *Bruxellois*, a cross-fertilization of musicians united through a creole, jazzy lingo. The country of Tintin and *Kuifje* (as he is called in Flemish), Magritte and Brel, Django Reinhardt and Toots Thielemans : the rich feeding ground of Belgian jazz.

The label W.E.R.F. - *with* dots - started off as a joke (in the year '93 of the previous century!) : 'Wasted Energy Recording Factory'. The label now has 25 titles to its name, to which we proudly add the 10 *Brugge 2002* ones. The joke as well as the eponymous *werf* - literally in the sense of construction site - belong to the past, but do let's keep things fun, creative and jazzy!

Filip Delmotte

**TOOTS THIELEMANS**  
Jempi Samyn

Our jazz history does not start with the saxophone. Tough luck. That has everything to do with a moral duty towards the father of Belgian jazz, who celebrated his eightieth birthday in April 2002.

The harmonica mainly tends to be associated with blues. John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson, Harmonica Slim, Sugar Blue, Sonny Terry, Johnny Mars, Junior Wells, Charlie Musselwhite, Kim Wilson, Mike Morgan, Juke Boy Bonner, Big Walter 'Shakey' Horton, James Harman, Buddy Moss, Big Mama Thornton, Harmonica Fats, Jazz Gillum, Billy Branch, Driftin' Slim, Blue Boy Willie, Whispering Smith, Little Walter, Slim Harpo, John Mayall, Shakey Jake Harris, Buster Brown, Steven De bruyn... the list is endless. Need I say more?

In jazz, harmonica players are few and far between. Chromatic harmonicas (with a push button on the side) never were quite as successful as blues harmonicas. What is more : the one and only true jazz harmonica player in history was born on April 29th 1922 in the Brussels *Marolles* quarter and is still performing. His name is Jean Baptiste Thielemans, doubtless better known to you as Toots, a name he acquired after musicians such as Toots Mondello and Toots Camarata. Philip d'Arcy may have played the harmonica with Fred Hall's Sugar Babies in the Twenties, and Larry Adler indeed was there in the Thirties, long before Toots, but in fact this traditional, popular music nowhere near compares to the as yet unequalled virtuoso manner in which, from the age of 17, Toots has been playing top-notch jazz on the chromatic harmonica.

These last few decades a string of notable harmonica players have taken the stage, amongst whom Stevie Wonder, Swiss American Grégoire Maret, Frenchman Oliver Ker Ourio and Dutchman Kim Snelten. In Belgium too, a few people chose to follow in the great Toots' footsteps. Olivier Poumay, for example, who regularly scours the nocturnal jams at the Brussels Athanor and Sounds jazz clubs and Steven De bruyn, another skilled chromatic harmonica player.

The harmonica, however, is not the only instrument at which Toots excels. It was Django Reinhardt's playing which drew Toots to the guitar, which he started practising seriously in 1941. In the Sixties, he even developed his own sound : unisono whistling and guitar playing. In 1962 this earned him the timeless world hit 'Bluesette', which has since been recorded in over a hundred different versions. The very first live version, however, was performed *and* recorded in Sweden in 1963. The annual readers' and critics' poll of the leading magazine *Down Beat* still lists Toots as number one in the category 'miscellaneous instruments'.

Toots was friends with Charlie Parker, with whom he topped the bill at the Paris 1949 International Jazz Festival. He also played in Charlie Parker's All Stars. Two years earlier, 25-year-old Toots had visited the States for the first time. Before long, he was jamming with various jazz bands on 52nd Street.

In 1950 Toots toured Europe with the Benny Goodman Sextet and nearly two years later (in the winter of 1951-'52) he definitively emigrated to the States. Five years on, he became an American citizen.

Between 1953 and 1959, he was a member of the George Shearing Quintet, after which he started his own ensemble, without ever giving up being a studio musician. That is how, in the mid-Sixties, he became a close friend of Quincy Jones, who made various recordings with him, amongst which the soundtracks of the films *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *The Getaway* (1972). Toots regularly participated in commercials, TV-series etc. Old Spice was the most famous one, but his musical contribution to the educational TV-series *Sesame Street* didn't go unnoticed either. Other famous film soundtracks by Toots, are *Turks Fruit (Turkish Delight)*, *Sugarland Express*, *Jean de Florette* and *Cinderella*.

The impressive list of artists with whom Toots performed and/or recorded with at one time or another, contains celebrities like Ella Fitzgerald, Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, Art Taylor, Pepper Adams, Kenny Drew, Dizzy Gillespie, Jim Hall, Gilberto Gil, Milton Nascimento,

Eliane Elias, J.J. Johnson, Ferdinand Povel, Joe Pass, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, Joshua Redman, Shirley Horn, Jaco Pastorius, Oscar Castro-Neves, Terence Blanchard, Jerry Goodman, Lee Ritenour, Ernie Watts, Richard Galliano, Natalie Cole, Pat Metheny, John Zorn, Paul Simon, Billy Joel and at least twice that number, as will appear from the following. The late Clifford Brown once told him : 'Toots, the way you play the harmonica, they shouldn't call it a miscellaneous instrument.

'Toots himself remembers it well : 'The first record I owned was by Louis Armstrong, sixty-odd years ago, and I was immediately struck by the way in which it brought various cultures together, especially African and American (both North and South). I was *inoculated* on the spot : injected for life with the jazz vaccin. Little did I realize that, one day, I would be playing in a commercial with Louis Armstrong himself : an unforgettable experience, even though it only lasted 28 seconds.

As a 3-year-old kid, I already played the accordion. But it was through film music - before World War II - that I found out about a sound very much like that of the accordion : the harmonica. I was already at university when, one day, I saw Larry Adler play - the absolute pioneer of the chromatic harmonica. Never before had I seen such musical potential bundled in such a tiny, easily transportable trinket. You could have it with you at all times and it probably wasn't that expensive either. I dashed to the shop to get me one and I have been playing the thing every day since, sometimes only for 15 minutes. Mind you, it was pure recreation at the time. I wanted to be a maths teacher, you see. Later, when I had already made some sort of a name for myself on harmonica, most musicians looked at me, smirking and nodding their heads : '*Jette ce jouet!*', they seemed to suggest. Incredible!

To this day, some people sneer at the instrument as a banal toy. Some critics still reckon I should have picked the saxophone, as if I were less of a musician because of it. They forget I have also played the guitar with the biggest names in jazz, amongst whom the George Shearing Quintet. Dizzy Gillespie would say : 'I'm sure you play some great shit on the harmonica, but I prefer your guitar playing.' Which is why, in his trio in Montreux, I played the harmonica, not the guitar.

A thrombosis has drastically sapped the strength in my left hand, which makes playing the guitar difficult. In the '50s, however, I was mentioned in one breath with Herb Ellis and Barney Kessel, and later Wes Montgomery. I will never give up playing the guitar. I've recently had my semi-acoustic Gibson ES175, the *fat lady* as we sometimes call it, repaired. Philip Catherine has the same. In the past, I also often played a Rickenbaker. I was the first one, in fact, to introduce the solid body in jazz. I have a nice anecdote about that.

One day, in 1963, I got this phonecall from the Rickenbaker manufacturer. He told me : 'Toots, this young band from England - what are they called, Smittles, Dittles? - I don't know, one of their guys is playing your guitar. They will be on the Ed Sullivan Show.' It was The Beatles, of course, who were touring the States for the first time. I met them and John Lennon told me how he had bought his Rickenbaker after seeing a photo of me holding one on a record sleeve. He had assumed, he said, that 'if it's good enough for George Shearing, it must be bloody good enough for me.' I'll never forget that.'

There is also a nice anecdote about Toot's first encounter with the blind pianist/composer George - 'Lullaby of Birdland' - Shearing, who in the '50s created an entirely new sound by introducing quintet Afro-Cuban jazz in his band with, amongst others, vibraphone player Cal Tjader and conga player Armando Peraza. 'In the winter of 1951, having waited six months for my immigration papers, I finally settled in the States. The year before I had toured Europe with the Benny Goodman Sextet and, believe it or not, I got hardly any attention in my native country!

Another six months in New York later, I got my first Union Permit. I knew my patience would pay off. Not that the money immediately started pouring in, mind.

Tony Scott, a real musician's brother, found me in a bar in New York one evening, where I was having a drink with a few other musicians. He told me he had heard me play the guitar at the Birdland, where I occasionally did perform at their Monday Jam Session Nights. He had obviously been impressed, since he insisted I meet George Shearing that very night. Apparently his guitarist, Dick Garcia, had been drafted.

Off we went to Carnegie Hall, where George Shearing had a double concert with Billy Eckstine. Like him, he was under contract with MGM. In no time we found ourselves in George Shearing's dressing room. 'Hey, George, how are you doing, man? I've got just the man for you! Listen! I played 'Body and Soul' on my harmonica, which I always had with me. 'And he also plays the guitar...' That was how I met George Shearing.

A week later, I was in the Dinah Washington Show in the Philadelphia Earl Theater, with the Charlie Parker All Stars - with, apart from Charlie Parker himself, Miles Davis and Milt Jackson. I immediately spotted George Shearing in the audience. He had me auditioning at the Rendez Vous Club, where he happened to be playing that same week. I was given a minimum six-year contract on the spot, a time in my life I can only describe as my finishing school.'

Interesting detail : George Shearing, whose parents were from London, had emigrated to the States in 1946 himself.

Toots' career has, in fact, been one long string of encounters with various, extremely important jazz musicians. 'I have met quite a few musicians in my life. In 1955 I was a member of the George Shearing Quintet. I also travelled in the same coach as the Count Basie Band, Lester Young, Stan Getz and the Miles Davis Quintet. Together, we formed the so-called Birdland All Stars - you know, the famous jazz club. Diagonally across from me sat Billie Holiday with her little dog, a chihuahua, on her lap, and her husband next to her, whilst I sat next to Eddie Jones, Count Basie's bass player. Bill Evans is the monument amongst pianists I have recorded with, but I must admit I did hugely admire bass player Jaco Pastorius, who goes on living in many people's memories. Of the Belgian jazz musicians of the older generation, Jacques Pelzer has left very fond memories. He came to play at my seventieth birthday, and I played at his, in Andenne. Soon after that I heard, in the States, that he had died. I immediately rang Steve Houben to send flowers.

In 2000, three days before my birthday, I was invited at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. I had led some sort of workshop in 1972 there, as what they considered the perfect example of the truly professional musician who had played with the greatest, *and* felt at home in all styles : jazz, film music, commercials, you name it. I was being asked to go and play music and answer questions from youngsters who were all better musicians than myself. Imagine! Twenty-eight years later, a Swedish jazz organisation had got them to commission Maria Schneider - a graduate from Eastman, with whom I had worked off and on for 8 years - to write a few arrangements to celebrate the occasion. I couldn't believe my eyes nor ears! They had gathered enough students to fill two jazz orchestras with. So I decided to have each orchestra play one set in that fabulous Eastman Concert Hall, much bigger than the *Palais des Beaux-Arts*. It was chockfull.

'Spartacus', the piece I had played with Maria Schneider and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra at Jazz Middelheim, was also composed for me by her. 'Wine and Roses', which we performed together, was arranged by myself and 'Song for my Lady' is my own composition. It's a joy to see that Belgium now has several excellent jazz musicians, mainly saxophonists - both tenor and alto : Frank Vaganée, Ben Sluijs, Jeroen Van Herzeele, Bart Defoort, Kurt Van Herck, Fabrizio Cassol, Erwin Vann, Manual Hermia... too many to list! I do hope those young musicians get more attention than I did in 1950, when Benny Goodman took me to



Belgium on his European tour. The press hardly mentioned it. The Swedish papers, however, bulged with raving reviews : 'A European with Benny Goodman, and he plays the harmonica and the guitar!'

Benny Goodman actually asked me to play with him after listening to a tape recorded in a garage, on which I did my own arrangement of 'Stardust' with Francis Coppieters, Freddy Rottier, Jean Warland and a string quartet. To think I ended up playing the piece with Goodman virtually all over Europe! On *'The Live Takes'* (Quetzal/Virgin) I play 'Stardust' as a duet with Michel Herr - recorded at the Antwerp *deSingel* in December 1998. I played it again a few years ago in Rome, also with Michel Herr. The audience went crazy when I announced it as the piece I had played with Benny Goodman in 1950. What better token of gratitude and recognition can one wish for?'

Toots describes his co-operation with pianists as follows : 'After all those years - and I hope many more to come - goose bumps are still my best antenna. Three or so years ago, Kenny Werner and myself had to play at the Dakota Bar & Grill, a famous restaurant in Minnesota that organizes live concerts three/four days a week. Four years before, when I first heard him play, he had given me such goose bumps that I barely managed to sleep that night. We arrived the day before and - to get the feel of the place for the next day - we decided to go and eat there. We heard a jazz ensemble with a singer, but couldn't see them, since the stage was sort of hidden around the corner. Upon hearing the first piano sounds, I had the same sensation : goose bumps! I met the pianist afterwards : it was Bill Carrothers.

A few months later, I was performing in Minneapolis. Because Kenny Werner couldn't do it, I asked if I could have Bill Carrothers, whose exceptional, virtuoso playing I had experienced myself. A few years later, we played together again : four days in the St. Louis Jazz at the Bistro Club, with Billy Hart on drums and Ray Drummond on bass. Dee Dee Bridgewater occasionally performs there too. Later on, I played with him again, together with bass player Nicolas Thys and drummer Dré Pallemmaerts at the Jazz Middelheim Festival. I had brought Kenny Werner with me two years before and, four years before, Brad Mehldau, another fantastic pianist who has given me countless goose bumps. I met him thanks to Kenny, who asked if he could replace him in Los Angeles because he was playing with Joe Lovano in Japan that day.'

The legendary bass player Jaco Pastorius, who died at 35 on September 21st 1987, is a story in his own right : 'The strongest coffee I ever had is called Jaco! I first met him in Berlin in 1979. He had just left Weather Report and was touring the world all by himself. He had his solo act at the same festival where I happened to be performing with Bruno Castellucci and Rob Franken. I heard, later on, that at the press conference, a journalist had asked him which artist, given the choice, he would pick to play a duet with. He answered without hesitating : 'Give me Toots!' So they introduced us to each other. I still see it : he, all alone, with his fretless Fender Jazz Bass, hopping - wireless - about the immense stage, and then this sudden silence : 'I would like to invite Toots Thielemans on stage!' We played 'Sophisticated Lady'. I'll never forget the impression Jaco made on me during that very first encounter : a young *Indian chief*, complete with beautiful headband and this shock of hair gracefully waving underneath it.

He told me, later, that his father - John Francis Pastorius Jr. (Jack to his friends), drummer and vocalist in lounge bands - had often told him as a child : 'One day, my son, you'll play with Toots, and then you will have played with a real musician'. I understood then what he had meant in Berlin when he whispered in my ear after 'Sophisticated Lady' : 'My father was right...'

One beautiful summer day, I was back in New York, I got this phone call from him : whether I felt like playing on his album '*Word of Mouth*'. He didn't have to ask twice.

A few months later, on December 9th 1980 to be exact - Lennon had been shot the day before - Jaco called me, out of sorts : 'Papa' - that's what he called me - 'you're gonna come to Florida!'. Apparently, they needed extra recordings. But I was in Brussels and couldn't leave, since I had a few concerts lined up in The Netherlands with Bruno and Rob. I asked him if he could come over instead. We've got very good studios here too. He agreed and we recorded in Marc Arian's Studio Cathy in Ohain.

I still see him standing in the doorway in Molenbeek : wearing jeans and his bass on his back. The way he had got there couldn't have been more like him : 'How do I get to Brussels from Miami?', he had asked from Fort Lauderdale, where he used to live. Not that my instructions helped much. He had taken a plane to Washington, and from there Concorde to Paris, and then another plane to Brussels. Not only did he get there much later than planned, the whole adventure set him back \$ 4,000 - but he didn't care.

He had this fabulous contract with Warner at the time. Convinced he would sell as many records as, say, The Doobie Brothers or Alice Cooper, they had given him this huge overheads budget. Whilst they were mixing, in New York, Jaco kept ringing me to play me the results : 'Papa, hear this...'. He had a heart of gold. When, after an operation, I spent some time in a New York hospital, he kept demonstrating over the phone how he was learning to play the double bass, just to cheer me up.

'Papa, you're gonna go to Japan with me!', he told me during my rehab. He was scheduled for a 10-concert tour there. I tried to explain this might be overdoing it a bit for me, but did invite my doctor to the concert in Avery Fisher, where I had agreed to play with Jaco. During the interval, the first thing my doctor said, was : 'Toots, go to Japan! This guy is the best medicine for you!' The result can be heard on the CD '*Jaco, Live in Japan*'. Bob Mintzer is also on it. I remember watching Jaco quickly scribble down the big band arrangement of the last bars of 'Sophisticated Lady' in the Bullet Train.'

Toots immediately starts playing the chords of 'Three Views of a Secret' and Jaco's spirit is clearly amongst us.

Foreign artists adore our Toots. Here are some reactions :

Ronny Jordan : 'Toots is one of the world's most important jazz musicians for me, with a truly unique sound. No other guitarist would ever have thought of whistling unisono to his solos. Toots did, and he had the entire jazz world up in arms! As a guitarist, he is vastly underrated to boot.'

Maria Schneider : 'I first came into contact with Toots in 1993. I was asked to write a project for the Norrbottens Big Band in Sweden. They asked which artist I'd like to write for, and I said, 'Toots'. I had no idea how much the Swedes loved him. Toots even speaks Swedish. So, I proceeded to arrange pieces which he liked to play. It was such a thrill when he started to play over my arrangements. Life doesn't get much better than that. The whole band would watch him play with smiles and gazes. He's mesmerizing. The beauty of his music is beyond words. I've been lucky enough to work with him with a few other bands too : the Stockholm Jazz Orchestra, the Danish Radio Orchestra and, of course, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra. It was especially wonderful to make music with him in Belgium with the Brussels Jazz Orchestra. The band clearly felt proud and touched to make music with this man that they obviously adore and feel very proud to know. That made it even more special. And Toots seemed especially inspired to be playing with them, in Brussels too. I hope I will have many more opportunities to do projects with Toots. To make music with Toots is to experience making music that goes beyond *music*. That's the experience that I'm always looking for.'

Kenny Werner : ‘Toots, with whom I have been working for seven-odd years now, is the most respectful and understanding artist you can possibly imagine. His exceptional talent continues to amaze me!’

Dave Brubeck, with whom Toots chatted about harmony and counterpoint in the tour coach fifty years ago, and whom I interviewed in April 2000 on the occasion of his concert in the *Palais des Beaux-Arts* for Audi Jazz, told me the following : ‘He’s one of the finest guys, and definitely the most unique musician I have ever met. If only there were more people like Toots in the world!’

Toots Thielemans keeps churning out albums. The last two years, he released no less than 3 CDs :

- ‘*The Live Takes*’ (Quetzal/Virgin) with tracks recorded at various concerts in Belgium and the States and on which we hear four different rhythm sections: Nathalie Lories (p), Sal La Rocca (b) and Bruno Castellucci (d)/ Kenny Werner (p), Ray Drummond (b) and Jukkis Uotila (d)/ Michel Herr (ky, p), Michel Hatzigeorgiou (b) and Bruno Castellucci (d)/ Kenny Werner (ky, p), Jay Anderson (b) and Adam Nussbaum (d).

- ‘*Hard to Say Goodbye - The Very Best of Toots*’ (Emarcy - Universal) with contributions by, amongst others, Quincy Jones, Shirley Horn, Lionel Richie, Rogier Van Otterloo, Paulinho DaCosta, Ian Underwood, Philip Catherine, Ferdinand Povel, Rob Franken, Mike del Ferro, James Anthony Carmichael and Kenny Werner.

- ‘*Toots Thielemans & Kenny Werner*’ (North Sea Jazz - Emarcy - Universal) : the result of six years of intense co-operation with a great pianist and composer. The CD was recorded in the cafeteria of a Kalmthout publishing house (all those present are listed in the liner notes). The duo performs unparalleled renderings of classics and standards and briefly becomes Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans, Frank Sinatra, Chick Corea, Walt Disney, Charlie Chaplin and J.S. Bach (Brel must have lent a close ear to his ‘*Sicilienne*’...). ‘*Inspiration*’ is a strong ballad and one of Kenny’s own compositions.

‘Listening to this CD is a bit like coming home after a long, cold trek through the dark night, after which you take off your shoes and dive into a deep couch. We have always felt at home listening to Toots Thielemans’. (Stage Magazine, August 2001)

The recently released ‘Jazz in Paris’ series - made up of 100-odd CDs (Emarcy - Universal) - contains unique, 24-bit remastered live recordings from between 1930 and 1980, a Toots CD from 1961 called ‘*Blues pour flirter*’, with him on guitar - only - alongside George Arvanitas (p), Roland Lobligeois (b) and Philippe Combelle (d).

For an ocean of information, simply surf to Toots’ official website - where else? [www.tootsthielemans.com](http://www.tootsthielemans.com)

# **HISTORY OF BELGIAN JAZZ**

Sim Simons

## Intro

Comprehensiveness in history is utopian. The evolution of Belgian jazz has been described in a number of invaluable works, which those who wish to acquire a thorough insight into should be able to trace without too many problems. The ultimate authority is Robert Pernet, whose books are the result of light-years of study, research and collecting. His elementary bible was *Jazz in Little Belgium* from 1966. The part on recordings was rewritten later, as *Belgian Jazz Discography*. Robert had his history all mapped out, but was unable to finish it. Luckily, an outline - and an excellent chronicle at that - was published in *Sabam 75, 1922-1997*.

Another major historian is Jean-Pol Schroeder, amongst others in his introduction to the *Dictionnaire du Jazz à Bruxelles et en Wallonie* (although, geographically, it does reach slightly more to the North) and the musicians' biographies, which he wrote with Marc Danval, Robert Sacré, Bernard Legros, Michel De Rudder and Robert Pernet. His *Histoire du Jazz à Liège* is also a must. Both Robert and Jean-Pol took their first steps on the jazz scene proper, the former as drummer, the latter with Jazzmatic (in which he played the piano and which also had Fabrizio Cassol in it) and which recorded on Michel Dickenscheid's MD-label in May 1982. Jean-Pol and Jean-Marie Peterken lay at the basis of the Liège *Maison du Jazz* ([www.jazzaliege.be](http://www.jazzaliege.be)), of which the former is the devoted curator. His magazine *Jazz in Time* may have folded in mid-1994, it still remains a font of information. I myself certainly relied on Pernet and Schroeder whilst compiling this.

My other sources have been magazines like *Jazz in Time*, *L'Actualité Musicale*, *Jazz Hot*, *Jazz 57 & 58*, *Swingtime* (Flemish edition), *Jazz'halo*, *J@zz@round*, *Jazzmozaïek* and *Jazzman*, as well as testimonies from a number of jazz musicians and critics.

Robert Pernet (1940-2001) became interested in jazz through the Ronnex recordings of 'American' Freddy Sunder. As a result, he started collecting 78s, magazines and books. His collection of records by Belgian musicians grew, as did the idea to contact the latter and, eventually, write a book on Belgian jazz. A lot had been written on jazz in general already. One of Pernet's hobby horses, however, was the prehistory of jazz : minstrel (show)s, ragtime and cakewalk - of the former two he indeed found clear traces in Belgium.

He wanted to experience jazz as a musician as well, and put in regular drumming appearances at the Brussels *Rose Noire* with Jacques Pelzer. At the *Blue Note*, he met manager-cum-bass player Benoît Quersin, who put him on stage on several occasions and introduced him to Toots Thielemans, with whom he played for two weeks in early 1960. 'I learnt more in those two weeks than I would otherwise have done in ten years...'. He then became the drummer of tenorist Babs Robert's quartet, with whom he recorded in 1965, 1968 and 1970 ('avant-garde jazz, but always structured, not free...'). In 1968, he recorded with 16-year-old Philip Catherine, and in 1972 with Stéphane Grapelli and Roger Vanhaverbeke, who themselves played with Pol Lenders at the time (see further). In 1960 he appeared in *Europe Jazz*, a short film with Toots, Sadi and Quersin. Twenty years on, he played in a two-part BRT documentary about Belgian jazz that was only broadcast once. As a musician he was barely active towards the end : his last gigs were with Jazz for Fun, a band with Belgian jazz veterans such as Herman Sandy (t), Roger Asselberghs (cl) and Alex Scorier (ts).

## Foreword

Our story begins with a survey of musicians in Belgium today.

I then sketch a profile of the jazz buff, look at music sites, the media, jazz from the last decade to the present, and awards like the *Django d'Or*, after which we move on to a number of projects from the recent past and in jazz education.

In other words : this history of jazz is told back to front - starting with the present.

Adolphe Sax and our roots - our prehistory, so to speak - are next.

When jazz reaches Europe, Belgium is in the front rank, definitely in the pre-jazz days of ragtime and swing big bands. World War II throws a spanner in the jazz works, but - paradoxically - brings in a lot of work for musicians too. In 1949, two Belgian bands even perform at the Paris jazz festival.

Our jazz history then paints a few portraits of musicians who were involved in the transition from swing to bop : Bobby Jaspar, Benoît Quersin, Jacques Pelzer, Francy Boland, Sadi and Jean Warland, who effectively did play in Paris, as well as a few like-minded souls such as Jack Sels, Roger Asselberghs, Rudy Frankel, Freddy Rottier, Jean Fanis, plus those who bridge the gap with the near-present : Roger Vanhaverbeke, Félix Simtaine and Richard Rousselet. Historically, the World Expo of 1958 revved up the jazz record production. The next two decades, however, weren't always easy. The habit of large festivals had been formed (Comblain, Bilzen and Jazz Middelheim), and the Clarke-Boland Big Band as well as the BRT Jazz Orkest with Etienne Verschueren had hit the scene. In the late Sixties, improvised music appeared, and in 1976 the musicians' collective *Les Lundis d'Hortense* was founded.

For unity's sake - inside this motley diversity - we also look at what is left of old-style jazz and the swing era.

Next to some musicians' name, their instrument is mentioned.

Key :

acc	accordion
arr	arranger
as	alto saxophone
b	bass
ban	bandoneon
bb	brass bass (tuba, sousaphone)
bcl	bass clarinet
bj	banjo
bs	baritone saxophone
c	cornet
comp	composer
cond	conductor
cl	clarinet
clo	cello
d	drums
el b	electric bass
el p	electric piano, Fender
f	flute
flhn	flugelhorn
g	guitar
hca	harmonica
ky	keyboards

ldr	leader
mar	marimba
mel	mellophone
ob	oboe
org	organ
p	piano
perc	percussion
ss	soprano saxophone
syn	synthesizer
t	trumpet
tb	trombone
tba	tuba
tim	timbal
ts	tenor saxophone
v	vocal
vib	vibraphone
vn	violin

## Little Belgium?

The story of Belgian jazz is that of a tiny country with quite some appeal in the various eras. Staking out landmarks is not an easy thing to do.

One thing is clear : we have just entered a new stage, whose strength not only lies in numbers, but also in the fact that its musicians are all top-class, and complemented - not to say dominated - by a few established names who never stopped evolving themselves.

Internationally, Toots Thielemans tops the long list. Philip Catherine is his runner-up, and heads a string of guitarists : Peter Hertmans, Fabien Degryse, Jacques Piroton, Jeanfrançois Prins, Pierre Van Dormael, Paolo Radoni, Pierre Lognay, Maxime Blésin, Stéphane Martini, Frankie Rose, Raphaël Schillebeeckx, Guy Raiff, Patrick Delterne, Hendrik Braeckman, Hans Van Oost, Karel Van Deun, Marco Locurcio and Mimi Verderame... amongst others. There are plenty of saxophonists too : Steve Houben, Ben Sluijs, Frank Vaganée, Kurt Van Herck, Bart Defoort, Erwin Vann, Pierre Vaiana, Fabrice Alleman, Jeroen Van Herzeele, Fabrizio Cassol, Peter and Johan Vandendriessche, André Goudbeek, Dieter Limbourg and Bo Van der Werf. Trumpeters Bert Joris and Richard Rousselet, pianists Nathalie Lories, Michel Herr and Eric Legnini, Fred Van Hove for free improvised music, tuba/trombone player Michel Massot, trombonists Phil Abraham and Marc Godfroid, alto saxophonist Steve Houben and vocalist David Linx are European class, at the very least. Amongst flautists, alongside some of the above saxophonists, Stephan Bracaval and Els De Doncker must definitely be mentioned. Today, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra is world class.

Amongst our top-quality pianists we find : Ivan Paduart, Erik Vermeulen, Kris Goessens, Diederik Wissels, Kris Defoort, Anne Wolf and Pirly Zurstrassen. Charles Loos is probably one of the most versatile figures in recent Belgian jazz history. Amongst the bassists, we must mention : Philippe Aerts, Niclas Thys, Bart De Nolf, Piet Verbist, Sal La Rocca, Mario Vermandel, Michel Hatzigeorgiou, François Garny and Daniel Romeo. Flautist Pierre Bernard and trumpeters Laurent Blondiau, Gino Lattuca, Nico Schepers, Serge Plume and Bart Maris are names to remember.

It is Marc Moulin who, in lounge, perfects the approach with which the French *Saint-Germain* currently scores. Moulin developed his ideas long before the band, in fact, yet put them on a backburner. Not all jazz lovers appreciate this type of music anyway (assuming the label still means what it did a while ago).

In fusion with rock and world music, Aka Moon are definitely trendsetters.

Which leaves us with Chris Joris, our main percussionist - with Michel Seba a close second - and Dré Pallemarts, our top drummer. 'Old' Félix Simtaine remains a source of energy behind various projects, such as his mini big band *Ten-Tamarre*. Other old hands like bass player Jean Warland and Roger Vanhaverbeke span more than a century of Belgian (and European) jazz history, while vibraphone player Sadi stopped in 1999. Trumpeter Richard Rousselet, vibraphone player Guy Cabay, pianist Tony Bauwens and drummers Bruno Castellucci and Tony Gyselinck are definitely 'pedigreed' talent. Bauwens stopped in 2002.

The portraits in this book trace a broad outline of the national jazz firmament. The above names partly glitter in it, as do the - more or less - eager fledglings : saxophonists Koen Nijs, Tom Van Dijck, Bruno Vansina, Tom Mahieu, Nicolas Kummert, Sara Meyer, Rhonny Vhentat, Franky Van der Sloock, Frédéric Delplancq, Daniel Pollain, Bart Borremans, Robin Verheyen, Jonas Janssens, Toine Thys and Mark De Maeseneer. Pianists Bart Van Caenegem, Jef Neve, Ewout Pierreux, Dominique Vantomme, Jozef Dumoulin, Fré Desmyter, Marie-Sophie Talbot, Philip Joossens, Pascal Mohy and Bram Weyters. Vibraphone players Bart Quartier and Jan Nihoul. Trumpeters Alexandre Plumacker, Sam Versweyveld, Sam Vloemans and Gregory Houben. Guitarists Dirk Van der Linden (also pianist and organist),



Anthony Claeys, Peter Verhelst, Louis Verhelst, Dries Verhulst, Tim Vets, Pieter Thijs, Filip Wouters and Quentin Liégeois. Violinist Alexandre Cavalière. Bass players Martijn Van Beul, Samuel Gerstmans, Christophe Devisscher, Peter Verhaegen, Cedric Waterschoot, Janos Bruneel, Benny Van Acker, Thomas Sainderichin, Leen Van Reyn, Steven van Loy and Dajo De Cauter. And drummers Lieven Venken, Yves Peeters, Olivier Wery, Nico Manssens, Stephan Pougin, Jan De Meyer, Tom Dewulf, Steven Cassiers, Chryster Aerts, Teun Verbruggen and Isolde Lasoen; plus percussionist Frédéric Malempré... and many, many others.

I am all too aware of the gaps in the above, for which I do beg your forgiveness!

### **Bufs**

The world of jazz is relatively small. A hard nucleus of adepts is spotted at most interesting events, from Liège over Brussels, Antwerp and Gent to Bruges, but more bums on seats are needed to make concerts truly viable.

Organizers liaising a bit more and thus avoiding overlaps would help too. The (autumn) period of the Audi Jazz festival, for example, is much too cramped - despite all good intentions.

Belgium isn't exactly a huge country to cover either. Having tours of expensive American bands stop in various Belgian locations in an effort to share expenses doesn't work. The JazzLab Series, on the other hand, does programme 12-odd concerts with Belgian bands over short periods, ten times a year, while *Les Lundis d'Hortense* plan 4-odd performances a go - which seems to work.

Your average jazz buff is not a great CD buyer either. The jazz turnover in mainstream record shops varies between 3 to 5%. And the latter barely promoting Belgian productions, is definitely a mistake. Belgian labels - thank God we have quite a few of those - with their own distributor, by no means reach their target figures. Private initiative and concert sales do better, in fact. Shops specializing in jazz are few and far between (*Jazz Note* in Antwerp, is in fact the only one). Worth mentioning too are *Music Inn* in Brussels and *Banana Peel Records* in Ruiselede.

Belgium's independent labels (see also *Jazz'halo* number 15, November 2000) are : Igloo, W.E.R.F., Carbon 7, Lyrae, Mogno, Quetzal, Travers, Jazz'halo (Tonesetters-VKH), J.A.S. and Ispahan.

Jazz buffs are between 30 and 55, slightly younger for blues and mainly crossover jazz. The public can be seasonal too. In the summer months, for example, the coastal region may wedge the occasional jazz event into its mainstream programme and thus draw some of that crowd to it. The golden Fifties of the Knokke Casino or the jam sessions at *La Réserve* (also in Knokke) and the *Duc de Buckingham* in Blankenberge, however, are long gone. When, after the swing days, jazz stopped being dance music, a number of fanatics also dropped out. There have also been striking geographic shifts : while the triangle Brussels-Antwerp-Liège used to rule, the West (Gent, *De Werf*-Bruges since 1986) and the East (Motives for Jazz/Jazzconnection Limburg since 1977) now partly help set the trend.

### **Clubs and Platforms**

*Exit*, The Brussels Jazz Club on the *Grand'Place*, *enter* Music Village, where pianist Ivan Paduart does the programming. That's jazz life : coming and going. Brussels is no longer the Mecca it used to be in the days of jazz clubs like the *Caveau du Corso*, the *Cosmopolite*, the *Boeuf sur le toit*, the *Rose Noire*.

The same goes for Antwerp, where the *Exi Club*, *September* and *Riverside* have disappeared, or Liège, with its *Jazz Inn*, *Lion s'Envoile*, *Jazzland* (run by Jean-Marie Hacquier from 1974

until '76) and the *Chapati* in Spa. Calendars of around 1985 tell us of clubs like the *Oude Poort* (The Old Gate, Hingene),

*'t Brughhuis* (The Bridge House) in Wachtebeke, *Crazy Bol* (Crazy Head) in Aalst, *Toots' Jazz Club* (Zottegem), *Gasthof Heidelberg* (Loppem) and the *Banana Peel Club*, the 'mini theatre for jazz and blues' that's still going strong, and which, for more than six years, published the magazine *Swingtime*.

Going... but also coming (back) : gone are the *Travers* and Jules Imberechts, who organized events like *Brumuse* virtually overnight. The *Athanor Studio* now occupies the space where *Marcus Mingus* used to be. The *Sounds* has been programming jazz on a daily basis since 1986, while in Antwerp jazzcafé *De Hopper* has been doing the same - four days out of seven - for over ten years now. We are still waiting for the promised *So What Jazzclub*, though.

Smaller communes too claim their piece of the cake, be it less regularly : *Jazz 8* in Spy, *La Fabrique* (The Factory) in Frameries, *Finz'Erb* (Fine Herbs) in Mons, *Mazz* and the *Sjruur* (The Barn) in Hasselt, the *Lokerse Jazzklub*, and *Art Home* in Oupeye, also the birthplace of the *Jazzamor* festival. The *Hnita Jazz Club* in Heist-op-den-Berg is a story in its own right. It first opened in 1955, and did really well in the (economic) heydays. Gent has *Opatuur*, the jazz joints *Damberd* and *den Turk* and the ambitiously renovated *Gele Zaal* (Yellow Space). Regrettable, also from a geographical point of view, is the disappearance of *De Kave* (The Chimney) in Lauwe. Just across the border, we find *Porgy & Bess* in Terneuzen, and *l'Inoui* in Redange. A special place was occupied, between 1959 and '91, by Pol Lenders' Brussels Clubs (1917-2000), from the *Carton* over *Pol's Jazz Club* (*Pol's Place*) to the *Bierodrome*. Lenders had a ball singing his 'bold blues', and was both a folk and jazz fanatic. Mind you : 'Le free, c'est de la merde...' (Free is shit...). Since 1961, the scene in Liège had partly been set by Jean-Marie Hacquier, who now programmes on the boat *L'ex-Cale*, at *La Brasserie des Terrasses* in Liège and the Brussels *Caveau du Max*.

Thank God for arts centres too, who by no means ignore jazz. After a one-year break, the Antwerp *deSingel* picks up again in 2002-2003. Most active, since 1986, has been *De Werf* in Bruges, from which the JazzLab Series fan out to the cultural centres of, amongst others, Mol, Mechelen, Antwerp (the *Sint-Andries community centre*), Borgerhout (*Rataplan*), Sint-Niklaas (*Foyer De Spiegel/The Mirror*), Mechelen, Alsemberg, Aalst, Kortrijk. The Antwerp *CC Luchtbal* also successfully programmes American and European musicians.

## Media

Jazz barely gets any support from the commercial media these days. The latter simply reckon it should make do with its own press - which thankfully still exists in the shape of magazines such as *Jazzmozaïek*, *J@zz@around* and foreign (French) periodicals-with-a-heart-for-Belgian jazz like *Jazz Hot* and occasionally *Jazzman*.

Already in November 1948, and until 1956, *Jazz Hot* mentioned the *Hot Club Magazine* of the *Hot Club de Belgique* in its columns, sometimes even in Dutch. There are, of course, also the leaflets and mailings from jazz clubs and organizers. Regular newspaper jazz columns, like Mon Devoghelaere and Juul Anthonissen's, have disappeared.

TV and radio have a minimal selection on offer. In 2002, the RTBF gave Philippe Baron quite a bit more airtime than Marc Van den Hoof ever got from the VRT, or the BRF gave Walter Eicher. The latter channel, however, does now boast an incredible collection of recordings kept by either the BRT, RTB or BRF, which carefully maps out our national jazz history, but stands (a) very little (belittling) chance of ever getting published. The VAR (*Vereniging voor Audiovisuele Regie*, Society of Audiovisual Direction) is not exactly jazz minded, or so it seems.

When, in the mid-Sixties, Elias Gistelincx started the jazz section at the BRT, this yielded one hour of jazz a day. Listeners did get a monthly, free, stencilled programme book (the 'green books', later the printed 'white ones').

The RTB and INR had been there before : as early as 1936, in fact, with Stan Brenders band and the radio orchestra, and from 1945 with a series of programmes with the famous tandems Albert Bettonville/Carlos De Radzitzky and Nicolas Dor/Jean-Marie Peterken, and with programmes such as *Regards sur le Jazz* (A Look at Jazz) (C.D.R.), *Jazz Vivant* (Living Jazz) (A.B.) with, of course, live performances direct from the studio, *Jazz à bâtons rompus* (Let's Talk about Jazz) (A.B. & C.D.R.), *Jazz actualités* (A.B., later Benoît Quersin, who later coordinated the *Section jazz*), *Cap de Nuit* (Night Hurdle) (Marc Moulin), *Jazz pour tous* (Jazz for All) (1956-'69, from 1959 also on TV - N.D. & J.M.P.). The BRT too had its titles : *Jazzmagazine*, *Original Jazz*, *Jazz Is*, *Duke's Place*, *In de Club*, *Mixed Jazz*, *Criss Cross*, *Bandstand*, *Jazzimut*, *Roots and Fruits*, *Come Sunday...*

As of February 1949 the Hot Club of... The Belgian Congo in Jadotville, had *Le jazz, cet inconnu* (Mysterious Jazz) on radio Elisabethville each Saturday.

## Today

Quality-wise, Belgian jazz has reached a peak (see the various names in the intro). Not only can it look back on a bountiful, international past - with the likes of Toots, Bobby Jaspar and René Thomas - but the Brussels Jazz Orchestra is fast becoming a hit in the States. Under top saxophonist Fank Vaganée's baton, they indeed uphold the country's famous big band tradition, started in the Thirties (with Stan Brenders, Jean Omer, Fud Candrix). After *'The Music of Bert Joris'* (double CD W.E.R.F.), *'Naked in Cosmos'* is to be released in early 2002 (BJO + Kenny Werner, on Nightbird). The summer of 2002 witnesses a renewed co-operation with Maria Schneider, this time with the 'Sketches of Spain' project (with trumpeter Wallace Roney) at, amongst others, North Sea. There are also three performances in the States and the band is to select new compositions for Jazz Hoeilaart. In November there is the Tango! project, followed in June 2003 by concerts with the *Koninklijk Filharmonisch Orkest van Vlaanderen*, the 'Philharmonic'. For two years now, bass player Philippe Aerts (ex BJO) has been playing in New York with The Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra (featuring Lew Tabackin).

In the wake of Gus Viseur, Jean Omer, Philip Catherine (now with Bert Joris), Nathalie Lories, Eric Legnini, David Linx (with Diederik Wissels) and Aka Moon are now big in France. Phil Abraham (tb) and Serge Plume (t) play with the French ONJ (*Orchestre National de Jazz*). Philippe Aerts is with Martial Solal's New Decaband; rhythms Benoît Verstraeten (b)/André Charlier (d) are hugely active, amongst others, with Didier Lockwood and on a CD with the latter's *Onzette de Violon Jazz* (The Jazz Violin Eleven). In 1993, they still played together in Jacques Piroton's (Belgian) trio.

The main reasons behind this success are/have been the musicians' (jazz) education, as well as the support they got from a relatively large number of motivated organizers *and* record companies. Significant, also, in the further breakthrough of (not only) Belgian jazz, has been the arrival of CDs around 1990. Budding musicians were suddenly able to make much better demos.

Which is why it seemed a good idea to stretch the last decade from ca. 1987 to 2002.

## Cds

Toots - quite prolific on the Japanese and American recording scene in the mid-Eighties - was probably the first jazz-Belgian on CD (however difficult it may be to find exact data on the transition from LP to CD). Locally, the CD *'Extremes'* from the Act Big Band and Guests came out on Igloo in 1987. The band revolves around Félix Simtaine, and has himself on drums, alongside Joe Lovano (ts), John Ruocco (ts), Michel Herr (p, arr), Erwin Vann (ts), Kurt Van Herck (ts), Peter (as) and Johan Vandendriessche (bs), Bert Joris (flhn, comp, arr), Richard Rousselet (flhn), Marc Godfroid (tb), Philippe Aerts (b) as well as Jean-Pierre Catoul (vn) (an all-star cast in one production). The recording was from 1986, as were *'Solid Steps'* (Lovano, Joris, Herr, Van de Geyn and Pallemmaerts) (Jazz Club) and *'H.L.M.'* (Houben-Loos-Maurane) (Igloo), but the latter two were released on vinyl first. The time has definitely come for some rereleases and compilations, amongst which Juul Anthonissen's *'50 Years of Belgian Jazz'* (Tauro).

The first CD series comes out in 1990: *'Jazz Hoeilaart International Europ'Jazz Contest'* (recorded in 1989) (first BRT, then B. Sharp). The first old-style record is the Jeggpap New Orleans Jazzband's *'25th Anniversary Album'* (René Gailly) (1987). In 1988 *'En public au Travers'* (Charles Loos) is released, as well as *'Harmonies du Soir'* (Loos-Arnould Massart), *'Storie Vere'* (Paolo Radoni) and *'Made in Belgium'* (Trio Bravo); followed in 1989 by, amongst others, *'Lemon Air'* (Guy Cabay), *'Intuitions'* (Michel Herr), *'Trio'* (Steve Houben) and *'El Dorado'* (Piere Vaiana). 1990 has *'Modern Gardens'* (J.-P. Catoul), *'Some Other*

*Thing*' (Pierre Lognay), *'Never Let Me Go'* (Jacques Pelzer), *'Where Rivers Join'* (David Linx), *'Tender is the Night'* (Diederik Wissels), *'Quadruplex'* (Fabien Degryse), *'Some Sounds'* (Erwin Vann with Michel Hatzi and Dré Pallemarts) and *'Essentiels'* (Eric Legnini). Needless to add that the above is but a subjective and (consciously) incomplete selection. The (fruitful) snowball starts rolling...

### **A Page Turned**

In 1992, the first *L'Ame des Poètes* and Pirly Zurstrassen's H-Septet's *'Hautes Fagnes'* come out (p). Michel Herr releases *'Ouverture Eclair'*, and rereleases *'Perspective'* (1978) as well as *'Solis Lacus'* (1975). There is also the first Aka Moon and the first two Jazz'halo albums: *'Songs for Mbizo'* by Chris Joris, with Johnny Dyani; and Cameron Brown's *'Spring Cleaning'*, with Steve Houben (as) and Gilbert Isbin (g).

In 1993 the W.E.R.F. label is launched with Kris Defoort's *'Sketches of Belgium'*, while Igloo releases Nathalie Lories' *'Dance or Die'*, Jacques Pelzer/Philip Catherine's *'Salute to the Band Box'*, Gam Richard Rousselet's *'Waiting for You'*. FMP and Fred Van Hove produce *'Organo Pleno'* (Bauer/Nozati).

1994 sees a new Sadi - at last - (in quartet) and Diederik Wissels' *'The Hillock Songstress'*.

The event of 1995 is Kris Defoort and Fabrizio Cassol's *'Variations on A Love Supreme'*. Nathalie Lories releases *'Walking Through Walls, Walking Along Walls'*, André Goudbeek makes *'Nanook of the North'* (around a silent movie), Jeroen Van Herzeele and Peter Hertmans bring out *'At the Crossroads'* and Antoine Prawerman and his Deep in the Deep release *'Au fond dans la mer'*. Rereleases include Steve Houben with Strings (1982), Richard Rousselet's *'No Maybe'* (1984, 1986) and *'Mr Blue'* by Etienne Verschuere (1973,84).

1996: rerelease of *'Postaeolian Train Robbery'* of COS (with Charles Loos). Plus: Ivan Paduart's *'White Nights'*, *'Another Day, Another Dollar'* by Kurt Van Herck with Kris Goessens (p), *'Aquarelle'* by Ernst Vranckx (p) with Stephan Bracaval (f) and Chris Joris (perc), *'Cinq de Coeur'* (No Vibrato's first), *'From this Day Forward'* by Diederik Wissels (p) and *'Unknown Mallow'* by Charles Loos (p), with Donni (ts, cl).

1997: *'Loop the Loop'* by Fabrice Alleman (ts, ss) with Michel Herr (p), *'Clair Obscur'* by Ivan Paduart, *'Food for Free'* by Ben Sluijs (as, f) in their own production, *'Queen of the apple pie'* by Laurent Blondiau (t) and *'Ah Bah Joât'* by Rony Verbiest (acc).

1998: Michel Herr: *'Notes of Life'*, and with Jack van Poll *'A Tribute to Belgium, Bandarkâh'* by David Linx with Diederik Wissels, Blondiau and Van Herzeele, *'Määk's Spirit Live(s)'* and *'The Chris Joris Experience Live'*.

1999: Rerelease of *'A Lover's Question'* by James Baldwin with David Linx and Pierre Van Dormael and of Marc Moulin's *'The Placebo Sessions'*, Nathalie Lorier's *'Silent Spring'*, *'All Around Town'* by Jeanfrancois Prins (g), *'L'esprit du Val'* by Manu Hermia (as), the first *'Foofango'* by Pierre Vaiana, *'Two Trios'* by Frank Vaganée (as) with John Ruocco (ts), *'Passages'* by Kris Defoort with quartet and Dreamtime, *'Live at the Beursschouwburg'* by Flat Earth Society.

2000: Rerelease of the Sadi nonet, *'True Stories'* by Ivan Paduart, and *'Sad Hopes'* by Charles Loos (p) featuring the late Jean-Pierre Catoul (vn). The Demagogue Reacts record

their first - *'Action-Reaction'* - by Johan Vandendriessche (bs, d), Paul Flush (org) and Frank Michiels (perc), while Slang makes *'Los Locos'* (François Garny-b, Manu Hermia-as-f, Michel Seba-perc). Ben Sluijs does *'Candy Century'*; Jean-Pierre Catoul and Peter Hertmans (g) do *'Restless'*, a collaboration that ended abruptly and dramatically in early 2001.

2001 : Diederik Wissels and Bart Defoort with *'Streams'*, Ivan Paduart's Trio *'Live'*, Rêve d'Eléphant Orchestra with *'Racines du Ciel'*, *'Stones'* by Ben Sluijs and Erik Vermeulen (p), the Belgian musicians' compilation *'10 ans de jazz à Liège'* (1991-2001), *'Songs & Dances'* by the Ernst Vrancks Quintet, *'Voices of Pohjola'* (Alexi Tuomarila-p with his Belgian pals), Pierre Van Dormael's *'Vivaces'*, Anne Wolf's (p) *'Amazone, Joy and Mystery'* (Olivier Collette-p, with, amongst others, Kurt Van Herck-ts-ss, Steve Houben-as-fl, Nicolas L'herbette-b, J.L. Rassinfosse-b, Jan de Haas-d, Mimi Verderame-d, Michel Seba-perc, Patrick Deltenre-g, Olivier Bodson-t) and *'Heartland'* by Linx-Wissels-Paolo Fresu (t).

2002 focuses mainly on *The Finest in Belgian Jazz* : 10 CDs by *Brugge 2002 & De Werf*, including the BJO (*'The Music of Bert Joris'*), Greetings From Mercury (*'Heiwa'*), Aka Moon (*'Guitars'*), Nathalie Loriers Trio + Extensions (*'Tombouctou'*), Octurn (*'Dimensions'*), Ben Sluijs Quartet (*'Flying Circles'*), Philip Catherine (*'Summer Night'*), Bert Joris Quartet (*'Live'*), Erik Vermeulen Trio (*'Inner City'*), and Defoort-Turner-Thys-Black (*'Sound Plaza'*).

In early 2002 *'Back to the Old World'* comes out (Philippe Aerts Quartet with John Ruocco and Bert Joris), alongside *'Trinity Song'* by Jambangle, *'Traces à neuf'* (Pirly Zurstrassen), *'Sarfallango'* (Foofango), *'Bowling Ball'* by the Maxim Blésin 5-tet and *'The New International Edition'* by Pierre Lognay (g) featuring Mark Turner, and the BJO with Kenny Werner.

### **The (Stretched) Decade**

A number of recent, contributing factors prop up the Belgian jazz-temple-in-progress :

- the support of arts centres like *De Werf* (organization, promotion and structured CD production);
- the continuation or expansion of festivals over several days, like *Jazz à Liège* (from 1991, with an excellent Belgian double retrospective CD 1991-2000), *Gouvy*, *Gaume*, *Jazz'Amor*, *Vooruit Geluid* (Sounds at *De Vooruit*), *Jazz And Sounds* (J.A.S.) and the *Blue Note Festival* (Gent), the *Jazz'halo Music Days* (various locations), the *Brussels Jazz Marathon* (previously *Jazz Rally*, with the original *Brussels Jazz Promenade* CD recordings from 1992), the tentacled *Audi* (autumn) *Jazz Festival* and *Jazz Middelheim* (only odd years since 1981), with in its wake, various attempts at coming up with an alternative for the even years (from the musically fabulous, but financially disastrous *Antwerp Left Bank Festival*, 1984, to the ambitious and obviously European *Jazz Brugge 2002*, and *Free Music* (Antwerp));
- the concentration of musicians around smaller centres such as Mechelen : Stephan Bracavel (f), Els De Doncker (f), Frank Vaganée (as, ss), Tom Mahieu (ts), Eddy Devos (as, ts, bs), René Jonckeer (p), Dirk Van der Linden (g), Chris Mentens (b), Jean-Philippe Komac (d), Chris Joris (perc);
- the serious cataloguing of the national jazz heritage at the Liège *La Maison du Jazz* (founded in 1994 bij Jean-Pol Schroeder and Jean-Marie Peterken) and later (less thoroughly, as yet, and more geared to traditional jazz) in Mons (2000, around Albert Langue and Luc Mairesse). *La Maison du Jazz de Liège* also staged the exhibition *Wallonie-Bruxelles, c'est Jazz*, with interesting visual material - even though appearances do sometimes deceive. There are also plans for a jazz centre at the Dendermonde *Honky Tonk Jazzclub* (deadline: August 2003);

- the long awaited official subsidies : in 2002 the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and Octurn had been recipients for a few years;
  - the presentation and wide recognition of a prize like the *Django d'Or* (since 1995, see further) and the *Euro Django* (since 2000, created by Frank Hagège, supported here by PAB/BAP (Belgian Artistic Promotion) and SABAM.
- In 2001, the first Prize for Young Talent (of the city of Brussels) was awarded to Nicolas Thys (b);
- the hard work done by the musicians' collective *Les Lundis d'Hortense* (since 1976, see further) and the creation of an excellent website,
  - also important was the replacement of the Belgian 200 franc note by the Euro. The former had Adolphe Sax on it (who unwittingly greatly influenced the jazz evolution), as well as Jacky Lepage's profile shots of Charlie Parker, André Donni and Jeroen Van Herzeele, to whom the engraver actually managed to refer as '(...) *des musiciens quelconques*' ('just' musicians);
  - saxophone mouthpiece maker François Louis from Brussels is a world wide jazz monument;
  - the annual Down Beat Awards which Toots keeps raking in;
  - a few 'important' birthdays, like Toots rounding the cape of 80 (April 29th, 2002 : the same day as Duke Ellington); trumpeter Herman Sandy and Albert Langue beat him to it a year earlier. Bass player Dubois was 75 in 1999, his colleague Jean Warland in 2001 and Sadi turned 75 in 2002.

It was the decade of Aka Moon and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, of Philip Catherine and Nathalie Lories, the consecration of Bert Joris (with, amongst others, Catherine's quartet and the BJO's double CD *The Music of Bert Joris*), Richard Rousselet scored, with, amongst others, his Ecaroh projects and the A-Train Sextet (Jean Warland). A successful crop of saxophonists was harvested (see above) : Frank Vaganée, Ben Sluijs, Jeroen Van Herzeele (with, amongst others, the projects Ode For Joe and Greetings From Mercury with star rapper Steven Segers). There was also Määk's Spirit, with Laurent Blondiau (t) - yet another feather in the cap of guitarist Peter Hertmans, who was lured to the BJO by Maria Schneider, whilst Kenny Werner called upon guitarist Jacques Piroton for his performances *and* CD with this big band.

### **The Django d'Or**

This annual prize, which is still gaining in prestige, was first presented in 1992 by Frank Hagège in homage to Django Reinhardt, and internationalized in 1995. For Belgium it was initially a double prize : one Dutch-speaking and one French-speaking musician per year. The roll of honour was :

- 1995 Philip Catherine & Marc Godfroid
- 1996 Sadi & Bert Joris
- 1997 Charles Loos & Kurt Van Herck
- 1998 Fabrizio Cassol & Chris Joris
- 1999 Nathalie Lories & Jeroen Van Herzeele

In 1998 and 2000 a special career's prize was awarded to Jean Warland and Edmond Harnie, respectively.

Since 2000 only one jazz soloist gets honoured each year, from an alternating linguistic part of the country :

- 2000 Steve Houben
- 2001 Frank Vaganée.

The special career's award went posthumously to Robert Pernet. In 2000, European nominations or awards were given to Toots Thielemans, Philip Catherine, David Linx and Diederik Wissels.

The first European Django given to a Belgian, was in the year of its creation and went to Nathalie Lories.

## Projects

In the course of most of the last decade, a number of Belgian jazz musicians have developed interesting projects such as *L'Ame des Poètes*, around French *chansons* (Pierre Vaiana-ss, Fabien Degryse-g (initially Pierre Van Dormael-g), Jean-Louis Rassinfosse-b), and Guy Cabay's experiments (vib) around Walloon texts.

Crossover : The African Connection, the Chris Joris Experience, Foofango (Pierre Vaiana); and The Indian Connection, Aka Moon in various combinations, Stephan Bracaval with the Sumari-Flamenco project.

Kris Defoort : K.D.'s Basement Party, *Passages* with Dreamtime & Quartet, *The Woman who Walked into Doors*, an opera for soprano, chamber orchestra and jazz ensemble with director Guy Cassiers and *Het muziek Lod*, creators of other interesting projects with Dick Van der Harst (amongst others Sidney Bechet's *La nuit est une sorcière*).

Projects around jazz celebrities :

*Tribute to John Coltrane*, a memorable concert at the *Kaai* on September 23rd 1991 (Trane 65) with saxophonists Erwin Vann, Kurt Van Herck, Jeroen Van Herzeele, Bart Defoort, Frabrizio Cassol and Pierre Vaiana.

*The Gil* (Evans) & *Duke* (Ellington - The New Orleans Suite) *Jazz Orchestra* by Kris Defoort. *Far East Suite*, *Nutcracker Suite*, *Peer Gynt Suite* (Ellington) and other BJO classics.

*The Sacred Concerts* (Ellington) : big band and choir of the Antwerp Conservatoire under Kurt Van Herck, with Kristina Fuchs (solo v).

*Ecaroh* (around Horace Silver) and *Monk* by Richard Rousselet.

*Parker Project* : Manu Hermia.

*Cannonball* (Adderley) *Project* : Rhonny Vhentat.

Joe Henderson : *Ode For Joe* by Jeroen Van Herzeele and Peter Hertmans.

René Thomas : *Big Band de Guitares* (Fabien Degryse).

*Tribute to Bobby Jaspar* : Robert Jeanne, Steve Houben, Al DeFino.

Jaspar-Thomas : *Saxo 1000*.

Francy-Boland : Jean Warland *Sax No End* and *Sax-Port*.

*The MJQ project* : with Arne Van Colie (p) and Andres Liefsons (vib) with Daniel Zanello (b) and Luc Vanden Bosch (d).

Others :

*The Beatles Project/Beatles Jazz* : Sergeant Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band/Beatles Revisited by Phil Abraham, with David Linx, Richard Rousselet and Charles Loos.

Film projects with André Goudbeek (as, bcl), *Nanook of the North* and Bert Joris, *Jeux de reflets et de la vitesse* (both silent); Bert Joris also with *Le Bal Masqué* and Michel Herr with *Just Friends*.

The *Poel* jam projects by Fred Van Hove and Free Music.

Erwin Vann : 'Worlds' with Kenny Wheeler & Norma Winstone and 'Koya' : solo.

'Stones' : Ben Sluijs & Erik Vermeulen around the Antwerp open-air sculpture museum and poetry (Emile Clemens).



*The Hopper project* : the Antwerp Hopper jazz club's house band plus one occasional man (Kurt Van Herck- ts), with Frank Vaganée, Philippe Aerts (b), now Jos Machtel (b), Dré Pallemmaerts (d).

Pierre Van Dormael : '*Vivaces*'.

And before :

Tap Dance : '*Charles Loos Old Time Trio - Tap Dance*' (CD 2002).

Ragtime : ca. 1970 - Marc Herouet's Ragtime Cats.

### **Justified Basis**

Truly self-taught musicians are few and far between. Now that conservatoires have Jazz and Light Music departments, students learn this type of music from an early age on. The first signals are given in a Belgian, Francophone magazine.

*L'Actualité Musicale* of November 1948 mentions *Léo Souris' Academy* in Marchienne-au-Pont (Université de Musique Contemporaine par Correspondance). Souris (1911-1990) was a pianist, composer, arranger and later radio maker, and seemingly omnipresent in early Belgian jazz history. In 1941, he did his *Léo Souris plays Peter Packay and David Bee* as supporting act to Charles Trénet (see further). Souris' experiment didn't last long, though.

The first real opportunity to study jazz is offered in 1964, first via training courses - they would be called workshops today - at the Gent *Lodewijk de Raedtstichting*. Between 1968 and '71, they were also organized in co-operation with Jazz Bilzen. Co-organizer at the time was bass player Maarten Weyler, whose father created the *Halewijn* foundation. As of 1975, there are training courses (weekends and summers) in Dworp. Weyler's Jazz Studio in Antwerp followed their examples (now under Ondine Quakelbeen), and started the first true jazz department in Belgium. Frank Vaganée, Erwin Vann and bassist Piet Verbist are amongst the school's graduates. The evolution continued, in Wallonia first. Musicians such as Philip Catherine, Pierre Van Dormael, Michel Herr, Charles Loos, Diederik Wissels and Steve Houben went and studied at the Boston Berklee School of Musician. Houben corresponded enthusiastically with Henri Pousseur, head of the Liège Conservatoire and in 1979 the *Séminaire de Jazz du Conservatoire de Liège* took off, lasting all of six years.

Meanwhile, a 5-year curriculum had been put on offer in the northern part of the country : it is still being offered in a number of conservatoires in Gent, Antwerp, Brussels (also in the Francophone department, now under trumpeter Richard Rousselet) and the Leuven Lemmens Institute. In the south, jazz academies rather than conservatoires started playing a major role. What matters is that virtually all courses are taught by local, experienced jazz musicians *themselves*.

Guy Cabay, for example, teaches the extremely important jazz history course at Brussels (Francophone section). It is followed by an approach to older styles (Jean-Pol Danhier), which each student must pass. All students must do a group repertoire too, starting from jazz'early days to the late Thirties. Then comes bebop : theory, harmony, articulation and phrasing. All other jazz departments pick up here, in fact. Brussels also looks at present-day styles (Michel Hatzi). The Flemish section having to close its musical department, and six lecturers/musicians being laid off, heavily drained the department.

Liège, however, still does improvised music (Garrett List). Important to the musicians, was the presence in the country (around 1980) of other Americans with experience in education and jazz technique - mainly in the Liège region : Greg Badolato (ts, ss), Bill Frisell (g), Dennis Luxion (p), Kermit Driscoll (b), Joe Lovano (ts) and most of all reed specialist John Ruocco, who also regularly taught at the Antwerp Jazz Studio.

Of paramount importance in this entire process, is the 'changing of the guards' inside the jazz audience. It is not because one generation 'dies out' that people stop being interested in the

jazz associated with them. The fact that jazz, or what passes for it - jazz is an 'ugly' word and even Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker did not necessarily want to be associated with the concept - keeps evolving, makes the music fascinating to hear (be it not always equally accessible).

In 1963 Juul Anthonissen already did educational work by travelling the country for the Ministry of Culture with Jack Sels and Philip Catherine. From 1965 to 1971, the BRT indeed had an educational programme - *Jazz voor de jeugd* (Jazz for youngsters) - and later dedicated two series of *School Days* to jazz concepts - the second one, in 1997, amply illustrated live in the studio by pianist Kris Goessens.

## Prehistory

Belgium unwittingly gave invaluable logistic support to jazz. Antoine-Joseph Sax, better known as Adolphe (1814-1894) started making saxophones in eight sizes from the age of 25 : from the soprano to the sub-contrabass. Soprano, alto, tenor and baritone sax took to jazz the fastest. After an audible 'struggle', tenorist Coleman Hawkins virtually identified the genre with the instrument as early as the Twenties and thus played his own, major role. Alongside this B-flat tenor, jazz also used its C-melody version (C-melody sax or C-tenor : Frank Trumbauer).

In 1846, Adolphe Sax patented the *saxophon*, modelled on the metal clarinet and the *ophicleïde*, designed by Halary in Paris (1817). *Ophis* is Greek for snake (cf. the other instrument called serpent) and *kleides* means valves. Father Sax was also an instrument builder and mainly concentrated on perfecting the clarinet, while Adolphe took this further, initially to the bass clarinet. Sax also made saxhorns and saxotrombas. Dinant and Belgium were too small for him in those days, so he set up shop in Paris. He did make it onto one of Belgium's last franc bank notes, though (200 BEF, to be precise).

### Prehistory : Minstrels, Ragtime and John-Philip Sousa

Robert Pernet was passionate about the impact of the *Black and White Minstrel Shows* and rightly so : initially white men with blackened faces who paraphrased, not to say parodied black men. They were actors, musicians, singers and dancers, who, like the medieval minstrels, crossed the States during the last six decades of the 19th century.

The genre went down well in Great Britain and France. Belgium soon followed. The Hooley's Minstrels, for example, visited Brussels on their European tour of 1851. Round about that time, cakewalking became popular, peaking in 1903 at the *Brussels Cakewalk* (with music by the Belgian composer Louis Frémaux) and in 1905 *Les célèbres petits nègres Rudy & Freddy* (Walker).

Meanwhile, in 1903, John-Philip Sousa's band had performed in Brussels. In the programme we read : '*en cas de bis l'orchestre exécutera les cakewalks américains authentiques et des airs populaires des Etats-Unis*' ('encores will be authentic American cakewalks and popular melodies from the United States'). There was one Belgian in the Sousa band : the uncle of the later Liège saxophonist Raoul Faisant. Another Belgian joined the orchestra later on : alto saxophonist Jean Moeremans, who also played for Arthur Pryor during his American period and was the first man in the world to put saxophone solos on record (as opposed to cylinder), with the Victor Talking Machine Company.

Other major events in this phase are the fact that in 1878 Edison's phonograph was demonstrated at Monsieur Castar's Panopticum in Brussels, and that in 1902 a shop opened in Liège with Edison phonographs, graphophones, gramophones and a selection of 10,000 cylinders.

### Ragtime

Now three decades ago, the film *The Sting* (1973) with Scott Joplin's hit 'The Entertainer' caused a new ragtime boom. Belgian pianists such as Marc Herouet, Alain Lesire and André Van Lint craftily jumped on the bandwagon : cf. the LPs '*Belgian Ragtime*' (with all three of them), '*Piano Ragtime*' (Lesire) and '*Marc Herouet's Ragtime Cats*'. The hit during the Belgian ragtime craze was 'Toboggan' (Intermezzo-Two Step, as it also says on the label) again by Louis Frémaux, specialist extraordinaire. The score sold 75,000 copies, a very high number indeed for those days, and even reached the UK. One of his other successes bore the remarkable title : 'Défilé de Jass' (Jass Parade). In the Seventies, two numbers by

composer/guitarist Jean Pâques made it into American ragtime compilations on respectable labels such as Biograph and Folkways, even though Pâques is more of a cocktail party name. Came World War I...

### **'Europe' and Jazz Come to Europe**

During WWI Jean Reese Europe (1881-1919) takes his 369th Infantry Regiment Band (known as *The Hell Fighters*) through Europe to give moral support to American troops. Europe was a pianist and violinist. His wasn't exactly a jazz orchestra in the strict sense of the term, but it did have the makings of one. Guitarist/violinist Noble Sissie (1889-1975) played the bass drum with Europe too and, in the Thirties, Sidney Bechet was also with the band. Europe comes back to 'Europe' in February 1919.

In April of that year, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band records in London and the word 'jazz' invades Europe. A European contract for Mitchell's Jazz Kings (with Sidney Bechet) at the Paris Casino fell through, so in June 1919 Bechet accepted to go to the mainland with Will Marion Cook and his Southern Syncopated Orchestra. Cook (1869-1944), who had studied the violin in Berlin, worked in his SSO with, amongst others, Arthur Briggs - which was of major importance for the spreading of jazz in Europe and Belgium. In 1922, he founded his Savoy Syncopated Orchestra in Brussels, which in its programme claimed to have 'Sydney' Bechet doing a *clarinet solo* on 'Characteristic Blues' in the one but last number.

Already before and during World War I, drummer Louis Mitchell (1885-1957) had played in London, and in between in the USA with James Europe, before throwing himself in at the deep end of jazz. On January 24th 1920, the Mitchell's Jazz Kings inaugurated the renovated *Théâtre de l'Alhambra* in Brussels, managed by the director of the *Casino de Paris* at the time. Jazz was conquering Europe. Robert Pernet had a point when he wrote: '*La vogue est lancée, le virus se propage et rien ne pourra stopper ça*' ('the trend has been set, the virus is spreading and nothing will stop it now'). Robert was working on a comprehensive study of Mitchell at the time, but was unable to finish it.

### **Louis Mitchell, Félix Faecq and Robert Goffin**

The Mitchell's Jazz Kings (no match for King Oliver, but they were first, and black) played the 'new music' in the *Perroquet* bar at the Alhambra, whose variety show was quite a crowd puller. Youngsters like Félix-Robert Faecq and his friend Robert Goffin immediately spotted the Kings. The band played in Ostend in the summer of 1920 and left the country in April the next year. Faecq never forgot them, though, and became the first jazz manager, so to speak.

On November 26th 1921, he organized a jazz dance party for his friends and thus had his love of jazz invading the then budding record world.

He becomes the representative for Belgium of the British Edison-Bell label and imports labels such Gennett, Paramount, Perfect and Okeh directly from the States. He also starts distributing sheet music, and in 1924 he sets up his own publishing company, the International Music Company as well as the Universal Music Store, making and selling records, sheet music and instruments.

Important that year, is the publication - with Paul Naeyaert - of the magazine *Muzique Magazine*, renamed *Music* a year later.

On January 15th 1926, together with Naeyaert, he organizes the first jazz concert in Belgium at the *Union Coloniale* in the Brussels Rue de Stassart, with the Waikiki Jazz Band (which had been around since 1920) and the Bistrouille A.D.O. (Amateurs Dance Orchestra). Also present were saxophonist Harold Connelly and Monsieur Constant Brenders. The Bistrouille also had Peter Packay (Pierre Paquet-t) and David Bee (Ernest Craps-as, cl) in it. Faecq was also to publish Packay and Bee's compositions, whose fame soon made it across the ocean, where (in September 1930) Luis Russell's band records '*High Tension*'. Faecq: 'I often went

and danced at *L'Abbaye*, near the *Porte de Namur* in an annex to the *Building de l'Elite*, later to become the INR studio, until the building on the *Place Flagey* was finished. Their orchestra caught my attention : Charles Remue, leader on alto and clarinet, Stan Brenders on piano, Harry Belien on drums, Alphonse Cox on trumpet, Gaston Frédéric on tenor and Rémy Glorieux on (brass) bass.'

Faecq reckons it is high time Belgian musicians get a shot at recording too. So, in the summer of 1927, he introduces the Charles (Chas.) Remue and his New Stompers band to Edison-Bell. The band develops quite a following in the UK, and people suddenly realize that these are, in fact, the first Belgian jazz records.

Also important, is the fact that of the fourteen numbers recorded in London, five are Belgian compositions, like 'Vladivostok', 'Pamplona', 'Slow Gee-Gee', 'The Bridge of Avignon' (the theme is indeed used in its original arrangement) and 'Allahabad' by Bee *and* Packay.

Bee : 'I knew Peter Packay well. He had learned to play the trumpet and listened to Armstrong, Bix and Red Nichols. Peter loved Jimmy Dorsey's band, and jazz was completely new at the time. Peter opted for Dixieland with a touch of Negro spiritual. The two of us started composing, for the fun of it, really. Along came this publisher - the first on the continent - who believed in us. It was Félix Faecq... and our career took off.'

Slightly less important, perhaps, is the fact that the first jazz Belgian to make records abroad was the Liège trumpeter/band leader Léon Jacobs. He and his Jacob's Jazz recorded with Josephine Baker in January 1927 already - which was quite a different ballgame, of course...

Robert Goffin (1898-1984) was a poet and lawyer - who put forward the occasional plea for jazz. In 1920 already, he published a poem by way of homage to the genre in *Le Disque Vert*. It was followed in 1922 by a collection called *Jazz Band*. By then he had started what, ten years on, turned out to be the first jazz book ever - *Aux Frontières du Jazz*, dedicated to Louis Armstrong, whom he befriended and with whom he corresponded avidly (see *Louis Armstrong In His Own Words*). Two years before the book was published, Faecq published it in instalments in *Music*.

Also important to Faecq, is the fact that in 1931 the Pathé label opens a studio in Brussels. The cream of Belgian jazz music record there, such as Gus Deloof (and his Racketeers), with John Ouwerx (p), Josse Aerts (d) and the saxophonists Jean Omer and Jean Robert. In 1932 he also founds the *Jazz Club de Belgique*, with Goffin and a few friends.

### **Meanwhile...**

Robert Pernet points out that in the Twenties there were also a few - long forgotten - small orchestras (most of them more *jazzy* than jazz). They did, however, partly determine the face of the - quite successful, let's face it - early Belgian jazz scene. One of the oldest and most important ones - with leader/drummer René Vinche's Bistrouille Amateurs Jazz Kings - dates from 1920. The band restrains its ambition, and becomes the, better known, Bistrouille A.D.O. (Amateurs Dance Orchestra). The Waikikis too were an A.D.O., as were (quote Pernet) Les Minstrels A.D.O., Le Hot & Swing A.D.O., The Collegians, The Excellos Five, The Miami Jazz-Band, The White Diamonds, Bee and Packay's Red Beans (joined by trumpeter Robert De Kers), the Antwerp Mohawk's Jazz Band and way at the top the Doctor Mysterious Six, with trumpeter... Robert Goffin.

The Red Star Line packets, such as *Belgenland*, also used Belgian bands on their Antwerp-New York crossing, which in its turn gave musicians the opportunity, in the Twenties, to go and listen to American jazz on the spot. Our people did find an audience abroad, like pianist Jean Pâques, who become house pianist at Edison Bell in London.

## Swing Big Bands

The now generally recognized quality of Belgian jazz musicians once again manifests itself during the post-depression years. In the second half of the Thirties the bands of Stan Brenders, Fud Candrix and Jean Omer are amongst Europe's best.

### Stan Brenders

Stan Brenders (1904-1969) was a cum laude classical musician and indeed made his debut as a classical pianist. That didn't stop him from joining Chas. Remue and his New Stompers in the London studios, though (1927), having first played with Fud Candrix and soloed at the first Belgian jazz festival ever (1926). Five years on, he started playing the piano with the INR symphony orchestra.

He is the first in Europe to play George Gershwin's Concerto in F with the orchestra.

When the INR asks him to form a jazz orchestra, Brenders writes radio history. The very first radio broadcast is on January 19th 1936. His band gathers the cream of Belgian jazz musicians, like John Ouwerx (p), Chas. Dolne (g, vn), Emile Deltour (Eddie Tower, vn), Sus Van Camp (tb) and later Albert Brinkhuizen (tb), as well as Janot Morales (t) and the saxos Arthur Saguet, Jack Demany (also vn) and his former 'boss', pioneer Charles Remue. The band also plays for foreign radio stations (Hilversum, BBC).

The radio and studio work continues during the war. Even though Brenders does record with Telefunken and Olympia, he never does so in Germany itself. The peak of his career lies mainly in the spring of 1942, when his band, as well as Fud Candrix and (his) pianist Ivon De Bie, accompany Django Reinhardt in Brussels and get to record with him for *Rythme*. It is with De Bie, in fact, that Django records his only two violin solos at the time. They are not the first 'Django Belgians', though, since Gus Deloof (t) and Jos(se) Breyre (tb) already recorded with Reinhardt in December 1937.

The war years mark his career - unrightly so, as will appear later on. Brenders does, however, continue to perform in reduced strength or solo at the Brussels *Archiduc*, where his piano still stands. In the Sixties the BRT asks him to compile *De keuze van Brenders* (Brenders' Choice). Internationally, Brenders gets some recognition when, in 1954, Capitol releases the recording of his composition 'I Envy' in the Nat 'King' Cole version (with Nelson Riddle), with 'Make Her Mine' as B-side (Capitol 2803).

### Fud Candrix

Candrix's (1908-1974) performance with a septet at Jazz Middelheim in 1973 was a late official crowning of a rich career that spanned half a century. Before he really got the jazz bug, he already played the violin and tenor sax with Jean Omer and Charles Remue (1931). His first big band comprised the likes of George Clais (t), Bobby Naret (as), Raymond 'Coco' Collignon (p) and Armand Draelants (d). The first recordings are from 1937. Until 1943 he worked for Telefunken, making records under the name *Fud Candrix und sein (grosses Tanz) orchester*, with many a German title on them. He played for the BBC, recorded with Django in 1942 and then in Berlin, where he also performed - or rather was forced to. His then rhythm duo consisted of Gene Kempf (b) and Jeff De Boeck (d). Later guitarists are Frank Engelen (1946) and Jo Van Wetter (1951). Candrix records until 1971. 'I Envy' is one of the three sides at his last session (June 15th that year).

### Jean Omer

Omer (1912-1994) makes his first recordings in... Milan, with his Carolina Stomp Chasers, that also included Chas. Dolne (g) and André Van der Ouderaa (ts), who later became 'the Belgian with the Ramblers'. Two years on, he is in a studio with Gus Deloof and his

Racketeers, alongside Arthur Saguet and Jean Robert (reeds), John Ouwerx (p), Arthur Peeters (b) and Josse Aerts (d).

That same year, he and Robert De Kers and his Cabaret Kings accompany Josephine Baker in Paris, Switzerland and Italy.

The first recordings with his big band date from December 1937. He plays à la Jim Dorsey. That year he has opened the Brussels *Cotton Club* and in 1938 he makes the less than successful *Pingouin* near the *Porte de Namur* - formerly *L'Abbaye* - into *the Boeuf sur le toit*, the place to be (also during the occupation). The first year he gets Coleman Hawkins to play, who continues to perform there with his band for quite a while. His stand-in is Jean Robert, the European tenorist closest to 'Bean'. Benny Carter too writes arrangements for the orchestra and Omer's records are released as *Jean Omer et son (Grand) Orchestre du Boeuf sur le toit*. Alongside Robert Louis Dehaes, the band has Fernand Debray in it - later Al Goyens (t) -, Roger Squinquel (tb), Vic Baeyens (ts), Henri Segers - later Rudy Bruder (p) -, Jean Delahaut (b), Lucien Pollet (d) and later Buddy Heyninck (d), as well as Gaston Bogart (d).

After the liberation he opens *Le Monseigneur* in Cannes and thus gives work to 20-odd Belgian musicians. In 1947 he does the summer season at Monte Carlo and a year later he returns to Brussels for the reopening of *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, which will stay open until 1961.

### **Some other musicians**

The bands of Stan Brenders, Fud Candrix and Jean Omer were outstanding, but the Belgian swing scene has more up its sleeve. Less familiar to today's jazz lover are names such as Emile Deltour, Gene Dersin, Jack Kluger, Robert De Kers, Bobby Naret and certainly that of Lucien Hirsch.

**Emile Deltour** (1899-1956) came from Liège and mainly used the Anglo-Saxon sounding name Eddie Tower. Himself a classically trained violinist, he had a swinging band with reedwinds David Bee and Arthur Saguet, supported by a rhythm duo including Arthur Peeters (b), and from 1940 Josse Aerts (d). Eleven years earlier he already recorded with the Charles Remue Band, second version. He joins Stan Brenders' INR band in 1936 and is present at the recording with Django. Eddie Tower mainly explores the terrain of light music and the crossover of his day : he writes jazz concertos for violin and harp, *chansons* and symphonic works.

**Gene Dersin** (1905-1985) came from Jemappes, was very popular just after the war and - choosing his themes carefully - managed to 'softly' convert jazz philistines. His band, at different times, includes Raoul Faisant, Jacques Kriekels, Vic Ingeveld and Arthur Saguet (reeds) and Lucien Pollet (d). Himself a reeds man, he left the solos to others. He also worked with strings, such as Georges Octors and René Costy. He accompanied Bing Crosby and had the arrangement for his 'White Christmas' written by Peter Packay. His interest in jazz mainly came from Lucien Hirsch's band, with whom he recorded as a clarinetist in 1931.

Lucien Hirsch (°1911) was from Liège and - although a saxophonist - mainly frontman. He was extremely popular in his native city around 1930. He only did two sessions for Columbia in Brussels. The first one (1931) has Bobby Naret and his band, the second (1937) other saxophonists Jack Demany, Jacques Kriekels and Henry Solbach. Fud Candrix also occasionally plays with him. During the mobilization in 1939 they each play with their own band for the moral support of the soldiers and under the auspices of the Queen Elisabeth Foundation. Himself of Jewish stock, he stops all musical activity at the beginning of the occupation.

**Bobby Naret** (1915-1991) was also from Liège and won the 1946 saxophone referendum of the HCB (*Hot Club de Belgique*). As a clarinetist, he shared the first place with someone else. It takes until 1944 before he starts his bigger band, with, amongst others trumpeters Janot Morales, George Clais and Edmond Harmie, Albert Brinkhuizen (tb), Sagnet again (reeds), Frank Engelen (g and arr) (like David Bee and Peter Packay) and vocalist Martha Love (Martha Delbecque, discovered by Jack Kluger).

Naret plays with guitarist/violinist Chas. Dolne's Swingtette, with David Bee on harp, Lou Logist (acc), Frank Engelen (g). The four also write arrangements (Decca 1940-'42). There are also recordings with Gus Deloof (1941, with Jean Robert), Jeff De Boeck and his Metro(phone) Band (1941-'42), with Janot Morales (t), Vic Ingevelts (ts, cl), Ivon De Bie (p), Frank Engelen (g), Gene Kempf (b), Django (1942, with Candrix *and* Brenders) and Hubert Rostaing (1942, Naret on as). He stays with Candrix from 1934 until 1943, until he forms his own band (see above). In 1962 he still plays in Comblain with the 'veterans', after which he disappears.

**Jack Kluger** (1921-1963) occasionally performs as 'Jay Clever' and started as leader of the Antwerp A.D.O. The Collegians, in 1932. Three years later the *Jazz Club de Belgique* commissioned him to make radio programmes. In 1939, he sets up Jack Kluger and his Swing Orchestra/Band, with, amongst others, Louis Dehaes (t), Harry Bart, Harry Turf (Kruyer), Omer & Marcel De Cock, Vic Ingevelts (reeds) and René Goldstein (b). After the war he concentrates on publishing music, producing records and talent scouting. To quote Bernard Legros : 'Without ever having played an instrument, Jack Kluger is important because of the bands he led, which at the time were amongst the best in Belgium - *and* as a producer and manager. He helped promote jazz in Belgium and Belgian jazz in the States.'

Robert De Kers (Keersmaeker) (1906-1987) is a pianist before becoming known as a trumpeter. In 1936 he forms his Cabaret Kings with, amongst others, David Bee (ct, ts), Ernst van 't Hoff (p) and Frank Engelen. In 1941 he also makes recordings as vibraphone player (& his Vibraswingers) and after the war he plays in occupied Germany. In 1946 he records the music for the short film *Modern Mood*.



## The War Years

Musical life goes on, but under Nazi rule, jazz gets blacklisted in 1935 already. 'Swing Tanzen verboten...' (No swing dancing!)

The musicians showed virtually boundless inventiveness, though, when it came to thinking up titles that sounded acceptable to the regime. 'St Louis Blues' became *Lied vom blauen Ludwig* or *La Tristesse de Saint Louis*, 'At the Woodchoppers' Ball' became *Houthakkersbal*, 'Idaho' was *Vous avez un beau chapeau madame*, 'Indian Summer' became *Été Indien*, 'Out of Nowhere' was renamed *Sorti de nulle part*, 'South Rampart Street Parade', *Rampart du Sud*, 'Sweet Georgia Brown', *Douce Georgie*, 'I Know That You Know', *Je connais tes pensées*, 'Who's Sorry Now', *Pourquoi des regrets?*, 'Bye Bye Blues', *Afscheid* or *Blues de l'adieu*, 'Stardust' : *Poussière d'étoile* or *Sterrenstof*, etc.

However transparent, the trick seemed to work. People were *In Guter Stimmung* instead of In The Mood. When the Germans realized how the nation continued to like jazz and swing, they fought evil with evil. The German label Telefunken recorded Stan Brenders in Brussels and released the records in the Heimat. The creation of a band under Lutz Templin - Charlie and his Orchestra - was a remarkable move : vocalist 'Charlie' Schwedler's ambiguous persona sang jazz standards under the original titles, the *Reichspropagandaministerium* (Ministry of State Propaganda) found a new subject for the song, and had lyrics written for it in German which were then translated back into English. The content invariably parodied the allies, with Churchill and Roosevelt as main butts. The band had been carefully compiled and recordings were made between late 1941 and mid-1943 in Berlin. Two Belgians were amongst its international strength : Josse Breyre (tb) and Jean Robert (ts). Such tangents with the Germans gave many a musician the status of collaborator. Stan Brenders even lost his radio contract over it.

In the States things were different. Various musicians had been mobilized after Pearl Harbour and big bands were dissolved or had to find replacements. Then came the first recording ban, from August 1st 1942 until November 1944. With the development of bebop (Parker, Gillespie), jazz had undergone a huge revolution, which the war had kept outside Europe. The States, however, had started making V-Discs (V for Victory), not for the shops, but by way of (free) moral support to the front soldiers. Because of the recording stop, V-Discs contained no bop, even though they were distributed until 1949... and avidly sold by the soldiers.

During the occupation, a number of Brussels musicians went into hiding and got together in a tiny four-storey building on the Rue des Moineaux. The house became famous as *Le Kot(t)* (the Digs). Léon Demol 'Podoum' (t) , Jean-Jacques (Jacky) Jun(e) (reeds), Léon Demeuldre ('Bodash') (d), Herman Sandy (t), Jacky Thunis (d) and Jean Vandenheuvel (Warland, b) were amongst them. Under Bodash's impulse this yielded the *Kot Jazzmen*, who triumphed at an *HCB* tournament and lay the basis for Le Jump College.

The Belgian musicians had remained active during the war, but the arrival of the first bop 78s caused both a shock and a jazz revolution. Bobby Jaspar's Bob Shots is considered the first national bop band, but Jean Warland attributes that honour to Bill Alexandre's band (g), with Warland (b), Sandy (t), Freddy Lhost (cl, as), Freddy De Bondt (ts), Phil Decae (p) and John Ward (d). In the spring of 1946 they made a private recording (in The Hague), also called acetate. The first (factual) traces of Jaspar and friends date back to 1947.

The press further tells us : 'A true Jazz orchestra at the Welfare - the home ground of musicians Jean Carnin (d, then 19), Roger Asselberghs (cl, 23), Roland Thyssen (p, 20), Nic Fissette (t, 20)'. *Naturellement le band joue le bop* ('Naturally the band plays bop'). That was 1948.

Soon after, manager Billy Shaw was promoting Toots Thielemans in the States as 'The Belgian King of Bop'. His solos in *Modern Mood*, a short film with Robert De Kers' band in 1946 and a recording with Jack Sels' sextet truly deserve bop ennoblement.

After the war, the Welfare gave our musicians radio programmes to do and sent them on tours at the Officers Clubs of American militaries still stationed in Germany. A new generation was helped on its way, also and largely thanks to the Liège La Session d'Une Heure (One AM Session) - an amateur band that could easily compete with professionals. One of its members was alto saxophonist Jacques Pelzer, whose initial description: '*En 1941 à Liège, nous jouions en style tantôt Dixieland, tantôt Ellington*' ('In 1941 in Liège we played a style that was sometimes Dixieland, sometimes Ellington'), speaks volumes.

## The Tail End of the War

‘Strangely enough, more rather than less jazz music was heard on the radio under the Krauts and more concerts organized at the *Palais des Beaux-Arts* - and that for ‘*une musique fortement déconseillée*’ (a strongly discouraged music)... Yet the public didn’t seem to like it. Because it was a forbidden fruit, perhaps?’, thus Gaston Bogart in his book *Dance Band, quand Bruxelles jazzait...* about the period 1937-1957, in which he also tells us his story.

At the end of his career, Boga(e)rt(s) founded the Chakachas, a modish cha-cha orchestra with a few jazz others such as Vic Ingeveldt (ts, fl) and Charlies Lots (t). He started off with Charlie Calmeyn, himself also a drummer, and played with the Continentals, Gus and Pol Clark, Roger Rose (as), and, amongst others Mary Kay (vcl) and René Goldstein (b). A much heard name is that of amusement orchestra leader Marcel Hellemans (ts). The musicians had reached maturity and assimilated the pre-war American ideas in an age when, in Europe, they only had themselves to rely on.

Just before the war (1938), four jazz clubs open their doors : the *Hot Club de Belgique*, the *Sweet & Hot*, the *Antwerp Jazz Club* and the *Jazz Club de Belgique*, with branches in the country.

As Bogart said, jazz was doing nicely and a lot of Belgian jazz was being recorded and released. Critics like Albert Bettonville and Carlos de Radzitsky gave lectures, and record nights. The import of new American records having been curbed for so long, people were in for a surprise.

Upon the liberation, Brussels becomes the centre of entertainment : the English opt for the Plaza hotel, the Americans for the Metropole. Clubs/establishments like *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*, the *Caveau du Corso*, the *21 Club* and the *Cosmopolite* on the *Place Rogier*, are the capital’s hotspots, while in Liège there is the *Eden* and in Antwerp the *Exi Club*. Meanwhile, Don Redman’s band had landed. It was the first American band on the continent and had Don Byas, amongst others, in it. The Belgian stars to be braced themselves.

They actually conquered The Netherlands en masse. In 1948, Fud Candrix played at the *Palais de la Danse* in Scheveningen and Eddie De Latte and Henri Segers did the casinos of respectively Scheveningen and Valkenburg.

## A New Spring

A few young ones, like Bobby Jaspar, decide to start their own band : the Swingtet Pont d'Avroy - later the Bob Shots. The American magazine Down Beat features them - with photo - in their May 1947 issue as 'The most famous jazz combo in Europe'. The band evolved towards bop; Pelzer and Sadi joined them, guitarist Pierre Robert was their leader, while René Thomas occasionally joined in. Raoul Faisant (ts), by the way, was the godfather of Liège jazz.

### Paris

The crowning (and swan song) of the Bob Shots follows at the Paris *La Grande Semaine du Jazz* in May 1949. A year earlier, however, (February 1949) Jaspar had already played in Nice, at the very first jazz festival worthy of that name. Belgium was represented by the orchestra of pianist Jean Leclère, who had 'upgraded' his band with Bobby (ts), Herman Sandy (t), Jacques Pelzer (as), Sadi (vib) and Toots (g). They even accompanied tenorist Lucky Thompson at the festival.

Paris 1949 had two Belgian bands in it : the Bob Shots and Toots Thielemans' quartet, whose harmonica was barely able to seduce the anything but objective Parisian public. The magazine *Jazz Hot* (see above) wasn't hostile to Belgian jazz, though. It referred to Robert De Kers as '*la plus grande autorité belge en matière d'orchestration de jazz*' (the biggest Belgian authority on jazz orchestration), for example, and published a report on a contest at the *HCB*. Their correspondent was Paul Acket, who later founded the The Hague North Sea Festival.

### Bobby Jaspar

If Toots Thielemans is our main exponent of post-war Belgian jazz, Bobby Jaspar (1926-1963) was paramount in taking our own, national bop evolution to the States. A few years ago, his Columbia recordings with trombonist J.J. Johnson were fully released on the collectors' label Mosaic. On February 10th 1947 he had recorded 'Oop Bop Sh'Bam' and 'Moonlight in Vermont' with the Bob Shots - led by Pierre Robert (g) - on the Belgian Olympia label, and with Jean Bourguignon (f), Jacques Pelzer, Jean-Marie Vandresse (p), Charles Libon (b) and André Putsage (d).

Two years later they play at the Paris festival. The band now also has Sadi (vib, v), Franky Boland (p) and John Ward (d) in it. Drummer Putsage pulled out at the last minute. Miles and Bird were also at Paris. Our musicians were lost for words, however well prepared they may have been, and however well they knew the records...

Jean Warland : 'We clearly sensed we were on to something big...'

Toots raked in Down Beat awards, but meteorite Jaspar too made it to the top as a 'new star' in 1956. He recorded, amongst others, with Hank Jones, Milt Jackson and John Coltrane and played with Miles Davis, be it only for a few weeks. The part he played in the quintets of J.J. Johnson and Donald Byrd also lingers. He performed in Europe with both.

His first stop had been Paris. Like many Belgian colleagues, he had settled in Mme André's Paris *Hôtel du Grand Balcon*. He stayed for five years, apart from an adventurous break in Tahiti. Paris offered him a lot of studio work, including the recently rereleased Saturn session, which can be considered the first French bop recording ever (1951). Many Paris recordings recently came out on BMG again (Vogue, Swing, the 'Italian' RCAs with Chet Baker and René Thomas), and Universal ('Jazz in Paris', EmArcy, Barclay). French musicians which regularly appear by his side are pianists Henri Renaud, Maurice Vander, Bernard Pfeiffer, René Utreger and Sacha Distel on guitar, plus Belgian 'émigrés' Sadi (vib) and most of all Benoît Quersin (b). Mon Devoghelaere's book (biography and discography) on the subject is

excellent, but hard to come by. More recently, there is Jean-Pol Schroeder's *Bobby Jaspar - Itinéraires d'un jazzman européen*.

### **René Thomas**

Jazz Middelheim 1973. Sonny Rollins proudly introduces the man who, fifteen years before, played on one side of the LP *'Brass and Trio'* with him. *'Ladies and gentlemen, my old friend from Belgium, René Thomas'*.

As a (very) young guitarist, Thomas (1927-1975) learned to play Django Reinhardt's solos from hearing. Liège godfather Raoul Faisant takes him under his wing and records a few sides with him for Olympia, with accordionist Hubert Simplisse. There is barely any room for solos - the odd 8 bars, in *'Vous avez un beau chapeau'* ('Idaho'), for example. After the war he starts his own trio with Léo Fléchet (p) and José Bourguignon (d). Eat your heart out, Americans.

He meets Jacques Pelzer and Bobby Jaspar, but never really joins the Bob Shots, even though leader Pierre Robert, also a guitarist, does regularly ask him to play. His Fifties' style can still be heard on *'Easy Going'*, with Jack Sels. The recording is an excerpt from a *Jazz Vivant* programme by Albert Betonville. Jaspar, Sadi, Quersin, Boland emigrate to Paris. Thomas and Pelzer follow in 1953. It is there that Thomas hears the Americans Jimmy Gourley and mainly Jimmy Raney, a true example for him. Recordings for Vogue, Barclay and Polydor have recently been re-released.

Jazz opportunities in Belgium dwindle, so Thomas moves to the New World, initially to Canada, where he sets up base. When, in 1958, Toshiko Akiyoshi releases her internationally inspired album *'United Notions'*, Thomas is labelled a Canadian, Jaspar a Belgian. He becomes a familiar figure on the New York scene and even records an album under his own name, *'Guitar Groove'* (1960), with tenorist J.R. Monterose. A year later he returns to Belgium (and Comblain...). He forms a quartet with Quersin and Daniel Humair, that records at Ronnie Scott's in London. In 1961 they make a record with RCA, with Jaspar and an Italian rhythm section. On that same label, they also record *'Chet is Back'* with Chet Baker (1962). Then follows (studio) work with Lou Bennett, Lee Konitz (Dutch radio recording with Misha Mengelberg and Han Bennink, 1965) and Lucky Thompson (A Lucky Songbook in Europe with Sadi, 1969). That same year, he also starts working with the Stan Getz Quartet, Eddy Louiss (org) and Bernard Lubat (d) (*'Dynasty'*, recorded at Ronnie Scott's). *'Hommage à René Thomas'* (Timeless) and *'TPL'* (Thomas-Pelzer Limited, on Vogel) are both recorded in 1974.

René Thomas made more than just a name for himself in the USA. World class.

### **Benoît Quersin**

Bass players are seldom referred to as representatives of a trend, but Jean Warland and Quersin are exceptions. Quersin started off as a pianist and in Toots Thielemans' quartet, he alternated with Warland at the 1949 Paris festival. He settled there the year after and recorded with heavyweights such as Sidney Bechet, Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie and Chet Baker. Before and after his return in 1957, he regularly worked with Jack Sels. As of 1960 he managed the Brussels Blue Note jazz club for a while, and led the RTB Jazz department. He was one of the first ones to play Eric Dolphy and Ornette Coleman here, after which he went and worked as a musicologist in Zaire. He left memorable recordings with Bobby Jaspar, René Thomas and Jacques Pelzer.

### **Jacques Pelzer**

On the second of three *Innovation en Jazz* 25cm LPs, released by the 'Innovation' department store, René Thomas played under Pelzer (1924-1994). Pelzer played with the band *Session*

*d'une heure* and evolved on alto saxophone from Johnny Hodges over Benny Carter to Charlie Parker (later Lee Konitz), and on soprano towards Coltrane and Steve Lacy. He didn't flinch from 'more free', in other words. Like Thomas and Sadi, he was taken under Raoul Faisant's wings; like Quersin, he was interested in Africa and, like Jaspar, he doubled up on flute. In the early Sixties he played with Thomas a lot, recorded with him, as well as with Jaspar and Chet Baker, with whom he became close and even performed at Carnegie Hall. The musical family genes have been passed on to his nephew Steve Houben and daughter Micheline (d). Between 1978 and 1981, Houben and Pelzer were together in Saxo 1000, an homage to Thomas, Jaspar and the millennial city of Liège.

### **Francy Boland**

In May 1949, Boland (°1929) is the pianist of the Bob Shots. His piano studies at the Liège Conservatoire, had introduced him to the 'new' jazz generation there. He played in Brussels, Antwerp (Exi Club, with Jack Sels, whose Chamber Music used him as trumpeter), as well as Paris, where he recorded with Jaspar, Sadi and Henri Renaud, but also with Chet Baker, with whom he also toured. Like Warland, he was part of Aimé Barelli's band and thus met drummer Kenny Clarke. In the States, he made arrangements for Benny Goodman, Count Basie and Mary-Lou Williams. In Europe, he made his first arrangement in 1958 for Kurt Edelhagen's band, who had already used (or was to use) the Belgians Christian Kellens (tb), Eddie Busnello (bs) and Francis Coppieters (p, arr). In 1960 he is with Henri Segers - leader of the BRT Big Band - after which he meets Gigi Campi, who has an ice-cream parlour in Cologne with jazz music, as opposed to palm-court stuff or some lone pianist. 'Campino' was dedicated to him, and recorded with Don Byas in 1960.

Gigi Campi and Kenny Clarke eventually yielded the Kenny Clarke-Francy Boland Big Band (CBBB), which alongside European top musicians and American top stars like Jimmy Woode, Benny Bailey, Johnny Griffin, Sahib Shihab and occasionally Stan Getz, also employed a number of Belgians.

### **Sadi**

Sadi Lallemand (°1927) summarizes his career in a list :

'NO music school. I studied on my own. What I know, I taught myself. Self-taught. New York : fabulous.'

Kenny Clarke-Boland : Excellent.

My orchestra (a big band) at the *Rose Rouge*.

Paris : Such joy. The years at the *Ring Side* (amongst others with American visitors and Django) : Extraordinary.'

Amongst his records, he stresses the importance of the ones made with the Clarke-Boland Big Band (CBBB) and Django Reinhardt (Decca).

'Paris : I made this record (with Django Reinhardt, writer's note) - his very last one - 3 weeks before his death in 1953'. If you look carefully, you'll see there simply wasn't enough room for his entire discography : 'Simply no room!!!'

Sadi made his very first record on April 13th with Gus Deloof (on Victory), plus, amongst others, Raoul Faisant (ts) and Alphonse Verlackt (Al Verlane) (d). Lionel Hampton was the first one to influence him, and later also Milt Jackson, (after he had joined the Bob Shots).

He also played on the American Special Services tours through Germany. As of 1950, he moved to France, where he stayed for eleven years, and did many recordings in the Fifties. From 1962 to '65 he was with the RTB Television, and later became a member of Etienne Verschuere's BRT Jazz Orkest.

Jazz spot on world tours with vocalist Caterina Valente too. 'I simply adored Las Vegas...'

## Jean Warland

'It all began with the accordion,' Jean says (Brussels 1926), 'like with Toots, Etienne Verschueren and Tony Bauwens.'

He starts playing the accordion when he is three and in 1945 he replaces Lou Logist in Chas. Dolne's band (g). David Bee played harp in it, Frank Engelen guitar. He himself could barely read at the time and played all Dolne's pieces by ear. He was given the sage advice of perfecting his music reading, though. Which he did. He was an excellent jammer too : when Jack Sels came in, it often cost him his last train to Brussels. The 'Blues de l'adieu' (Bye Bye Blues) indeed often came in late...

He was often the youngest in bands and deeply respects people like Jean Robert, Fud Candrix, Bobby Naret, Stan Brenders, Jean Omer, Pol Bevernage (bs), Ivon De Bie and Janot Morales. When Jean Omer got himself a contract in Cannes for the winter of 1947-'48, Jean replaced him at the Brussels *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* in Bill Alexandre's band : '*be bop pour la danse...*'. With Toots' quartet, he played at the Paris 1949 *La Grande Semaine du Jazz*, alongside Francis Coppieters (p) and John Ward (d). From 1951 on, there is a lot of studio work in Brussels. Jean : 'There were two rhythm sections : A and B. A had Jaap Streefkerk (alias Steve Kirk) (p), Jo Van Wetter (g), René Goossens (Goldstein) (b) and Jo Demuynck (d) in it, B Frans André (p), Jean Douchamps (John Sweetfield) (g), Jean Warland (b) and Jeff De Boeck (d). The Philips studio always chose A. B didn't stand a chance of recording with them'. Jean did, once.

In 1956-'57 he shares a room with Sadi at the Paris *Hôtel du Grand Balcon* and records, amongst others, on '*Kenny Clarke's Sextet plays André Hodeir*', where he does more numbers than Pierre Michelot.

He had met Clarke in Jacques Hélian's orchestra (with Ernie Royal) (t) and later, he played with Aimé Barelli in Monte Carlo for two years. He speaks highly of Lucky Thompson - when he started off, he didn't know 'How Deep Is the Water', which made neither of them very happy...- and Dizzy Gillespie - who taught him the intro to 'A Night in Tunisia'. In 1956 and 1959 he regularly worked with Lucky Thompson. He went on a world tour with Caterina Valente and got an offer from Werner Müller.

Meanwhile, he regularly worked with the Clarke-Boland Big Band in Cologne (LPs '*Fellini 71/2*' and '*Change of Scene*', the latter with Stan Getz). The WDR Big Band then employed him and in 1991 he retired, with two farewell concerts. After that, he led Sax No End, with whom he played at Jazz Middelheim 1993, with Richard Rousselet (t), saxophonists Ben Sluijs, Bart Defoort, Fabrice Alleman, Jeroen Van Herzeele and Bo Van der Werf at the time. A year later, it became Sax No End plus Five. He continued to work with the latter five (a young German sax section) as Sax-Port, and with Richard Rousselet he founded A Train Sextet in 1998, a band doing Duke Ellington's music. After which he worked with 'a triette', with Curt 'Bas' Bulteel (p) and Laurent Mercier (d). His advice to young musicians : 'Listen, listen very carefully, that's where it all starts for jazz musicians.'

## Some Other Musicians

### Jack Sels

Musicians like Jean Warland and Roger Vanhaverbeke respectfully give Jack Sels a central position in the evolution of Belgian post-war jazz. Jack - like most of his generation - was still a self-taught man. In what used to be a huge record collection, it was mainly Lester Young and the bop 78s that intrigued him. He himself and his contemporaries were also greatly influenced by the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band in Antwerp in February 1948.

Sels set up a similar orchestra in the autumn of 1949, with, amongst others, Charlie Knegtel, Nic Fissette and Herman Sandy (t), Christian Kellens (tb), Bobby Jaspar (ts), Roger Asselberghs (bs), Francis Coppieters (p), Jean Warland (b), John Ward (d) (who had played with the Bob Shots *and* Toots at Paris in May 1949, and was now starting a career with Hazy Osterwald) and Rudy Frankel (perc).

Barely two years later, Sels was back, with his Chamber Music this time, inspired by Miles Davis' *'Birth of the Cool'* sessions : again with Knegtel, Sandy, Kellens, Asselberghs and Frankel (d), plus Francy Boland (t, mel), Jean Fanis (p), Benoît Quersin (b, plus ob, bassoon, clo and tba).

Jack then played for the Welfare in Germany - with Sandy, Fissette, Kellens, Asselberghs, Frankel, Etienne Verschuere and Roger Vanhaverbeke. Upon Jack's departure, Vanha founded the Belgian Bluebirds in Germany, with Etienne and Willy Albimoor (p). Several of them could be heard again on the 25cm LP *'Jazz in Little Belgium'*, with Jack's most beautiful composition, 'Rain On the Grand Place', on it. The film *Just Friends* caused a huge controversy. Jack barely left Belgium, never made it to America and is hardly present on the record market, even though there is quite a bit of material out there, mainly at the VRT.

Jack recorded a quartet record in 1961 with Philip Catherine. Lou Bennett played the organ, with whom our other top guitarist, René Thomas, was to record two and five years later. Paris was just around the corner, but not for Sels. Production manager Elias Gistelincx asked him to play live in the studio with his quartet - Jean Fanis (p), Roger Vanhaverbeke (b) and Al Jones (d) - for the BRT radio series *Levende Jazz* (Live Jazz) and, later, to solo, compose and arrange for the sax section of the BRT Jazz Orkest under the name Saxorama. The ultimate homage came when top critic and radio maker Mon Devoghelaere released two LPs on his Vogel label, with a well chosen selection from the radio archives on them.

Two pillars from Jack's 1949 and 1951 Big Bands deserve to be brought to the fore : clarinetist/baritone saxophonist Roger Asselberghs and drummer Rudy Frankel.

### Roger Asselberghs

Asselberghs' interest in jazz starts by accident, with recordings by Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. At the end of 1944, he works as a clarinetist with Marcel Bossu's band (g), a bit later with Coco Collignon's (p). Then he meets Mickey Bunner (tb), who gives him and Jack Sels extensive 'training' and has them join his octet. Those are also the days of his encounter and the jam sessions with Sadi, Toots, Jean Fanis, Bobby Jaspar and René Thomas. His military service is spent at the Welfare, where he meets musicians such as Nicolas Fissette (t), Roland Thyssen (p), Roger Mores (p), and the later BRT conductor Fernand Terby (vn).

He then joins reed player Jacky Jun(e)'s Jump College, with whom he does a remarkable concert at the *Palais des Beaux-Arts* in 1951, with Sidney Bechet, Roy Eldridge, Don Byas, James Moody and Kenny Clarke. He was to play with them again, with Dizzy Gillespie. In 1953 he records for Ronnex with Buck Clayton, Kansas Fields (d) and Taps Miller (t, v).

He interrupts his stay with Jack Sels in occupied Germany in 1953, to study photography, in the States and elsewhere. Roger has made very few commercially released recordings, even though you do find the occasional acetate. He does play on Henri Carels' (t) 1955 *Innovation*



*en Jazz* record, though. In 1958 he recorded two numbers on '*Jazz in Little Belgium*', with Herman Sandy (t), Paul Dubois (b), Johnny Peret (d). That is where his (music) studio story ends. He does, however, go on playing at the *Rose Noire* on regular occasions, and is employed by the RTB in 1957 for Léo Souris' band, with which he goes on tour in Africa (with Sandy, Pelzer, Quersin).

He then stops working as a musician, and becomes a publicity photographer. In 1976, he takes up music studies and starts a quintet : Roger Asselberghs and the Goodman Sound (with Jean Fanis), and he plays with the Fondy Riverside Bullet Band for a while. Later still (in the Nineties), he is one of the members of Jazz for Fun.

### **Rudy Frankel**

Immediately after the war, Frankel (1928-2002), Sels, Fanis and Asselberghs join Mickey Bunner's band. Frankel makes his first record with them ('*13th Port*'). Despite his importance on the national jazz scene, Rudy made few recordings in fact, most of them before 1960. He was a typical swing drummer, a perfect, sober time keeper, who systematically assimilated the transition to bop - as can clearly be heard on his recordings with the Jacques Pelzer Modern Jazz Sextet (1955). He played with Jack Sels a lot; with Toots as early as in 1947 (some on acetate); in 1951- again - with Billy Desmedt (org), followed by two sessions with Jaap Streefkerk (alias Steve Kirk) and Sels ('*Rain on the Grand Place*' and the EP with Lucky Thompson).

Meanwhile, he was also doing plenty of radio and variety work. The American top musicians he accompanied, range from Oran 'Hot Lips' Page, Bill Coleman, Stuff Smith and Lester Young, over Erroll Garner to Bud Powell. After 1960 he often worked with Jean-Paul (p) and Joanna (v) Vanderborght, the Victoria Band, Johnny Dover and The Brussels Jazz Gang. He regularly performed with Herman Sandy, with whom - quite symbolically - he did his very last gig...

### **Freddy Rottier**

Alongside Félix Simtaine, Rottier (1926-1995) is the most important post-war Belgian big band drummer. Together, they paved the way for today's young generation in small strength be-bop drumming. Before Freddy started working with Jack Sels in the mid-Fifties - the film *Meeuwen sterven in de haven* (Seagulls Die in Port), a lot of radio work and some Ronnex recordings - he had already played with Stan Brenders and from 1945 with Robert De Kers. In 1946 he made recordings with Rud Wharton (acc) (with Toots). In 1953 he works with Guy Grynrock (p) and Raymond Lauwers (s), amongst others. In 1955 he records with Herman Sandy, in 1956 with Janot Morales, in 1958 with Willy Rockin (with Sels). He also works closely together with Sadi : quartet (1960-'61), Big Band (1969-'72), quartet again (1976) and the much praised nonet (1987). So far the recordings. He tours with Caterina Valente and Werner Müller, and starts working for the BRT (amongst others The Modern Brass Band, led by Theo Mertens and Francis Bay). An important recording is the 1970 '*Injacktion*' (Jack Van Poll), with arrangements by Etienne Verschuere, with whom he records the latter's LP/CD '*Early Spring*' in 1983. With Roger Vanhaverbeke, he records the album with vocalist Stella Marrs en both Bop Friends' albums, and he can also be heard on Georges Mox' '*Jazzy Tunes*' (1992) and '*Remember Adolphe Sax*' (1994). He was a member of Vanha's New Look Trio until his death. His favourite drummer was Billy Cobham.

### **Jean Fanis**

Like bass players Roger Vanhaverbeke and Jean Warland, pianist Jean Fanis' career (° Wépion 1924) easily spans half a century. Via Ellington, Teddy Wilson, Nat 'King' Cole, Earl Hines and Erroll Garner, he evolved towards Al Haig and Bud Powell. In 1952-'53 he

played in Germany with Jack Sels and Roger Vanhaverbeke, but had to pull out twice because of eye problems. Before and after, his itinerary was very Belgian indeed and moved between Liège, Brussels and Antwerp, where he had decisive encounters with Roger Asselberghs and Jack Sels. In Liège he met Sadi and Raoul Faisant, and in Brussels he was house pianist at the *Rose Noire* from 1953 to '57, where he accompanied, amongst others, Clifford Brown (on tour with Lionel Hampton). He has made no recordings under his own name, but two sides with Mickey Bunner (1946), acetates with Jack Sels and his Chamber Music (1951). He is on the three *Innovation en Jazz* 25cm LPs (1955) : n°1 with Henri Carels and Roger Asselberghs, n° 2 with the Jacques Pelzer Modern Jazz Sextet (with René Thomas as well) and n°3 with the Herman Sandy quartet (with Warland and Rottier). With Sandy he also did the Fiesta '*Jazz for Moderns*' LP a year later (again with Pelzer, Warland and now Jo Demuynck on drums), 'Rain On the Grand Place' (with Jack Sels) (1958) and - also with him - one Saxorama (1963) and a few BRT quartet numbers (1964-'65), which were eventually released on Vogel. There were Didian (1957) and the Willy Rockin Band (1958) and Lucky Thompson (1959). There were also the mixed bag of recordings with Sadi, Freddy Sunder and again Sandy with the Brussels Jazz Gang and Jazz Combine with Mike Zinzen and Patricia Beysens (1981). Jean is still very active and played, amongst others, at the celebration of 50 years of musician Roger Vanhaverbeke (see further).

### **Roger Vanhaverbeke**

Roger (° Ostend 1930) made his official debut on October 1950 with Mickey Bunner's band in the *Beaulieu* nightclub, under *cinéma Palace* in Liège. The last two performances also included extra performances as a violinist at the cinema proper, with Emile Sulon's orchestra. By personally mapping out tours with great Americans like Harry 'Sweets' Edison and Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis, trumpeters Clark Terry, Carmell Jones, Art Farmer and Idrees Sulieman, trombonists Kai Winding, Frank Rosolino and Slide Hampton, altos Sonny Criss, Sonny Stitt, Chris Woods and Phil Woods, tenors George Coleman, Ben Webster, Scott Hamilton, Don Byas, Lucky Thompson, Johnny Griffin and Dexter Gordon, Cecil Payne (bs), Milt Jackson (vib) and vocalist Deborah Brown, he saves the organizers quite a bit of expenses. Definitely worth mentioning, are his tour with Nat 'King' Cole (and Lester's brother Lee Young on drums) and the trio performances (with drummer Freddy Rottier) with Teddy Wilson, Joe Albany and John Lewis. He received his nicest compliment ever from Roland Kirk with Pol : 'I want to talk to the bass player.... I like your pulsation and your sound. You have the punch that I like'. And the next day : 'Hey Vanhaverbeke, do you want to play some more?'

There were, of course, also Europeans like Stéphane Grappelli, Dany Doriz, Gianni Basso and Ronnie Ross. By sorting out stays and performances for them, he made the public better acquainted with those musicians, and jazz in general.

Roger started off as a classical violinist, though. He obtained first prize at the Brussels Conservatoire and made BRT recordings with Jean Fanis, Nic Kletchkovsky and Al Jones, which - sadly - have disappeared. Roger justly admires Jack Sels, with whom he played, amongst others, for the American Officers Club in occupied Germany (1952-'53). Etienne Verschueren swapped his tenor for an alto sax there.

Upon his return to Belgium, Roger formed his own Belgian Bluebirds with Verschueren (as, acc), Willy Albimoor (p), Cees See (d) and later Pierre Jowat (d). Other Belgians on tour at the time are Al Goyens (t), Johnny Renard (t, vib) and Nic Kletchkovsky (b). In 1955, Robert went and played with the Ostend Casino *Groot Orkest* ('Large Orchestra'), which he did for 7 years. After that he joined the Big Band of the Belgian Television, under Henri Segers. He mainly worked in trio at the time, with Jean Fanis (p) (later with Bob Porter, Tony Bauwens, Johan Clement) and Al Jones (d) (later Freddy Rottier and Luc Vanden Bosch). What started off as the Al Jones trio, is called the New Look Trio as of 1983. Roger was also active in the

more commercial side of the business, as accompanist to the original Platters and The Golden Gate Quartet.

With Tony Bauwens, Freddy Rottier, Nic Fissette and Etienne Verschueren he founded the Bop Friends in 1977. Two Vogel LPs definitely need rereleasing : *'Live at the Mozart'* (1977) and *'Live at the Brussels Jazz Club'* (1978).

Paul Acket has just invited the band to play at the The Hague North Sea Festival, when Etienne gets ill and has to be replaced by Steve Houben. Roger Vanha remains very active with the New Look Trio - a musician's musician.

## More Modern Times Ahaed

### **Félix Simtaine**

Simtaine (° 1938, Verviers) is one of the rare present-day jazz Belgians, who occasionally enquires after 'old ' recordings : Sonny Greer, and more recently The Drums, by Jo Jones. Going back in time is another way of continuing to evolve. In his early Liège past, he works with Léo Flechet, Robert Jeanne, Jacques Pelzer and René Thomas, with whom there is a recording of 1968. There is also one with Rhoda Scott (org) from 1970, whom he will accompany (on his own) for four years. In 1974-'75 he records with Michel Herr's super band Solis Lacus, and in 1978 he plays on '*Ouverture Eclair*', Michel's trio record with Freddy Deronde (b).

The Eighties start off with Christine Schaller (p), Saxo 1000 and his own magnum opus, the Act Big Band. Recordings with the band from between 1981 and '96 can still be found. In the Nineties, this eternal optimist is still active in the studio, with the likes of Jeanfrançois Prins ('*NY Stories*'), Eric Legnini and Joe Lovano ('*Rhythm Sphere*'), and in trio with Lew Tabackin at the Archiduc ('*Round About Five*'). This stage animal is currently also the leader of *Ten-Tamarre*.

### **Richard Rousselet**

Rousselet (° 1940) currently runs the Francophone jazz department of the Brussels Royal Conservatoire. In 1960, he gets noticed at the Ostend Festival, together with Félix Simtaine. Stylistically, he is omnivalent. Montreux really gets his career going. In 1969, he performs at the festival with Clark Terry's international band (arrangements Ernie Wilkins), and even gets a solo there. Philip Catherine is there too. Two years on, he is given the press prize after a performance with Placebo... Later (1974-'75) he plays an important part in Solis Lacus, and after that with Marc Moulin and Lilith (Claudine Simon) and the Act Big Band. The first recording under his own name is '*No May Be...!*' (with John Ruocco in 1984), followed later (1995) by '*Waitin' For You*' (with Jeanfrançois Prins) - both with Michel Herr. Meanwhile, he has also taken over the leadership of the Mons West Music Club big band, after which he works, amongst others, with the Sweet Substitutes (1993) and in his own projects Ecaroh, A Train Sextet and Monk, plus recently also an homage to Miles Davis, again with Herr, Jeanfrançois Prins, Bas Coojmans (b) and Bruno Castellucci. 'But I love playing standards from the Thirties just as much.' He is an excellent teacher and advocate of jazz in general.

## World Expo

Employment-wise, 1950 is a turning point: the American soldiers return home (and to Korea...) and their officers clubs disappear. The juke box makes its appearance and sends many an orchestra to kingdom come. The *Stadswaag*, Antwerp's jazz and entertainment Mecca, continues to flourish until well into the Fifties. Most - colourfully named - joints like *de Schuur* (the Barn), *de Stal* (the Stables), *de Zolder* (the Attic), *de Gard Sivik* ('garde civique', a kind of policeman), *de Beddenbak* (the Box Spring), *de Venushof* (The Venus Course) all had a jazz orchestra - or what passed for it - playing. As long as it lasted anyway, since things systematically went downhill.

The jazz musicians who hadn't emigrated, often took jobs in ballroom orchestras to pay the bills, while in the second half of the decade rock'n'roll swept the country. Some halls seemed to be doing okay, though, like the Brussels *Rose Noire*, or the *Exi*, *Gruter* and *Quellin* in Antwerpen.

Some musicians, however, play it safe: Gaston Bogart has his Chakachas, guitarist Jo Van Wetter scores a hit as Francis Goya with 'La Playa'. Guitarist/singer Frits Sundermann calls himself Freddy Sunder, makes the charts with 'Rio Rita Boogie' and becomes a famous jazz musician. The recordings he and his pals make as The Clouds, inside Francis Bay's band (bass player Clement De Mayer and drummer Armand Van de Walle), are worth tracking down!

Aficionados can go and listen to big American names at the Brussels *Palais des Beaux-Arts*, on Sunday often after an afternoon concert in Antwerp.

The Netherlands or Paris are also an option. The *Antwerp Jazz Club* even organizes coach trips to The Hague (complete with raffle!), often followed by a night concert in Amsterdam. Ella, even Billie Holiday, Basie, Ellington, Jazz at the Philharmonic, come to the Continent and in 1959 Armstrong even plays at the Antwerp *Oud België* for a whole week, as was common in those days in the States.

The 1958 World Expo also gave new, be it temporary jazz impulses, not so much through Benny Goodman and Sidney Bechet's performances, but rather through a number of new recordings by Belgian musicians on labels such as Fiesta (for the *Innovation en Jazz* series), and mainly Decca, with '*Jazz in Little Belgium*'. Omega (side label of the Belgian Decca) and Philips got Francis Bay's Big Band arrangers Bert Paige (Albert Lepage) and Peter Laine (Marcel Peeters) to record LPs with numbers à la Duke Ellington, or Tommy Dorsey ('*Salute to...*'), Ted Heath, Artie Shaw ('*Swing Low, Great Clarinet*'), Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman in the Expo year. And cha-chas, of course.

The band has strong trumpeters in Edmond Harnie, Louis Dehaes and Charlie Knegetel (also very active on Ronnex). The sax section - Frans L'Eglise, Jef Verhaegen, Benny Couroyer, Pros Creado and Guy Dossche - was to form Saxorama later on, with whom Jack Sels recorded eleven sessions (with Emile Chantrain instead of Verhaegen). Jean Evans is Bay's pianist, Sunder his guitarist and Bay himself is the precursor to the later BRT Jazz Orkest. The Expo also had a Belgian jazz day.

## Sixty and Beyond

Sidney Bichet was reasonably popular in the Fifties. He played at the Expo and was regularly seen on Belgium's then young national TV channel with lesser gods such as 'Hot Lips' Page, Peanuts Holland, Nelson Williams (trumpet only) and Kansas Fields (d). Funnily enough, around 1955, Lionel Hampton gave us the first 'jazz hooligans', with damaged premises and all. A tender Hamp recorded his versions of 'Toen onze Mop', 'Zeg kwezelken' and 'Sarie Marais' (popular Flemish songs). Benny played 'Obsession' (David Bee) at the Expo, as well as the 'March of the Belgian Paratroops' (Pieter Leemans). Joe Heyne's 'La Petite Valse', was recorded by Erroll Garner and Duke Ellington.

Prominent musicians between 1958 and '60 who haven't been mentioned yet, are Milou Struvay (t), Johnny Renard (t, vib), Alex Scorier (ts), Jean-Pierre Gebler (bs), Joel Van Drogenbroeck (p) (who was to play with the Swedish trombonist Eje Thellin), Jean Beurlys (alias Blaton) (g), José Bedeur (b) and José Bourguignon (d) (who went to Canada with René Thomas).

In the Sixties, the BRT - still Gistelincx - also organized a series of live *Jazz panoramas* and Babs Roberts (ts) hit the scene with Robert Pernet (d). Raoul Faisant had an excellent pupil in Michel Dickenscheid (ts) from Liège, who was to write history as an idiosyncratic top jazz technician - on Michel Herr's first records ('*Ouverture Eclair*'), Saxo 1000 (Jean-Marie Hacquier's idea), the first Guy Cabays, *Mauve Traffic* (his label : MD).

Free Jazz, or as Willem M. Roggeman subtly termed it 'more free jazz', made its entry in the late Sixties. There was also Fred Van Hove (p, org, acc), still staunchly true to his opinions in 2002, and European Free Improvised Music (*Europese Vrije Geïmproviseerde Muziek*), not to be confused with American Free Jazz.

For more information on this, see also the pieces on WIM, and André Goudbeek (as, ban). Meanwhile, the days of large (summer) festivals 'out into the fields' had started, or were partly over.

## **The New Trend : festivals**

### **Comblain**

Jazz became more popular again with the advent of open-air jazz festivals. The first jazz festival worthy of that name, took place in Nice in 1948.

Newport, Rhode Island, did jazz in the open as of 1954. The first (and most radical) Belgian festival was that at Comblain-La-Tour (1959-'66). Accurate information on it, can be found in back issues of the magazine *Jazz in Time*, the book *Jazz à Liège* and/or at the *Liège Maison du Jazz*.

It started one year before Antibes in Juan-les-Pins, and was rain-swept virtually each year. Chet Baker was there the first year already and Léo Souris composed a Comblain Concerto for his New Jazz Group. An imposing list of American musicians graced the stage : Cannonball Adderley ('Cannon Ball Edely' according to the not so well-informed press), John Coltrane, Jimmy Smith, Stan Getz, Paul Bley, Andrew Hill, Bud Powel, Ray Charles, Memphis Slim, Benny Goodman, Woody Herman and Bill Evans. But there were plenty of Belgians too : René Thomas, Jacques Pelzer, Bobby Jaspar, Sadi, Jack Sels, Francly Boland, Roger Vanhavebeke, and 20-year-old Philip Catherine in 1962. There were also closing jams at the Liège *Jazz Inn* and *Côte à l'Os*.

The event became heavily commercialized in 1962 and made even more room for contemporary pop music, which didn't always go down well with the public. Neither did the increased safety measures (barbed wire). The last festival edition was in 1966, even though in 1961 it actually outdid the *Newport Jazz Festival* with 30,000 visitors. There were revivals in 1969 and from 1985 to 1990. The motive force behind Comblain was Jean-Marie Peterken, who also started *Jazz à Liège* in 1991 and, three years later, set up the *Liège Maison du Jazz* with Jean-Pol Schroeder.

### **Bilzen**

Jazz Bilzen was started in 1965 by Theo Boelen - before Comblain packed up, in other words. Initially purely jazz (with Ferry Grignard as the 'odd one out'), it soon opted for a - not always equally successful - mix of jazz and rock, even though the last two years (1980 and 1981) the latter were programmed on different dates. A number of jazz greats did play at the festival, such as Zoot Sims, Archie Shepp, Ornette Coleman, Charlie Mingus, Sonny Rollins, Freddie Hubbard and Dizzy Gillespie. Of the Belgians, drummer Robert Pernet with the Babs Robert Quartet performed both in Comblain and Bilzen. Jazz Bilzen had one more revival in 1998. There was a one-off festival in 1968 in Amougies, on the Francophone side of the *Mont de l'Enclus* too. Performing musicians like Archie Shepp and the Art Ensemble of Chicago later played the BYG catalogue in Paris, which looked like a miniature (jazz) Woodstock avant la lettre.

### **Jazz Middelheim**

Jazz Middelheim first started when on May 17th 1969 - under Elias Gistelinc's impulse - the Middelheim promoters and *Jeugd en Muziek* (Youth and Music) Antwerp organized a Jazz promenade concert. Like Comblain, it was rain-swept. It had Nathan Davis' sextet in it (with Etienne Verschueren and Jan Wroblewski), Charles Tolliver's quartet and the Eje Thellin quintet with John Surman. A year later, a massive tent prevented a repeat performance in the rain. The cream of European more free jazz/improvised music performed : Willem Breuker, Willem van Manen, Han Bennink, Malcolm Griffiths, Evan Parker, Buschi Niebergall and Fred Van Hove. Fred was there the next year too, as were Paul Van Gysegem, John Tchicai and two jazz ballets, one by Etienne Verschueren (with the BRT Jazz Orkest), one by Theo Loevendie. In 1972 the Festival was spread over two days, still in May, and still at

*Middelheim* - the open-air sculpture park. Highlights were Palle Mikkelborg, Ian Carr (with Nucleus) and Jan Garbarek. Walter Boeykens also conducted the brass band of the Antwerp Conservatoire.

In 1973, for lack of space (those dreaded sculptures...) the Festival moved to the period of August 15th and to the nearby park *Den Brandt* with an exceptional programme : the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Big Band, Sonny Rollins (briefly with René Thomas as guest), Dizzy Gillespie and M'Boom Re : Percussion under Max Roach. By way of homage to Jack Sels, Saxorama was re-created, this time with Etienne Verschuere and Nathan Davis as soloists.

Jazz Middelheim remained an annual festival until 1981. For financial reasons, it became a biennial festival and, later still, heavy sponsoring was brought in.

The privately organized *Antwerp Left Bank Festival* tried to fill the gap in 1984, but turned out to be a megalomaniac and financially disastrous undertaking.

Kortrijk has had its annual *Park Jazz* festival since 1998 (not to be confused with the annual *Jazz in 't Park* in Gent, where a grand *Blue Note Jazz Festival* is in the making for 2002). New also is Bruges' biennial *Jazz Brugge 2002*, within the framework of Brugge 2002, Cultural capital of Europe and organized by *De Werf*. It seems only logical that this one should focus on European jazz.



## From the Deep...

### Clarke-Boland

The new 'light' music - rock'n'roll, twist and soon soul - caused a serious and almost deadly drop in jazz. What did people out here care that Bobby Jaspar played with Miles Davis, or René Thomas with Sonny Rollins?

Jaspar dies young in New York, Thomas sort of resurfaces thanks to his links with Chet Baker and by playing with Stan Getz (with Eddy Louiss and Bernard Lubat). Belgian musicians do try to make it abroad, mainly in Germany, the new 'paradise' : The WDR Big Band, the RIAS *Tanzorchester*, Werner Müller, Kurt Edelhagen, Caterina Valente. Jean Warland (b), Freddy Rottier (d), Jo Demuynck (d), René Goldstein (as, b), Christian Kellens (tb), Freddy Lhost (cl), Bruno Castellucci (d), Francy Boland (p, arr) as well as Etienne Verschuere (as) are much appreciated guests.

In 1961 Gigi Campi decides to have a jazz band instead of your usual cocktail-party stuff in his ice-cream parlour. It is here that the (Kenny) Clarke-(Francy) Boland Big Band (CBBB) first sees the light, with the best in European jazz alongside American musicians who either reside here or are passing through.

Of the Belgians, only Boland (who came from Edelhagen), and Sadi were more or less regulars. Jean Warland can be heard, amongst others, on the record with Stan Getz. Edmond briefly joins them at first.

In Belgium Henri Segers' RTB band ceases to exist. Thank God there is still the BRT, the Flemish radio channel.

### BRT JO

Once upon a time, radio channels had their own big band, their own jazz orchestra even. In Europe, the German WDR and the NDR Big Bands still exist, and in Denmark there is the DRJO...

The BBC Big Band (1995) and the BRT JO (1991) packed up ages ago, while France still does have a national, subsidized jazz orchestra in its ONJ.

The first Belgian Radio (Jazz) Orchestra was that of the INR in 1936 (Stan Brenders). In 1965, Etienne Verschuere became the leader of the then BRT Big Band, which became a ten-head jazz combo two years later, and, later still, a jazz big band under Elias Gistelinc's impulse, who kept referring to 'our orchestra' - and rightly so. In 1971 the BRT Jazz Orkest made its first appearance at Jazz Middelheim and as of 1973, it was the Festival's 'house orchestra', so to speak. Gistelinc not only invited famous guests to JM, he also organized an impressive series of studio recordings with American giants like Slide Hampton, Phil Woods, Benny Bailey, Nathan Davis, Kai Winding, Frank Foster, James Moody and European names such as Jan Wroblewski, Zbigniew Namyslowski, Ferdinand Povel and Martial Solal.

The BRT JO gave a series of - also educational - concerts and toured Zaire, Tunisia, Senegal, Germany and the then U.S.S.R. Financial reasons and belt-tightenings systematically sapped the band, though. While the Brussels Jazz Orchestra proves that a well-structured band can be viable indeed, even at less promising economic times. Over the years, Edmond Harnier, Nic Fissette, Janot Morales, Bert Joris and Jef Coolen (t), Frans Van Dijck, Paul Bourdiaudhy, Marc Mercini (Mestrez) and François Hendricks (tb), José Paessens, Emile Chantrain, Frans L'Eglise, Benny Couroyer, Pros Creado, Eddy Devos, Vic Ingeveldt, Jacky Eddyn, Peter Vandendriessche and Guy Dossche (reeds), vibraphonist Sadi, and in the rhythm section Tony Bauwens, Bob Porter (p), Freddy Sunder (g), Nic Kletchkovsky and occasionally Roger Vanhaverbeke, Bart De Nolf (b), Armand Van De Walle, Bruno Castellucci, Tony Gyselinck (d) have played with the orchestra.

### **Etienne Verschueren**

Etienne (1928-1995) belonged to Jack Sels' generation, with whom he played the American military bases in the Fifties. He made his debut with Willy Albimoor's trio and, like Jack Sels (but later), he was part of trombonist Mickey Bunner's band. His first instrument was the accordion. He played with Janot Morales, but was often seen at the Brussels *Rose Noire*. In 1959 he becomes a member of Henri Segers' Big Band at the INR, and with his composition 'Suite en Seize' (in which Sadi plays a star part) they win the 1963 Bronze Rose at Montreux (TV). That same year, the BRT employs him, and later he will conduct the BRT JO.

Important, as well, is the part he played in the Bop Friends, with Nic Fissette (t), Tony Bauwens (p), Roger Vanhaverbeke (b) and Freddy Rottier (d). For health reasons Steven Houben replaces him for a while. The same problems force him, in 1985, to stop playing prematurely. Even though he did record quite a bit (for the BRT), very little material of his - like Jack Sels' - is currently available. Easiest to come by, is the LP/CD '*Mister Blue*', his nickname. A follow-up to it was ready for production, but never did get released. He also played the organ on it, and it contained one of his best arrangements: 'De Fiertel' suite for jazz orchestra (to Flemish folk tunes from the Flemish Ardennes), as well as his less advertized steps in the direction of more free jazz...

### **WIM vzw**

Necessity was the mother of both *Les Lundis d'Hortense* and *Werkgroep Improviserende Musici (WIM)*. The two couldn't be more different, yet do share the characteristic of both being run by musicians proper. When, at Jazz Middelheim 1972, American participants apparently got much higher fees than the Belgians, the improvised music performers refused to go on. They united under Fred Van Hove and André Goudbeek and, as WIM, they organized a parallel *Free Music* anti-festival that ran for a few years. It was moved to the first weekend of August later on, so there no longer was any competition.

It has always been WIM's ambition to improve improvised music's lot. There was even a 'Plan for jazz in Belgium' at one point, but not one single minister of Culture reacted to the request for subsidies for concerts, festivals, rehearsal space, recording possibilities, the creation of bigger formations or grants.

In 1985 WIM got a relatively meagre subsidy, which was reduced by a third on two other occasions. In 1997 (*Free Music 24*) the money was paid *after* the date, so the festival had to be moved to November. Thanks to private sponsoring, the label *WIMpro*, however, could be upheld.

## Seventy and Beyond

Concerts of improvised music in the Gent impressive *Gravensteen* (castle) left their mark, as did the first glory days of New Orleans jazz just around the corner. Jean-Pol Schroeder remarks that, analogous with, say, Weather Report and the Mahavishnu Orchestra, more bands now 'chose' a name instead of concocting something around the band leader's name. In Belgium this yielded Placebo (1970-'75) with Marc Moulin (p), Richard Rousselet (t), Nic Fissette (t), Alex Scorier (ts), Johnny Dover (bs), Freddy Rottier (d), Garcia Morales (son of Janot) (d), or Cosa Nostra (1971-'73) with the Dutchman Jack van Poll (p) (who lives in Belgium), the American Charlie Green (t) (who lives in The Netherlands) as well as Robert Jeanne (ts), Freddy Deronde (b) and Félix Simtaine (d).

There is also Michel Herr's Solis Lacus (1973-'75) (p) - also with Rousselet, Jeanne, Nic Kletchkovsky (b), Simtaine or Bruno Castellucci (d). Steve Houben (as, f) starts Mauve Traffic and Open Sky Unit, in which he tends to use his American friends like Bill Frissell (g). Abraxas was an important band around Charles Loos, as was COS (1974-'79), in which Pierre Van Dormael (g) too appears towards the end.

In the late Eighties Van Dormael and Fabrizio Cassol (as), Michel Hatzi (b) and Stéphane Galland (d) form Nasa Na, the direct precursor to Aka Moon (1992). Interesting bands from the Eighties include Lilith, around Claudine Simon (p) and Baklava, with Gino Lattuca (t), Michel Massot (tb, bb) and Michel Debrulle. The days of Trio Bravo and Trio Grande are upon us.

Meanwhile : exit the LP (not entirely, so far), enter the CD (see : Today).

But there was also 'old style jazz'.

### Les Lundis d'Hortense

This unique organization of musicians for musicians has been around for more than 25 years now (1976). It sprang from weekly gatherings at the *Villa Hortense* community house in Hoeilaart. Thirty-odd musicians lie at the basis of LDH, including Charles Loos, Michel Herr, Bruno Castellucci, Richard Rousselet, Robert Jeanne and Marc Moulin. Their main aim was to promote and distribute their productions and to acquire the status of artist - a wish that still hasn't been fully granted. A first attempt in that direction was made by the *Onyx Club*.

In 1980 LDH switches to being an organization for jazz musicians only, from within the idea to organize jazz education and concerts in the *Halles de Schaerbeek*. Herr becomes its first 'jazz president' (1980-'84). Belgian bands are sent abroad and there is a memorable festival in *Woluwe-Saint-Pierre* in 1983. As of the next year, the festival is held at the *Botanique* and called *Jazz au Botanique*. In 1995 comes the training week *Jazz au Vert* and a year later the *Jazz-Tour*. Meanwhile, the first Belgian *Maison du Jazz* has been inaugurated - complete with library, record library, studio and rehearsal space. It is mainly geared to musicians and... slightly megalomaniac.

After a reconstruction plan, the festival, the jazz tour, the *Midis Jazz* at the Conservatoire (solo concerts), the Sunday programme on the Brussels *Grand'Place* during the *Jazz Marathon*, *Jazz au Vert* and the unique website (managed by Ilan Oz) survive - as do the continuing battle for status.

Despite its Francophone roots, LDH is an organization for and with all Belgian jazz musicians.

## 'Jazz in Former Times'

### Way Down yonder...

... in New Orleans

This jazz style is still very popular in Flanders. The Brussels region and the south are more into Dixieland jazz, with big hits in the Sixties like the Dixie Stompers, with Jean-Paul Vanderborght (p) and Albert Languet (t) from Mons. The name New Orleans refers to the revival movement - the 'second generation' - that was active in the United States just before 1940 under the impulse of, amongst others, Sidney Bechet (cl, ss) and later Bunk Johnson (t), Jim Robinson (tb), Louis Nelson (tb), George Lewis (cl).

The basis of the Belgian continuation of this jazz branch lies in Gent. Critic and fanatic Walter Eysselinck - whose record collection was huge for those days - gave lectures and thus got a number of musicians like 'Pitou' Pierre Claessens (cl), Walter De Troch (p, bj) and Pol Gevaert (b) interested. Claessens also founded the first orchestra in its style: The New Orleans Roof Jazzmen (1957) in the *Veneziana*, a Gent ice-cream parlour near the *Gravensteen* (castle). It also had Jacques Cruyt (t), the later leader of the Cotton City Jazz Band, playing in it.

Both bands still exist, Cruyt has died. Romain Vandriessche (tb) still plays with the Cotton. Rudy Balliu (cl, first t) did too at one time, but went on to found the Rudy Balliu Society Serenaders. Meanwhile, the oldest still existing jazz festival in the country had started in Kortrijk: the Golden River Jazz Festival, annex the Golden River City Jazzband. A year later, in Dendermonde (another city by a Flemish river!), the Jeggpap New Orleans Jazzband first saw the light, under Bert Heuvinck (cl). Emiel Leybaert (d) is still part of it, even though the 'New Orleans' bit has disappeared from the name and the style evolved towards swing (see under that chapter). The same happened with Alajos Van Peteghem's (tb) (New Orleans) Train Jazzband from the axis Temse-St.-Niklaas, in the Flemish *Waasland*. In Klein-Willebroek, by the river Rupel, the Fondy Riverside Bullet Band of the brothers Camiel (tb) and Johnny (t, v) Van Breedam, inaugurated the (first) *Veerhuis* (Ferry House) in 1970. The present drummer - Philippe De Smet - opened the club 't *Ol van Pluto* (The Back of Beyond) in Horebeke, as leader of the Big Easy Brunch. The Fondy celebrated its thirtieth birthday (2000) in New Orleans, amongst others with a CD recording in George H. Buck's Audiophile Studio. Rudy Balliu did the same, as did Norbert Detaeye (p, v), who with the Lois Dejean Gospel Choir recorded part of his CD *Jesus On the Main Line* there in 1995.

Detaeye stands out here. After 20 years as pianist with The Jeggpap New Orleans Jazz Band, he started his own solo programme around South Louisiana music, called *Songs of the South*, now expanded with *Religious Songs*. He also leads the Gumbo Four, a New Orleans quartet with, amongst others, Bruno Van Acoleyen (t), who had already played/stood in or still plays with all Flemish old-style bands. Another excellent trumpeter, Joris De Cock, moved to Cologne, drummer Didier Geers to Sweden, while Detaeye set up a media library that bears his name at the university of Brasov (central Rumania). He is also part of the occasional band The Original Patershol Ragtimers (with Pierre Claessens). The *Patershol* is an old quarter near the *Gravensteen*, bailiffed by Norbert...

A key figure in the entire New Orleans thing, is Maurice Van Eyck.

Jean-Paul De Smet, ex-co-founder of the *Gent Lazy River Club* - and himself also grand marshall of the Black Diamonds Brass Band - organizes regular trips (pilgrimages almost) to the Crescent City. The bands' fees and the present economic situation mean that the heydays of the big old-style festivals (*Honky Tonk Jazz Festival* in Dendermonde and the *Lazy River Jazz Festival* in Gentbrugge, since 1971) - however prestigious - are over. There is still a - much reduced - festival in Gentbrugge, though, and the one in Kortrijk.

For ages, the Cotton City Jazz Band invited American top musicians from New Orleans - all of them dead now - to perform and record here. Jeggpap and Fondy did the same, to a lesser extent. A regular with all Flemish bands is the Anglo-American star, crowd puller *and* example Sammy Rimington (cl, ts).

Anyway. Flemish old-style jazz made it into the 21st century.

### **It Don't Mean a Thing...**

The Thirties were a 'golden age' for Belgian jazz. The country is celebrating its centenary, Robert Goffin's *Aux Frontières du Jazz* comes out in 1932 and the *Jazz Club de Belgique* is founded. Concert halls like the Brussels *Palais des Beaux-Arts* and the *Madeleine* open their doors to jazz. In the course of the decade (and the next one) a number of musicians like trumpeters Robert De Kers, Gus Deloof and Johnny Claes profile themselves, as do saxophonists Fud Candrix, Jean Robert and Bobby Naret. Those are the days of the three major big bands : Brenders, Omer, Candrix.

The war 'delayed' the advent of bop a bit, since the new records weren't readily available and musicians couldn't travel to New York so regularly. Mainstream remained the most played jazz, even though Willy Rockin, Janot Morales, Eddie De Latte, Francis Bay, Henri Segers' bands, and later the BRT Jazz Orkest were clearly making the transition. The Belgian Swing Band started playing arrangements by Bee, Packay, De Kers... in a major 'back to the roots' move. Important here, is Roger Asselberghs (cl, bs), who imposed the ideas of Benny Goodman and Buddy De Franco, and as baritone saxophonist was part of the early Belgian bop movement around Jack Sels (ts).

Swing/mainstream have remained active in Belgium, be it less obviously so.

We start our survey with three father/son stories : Willy Donni (g) (who did a series of educational concerts with his own quartet, and had his own jazz club *De Begijnenvoer* in Mechelen once), regularly plays at the *Caveau de la Huchette* and the *Paris Slow Club*. His son André (ts, cl) is one of the few young Belgian jazz musicians - with Dirk Van der Linden (g, org, p) - to be perfectly able to express himself in swing.

Vincent Mardens (ts, as) is the son of Vivi Martens (d). André Van Lint (p) played, amongst others, with the late Pol Closset and Léon 'Podoum' Demol. Jean Van Lint jr (b) can be situated somewhere in between Slam Stewart and Paul Dubois. Another all-round bass player is Jimme Vandorpe. Paul Dubois (b) is one of the most important musicians in post-war Belgian jazz history. He was with the Victoria Jazz Band, amongst others, that had a number of (largely) still active swing-minded musicians in it : Herman Sandy (t), André Knapen (tb), Phil Abraham (tb), André Ronsse (ts, cl), André Van Lint (p), Alain Lesire (p) (now also with the Cotton City Jazz Band), Jean-Pierre Liénard (g, bj) (now with the Dixie Ramblers with, amongst others, Daniel Pollain (ts), Ferry Devos (b), Vivi Mardens (d) and Rudy Frankel (d), who passed away in 2002.

Important for the Nineties was Dubois' Sweet Substitutes Band, with Richard Rousselet (t), Phil Abraham (tb), André Donni (ts, cl), Charles Loos (p), Paolo Radoni (g) and Luc Vanden Bosch (d).

Active bands in the genre are Buster and The Swing (René De Smaele,t, André Ronsse-cl, Marc Herouet-p, Daniel Zanello-b and Bog Dartsch-d), The Swing Dealers (Vincent Mardens-ts, as, Pascal Michaux-p, also an organ specialist and on various reeds, Jean Van Lint-b and Jan de Haas-d), the Brussels Little Big Band (with Alex Scories-as, ts, Johnny Dover-bs and Hinderik Leeuwe-t). All through their lives, Scories and Dover led bands - Dover was one of the first ones to have the five saxes plus rhythm combination. There is also Roger Vanhaverbeke's mainstream trio, himself accompanist and promoter par excellence of American soloists inside the idiom, and historically just slightly more on the outside (first with the late Al Jones-d and Freddy Rottier-d, now with Luc Vanden Bosch-d); the Jeggpap

Jazzband (with leader Peter Verhas-ts, cl and sometimes Freddy Sunder-g, v) and the Dynamite Trio (with Eddy Murlot-p, Willy Donny-g, and all-time drummer Charlie Pauwels - aka Tony Dynamite). Dynamite's other bands also had fierce swing adept Camille De Ceunynck (p) in it, who won first prize in Paris in 1953 with Willy Hermans' *Hot Club van Sint-Niklaas Big Band*, but has since had to give up for health reasons. Curt Bulteel is an active young pianist (now with Jean Warland's trio).

Fapy Lafertin, Jokke Schreurs and Koen De Cauter - also an excellent soprano and tenor saxophonist - are Django style guitarists. Jan De Coninck (t) and Pol Jaspers (ts), as well as Herman Van Spauwen (cl), once the leader of the Deep Creek Jazzuits (Diepenbeek, where they come from, vaguely translates as 'deep creek') are also very active. Joop Ayal is of Indonesian stock, but was adopted by Belgians. Then there are Patrick Wante (d) (and, amongst others, 'A Drum is A Woman', with Jokke Schreurs and André Donni, a quartet arrangement of Duke's 'Far East Suite' full band version).

Dirk Van der Linden (g, p) and Karel Algoed (b) play with the Belgo-Dutch Swingcats. Our boogie-woogie specialists include Renaud Patigny (p), while Jean-Paul Vanderborgh (p) ('Jean-Lou') led various bands with, amongst others, Henri Carels (t) and Willy Donni (g). André 'Druss' - aka 'Babs'- Lecomte Babs/Babs' All Stars have been around for ages. Eddy Devos is an all-round man (as, ts). The big band that most closely approximates the swing idiom, is the Mons West Music Club, now of Richard Rousselet (t, arr, ldr). Until a few years ago, its Flemish alternative was the Jos Moons Big Band.

Benjamin Boutreur's (as) *Olie op Duke/doek* (an onomatopoetic pun along the lines of The Duke's no Fluke) project was the revelation of 2001, with, amongst others, André Donni (ts, cl), Thomas De Prins (p), Nico Schepers (t) and even Félix Simtaine (d) and Bart Maris (t). They do recreations of Ellington 1927-'31 as part of a hilarious story, told by actor Dimitri Leue. In Antwerp, the *Antwerp Jazz Club* (for those Afro-American pre-war musicians and their closest followers à la French critic Hugues Panassié) and the *USA Jazz Club* with Belgian musicians (and monthly live concerts) try to keep mainstream jazz going. In Brussels, the *Cercle Sweet and Hot* veers towards the A.(ntwerp) J.C. For a few years, they published the interesting magazine *Le Point du Jazz*.

## **By Way of Conclusion**

It is impossible to list every Belgian jazz musician. To find their names, please consult the index of Pernet's discography, or surf to [www.jazzinbelgium.org](http://www.jazzinbelgium.org). Red thread through Belgian post-war jazz history is Toots Thielemans, who combines both a worldwide reputation with a clear Belgian presence.

Younger talent also seems to have found its way into several bands, of which the BJO stands out.

The sequel to this story is in good hands.

# **PORTRAITS OF BELGIAN JAZZ MUSICIANS & GROUPS**

Jempi Samyn



## Phil Abraham

Phil Abraham was born in Mons in 1962 and still lives in a bucolic village near La Louvrière, where he grew up. Having finished his classical training (piano, guitar and harmony), Phil Abraham suddenly developed a strong interest in jazz. The trombone fascinated him immensely, so he became a self-taught player.

Phil Abraham, who calls himself a modern soloist, has mastered all the possible jazz styles in history by playing with people such as Clark Terry, Toots Thielemans, Anthony Jackson, Deborah Brown, Benny Bailey, Maria Schneider, Paolo Fresu, Art Farmer, Stefano di Battista, Flavio Boltro, Henri Texier, Michel Legrand, Claudio Roditi, Klaus Weiss, William Sheller and Lucky Peterson.

Phil Abraham, also an excellent scat singer, is in high demand with big bands. He is one of Félix Simtaine's regular soloists in his Act Big Band and in *Ten-Tamarre*, but also with the VRT Big Band. He is even a member of the *Orchestre National de Jazz* in France, where, until his arrival, no other Belgian had made the grade. Phil Abraham also replaced Bob Brookmeyer in the Michel Petrucciani sextet and was a member of the wind section on Charles Aznavour's CD '*Jazznavour*'. His favourite own CD (he has made 5 so far) is '*Fredaines*' (Lyrae Records), released in 1999. He is assisted on it by Frédéric Favarel (g) and Hein van de Geyn (b). Phil Abraham currently teaches at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire and regularly gives master classes and courses.

Phil Abraham : 'It was sort of a habit to send the children to the academy in our family. Like my grandparents had done with their children, my younger brother Christof and myself were sent to the La Louvrière music school when we were 8.

I picked the trumpet, because it was my father's favourite instrument. When I brought it home, however, my dad asked if I wouldn't have preferred another instrument. I admitted that I did, in fact, fancy the piano. Since we had one at home, all I had to do was hand in my trumpet. We might as well have kept it, though, since it became my brother's instrument.

My first introduction to jazz came through my cousin's impressive record collection. He founded the *Maison du Jazz* in Mons later. I often played duets with him - he played the banjo himself. When I was 15 or so, having first played the guitar for a bit, I started my own little jazz orchestra. The places we played weren't always cheerful, though - we went to retirement homes and all. The state of the piano, however, was always the biggest disappointment. That's one of the reasons why, at one point, I took up the trombone. A trombone with keys, to begin with (a leftover from my father's young days), but eventually a keyless one, a Czech Amati.

I ended up in some Dixieland ensemble - we played clubs and pub crawls, but also weddings, even on boats and in street parades - and automatically came across a lot of jazz musicians who played a lot more than Dixieland. People like Alex Scorier, for example, soon introduced me to a much more modern kind of jazz and before I knew it, I was playing swing and then bebop. I even played free jazz in The Netherlands for a while.

I also sang from day one. Standards to begin with, from the Dixieland and swing era. There was one French song, 'Les haricots rouges', which I sang with my band *Traction à Vent*. The scatting came later.

I try to bring my trombone playing and my singing as closely together as possible. I do hope that, one day, I will be able to make my trombone sound as naturally as my own singing voice. Hearing somebody play a *saqueboute*, a baroque instrument - the precursor to the trombone, so to speak, be it with a much smaller pavillon - seriously boosted my confidence. I now give workshops on the instrument and write music for it.

I often hear people say 'jazz' cannot be defined. I don't agree. To me, jazz is a music genre, made up of melody and harmony - which are intimately linked - on the one hand, and rhythm on the other. Without swing in the rhythm and without blues in the melody/harmony part, there can be no jazz. A jazz piece does not necessarily have to be a blues or a blues standard, or float on a ternary rhythm, as long as the instrumentalist - by definition a jazz man - has enough swing and blues, whether he is improvising or interpreting. It is not improvisation that typifies jazz, in other words, even though it is present for more than 90%. Bach also improvised, and jazz was still light-years away then. His music contained no swing or blues either. When Stan Getz played a bossa nova, that wasn't jazz. But because he was a jazzman, his sound did have enough swing and blues to speak of jazz. Jazz, in other words, does not solely exist by the grace of improvisation.

Some may wonder whether my approach leaves room for evolution. *Must* a certain art - but also science - evolve?, is what I keep asking myself. I always thought art was timeless, you see. The music of the likes of Louis Armstrong or Charlie Parker, for example, sounds just as topical today as it did when it was first heard on the radio.

Having said that, I must say that, to me, jazz is the most important and most spectacular musical evolution of the twentieth century.'

## **Philippe Aerts**

Philippe Aerts was born in Brussels in 1964 and taught himself to play the guitar and bass from the age of 11. Three years later, his father, himself a talented Dixieland bass player, gave him his own double bass, and stealthily put on a Ray Brown record. It was love at first hearing and young Philippe Aerts immediately started practising frantically, first by playing along with the records and by imitating the solos of Paul Dubois, Jean-Louis Rassinfosse and others, but soon also as a member of a number of local Dixieland and mainstream jazz bands alongside the likes of Pol Closset, Johnny Dover and Léon Demol. He gradually shifted to modern jazz and in no time he was one of the most wanted double bass players in Belgium and abroad. Toots Thielemans, Félix Simtaine, Philip Catherine, Michel Herr, Steve Houben, Charles Loos, Kris Defoort, Kurt Van Herck, Bob Brookmeyer, Tom Harrell, Mal Waldron, Steve Grossman, Lee Konitz, Richard Galliano... have all used (or are still using) this class musician who manages to harmonize his incredible ingenuity with a perfect feeling for accuracy, characterised by a skilfully maintained combination of fine lyricism and warm, grounded bass tones.

After a three-year stay in New York (an experience he warmly recommends to any musician), Philippe Aerts moved to Vevey (Switzerland) in late 1999/early 2000, where he regularly collaborates with Malcolm Braff. He has been a full member of Martial Solal's New Decaband for a while now.

On '*Back to the Old World*' the second CD he released as a frontman in early 2002, after '*Cat Walk*' (both on Igloo), the trio - consisting of Aerts, John Ruocco (ts, cl) and Tony Levin (d) - is back, expanded into a stylish quartet with Bert Joris on bugle.

Philippe Aerts can be heard on Philip Catherine's CD in the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series.

### **Playing live as soon as possible : every musician's dream**

Philippe Aerts : 'Jacques Pelzer, a true bebopper, really did develop a unique sound, which made him immediately recognizable. It was usually Bart De Nolf who played on bass with him, but I was often asked to replace him. I couldn't have dreamt of a better school. It was perfectly clear from his deeply felt sax play that he knew his little world like the back of his hand. I have exactly the same feeling when I play with Philip Catherine.'

Since I taught myself to play bass, I learned to read scores reasonably late, although I was no longer a stranger to notation at the time. In Toshiko Akiyoshi's big band, with whom I played for two years in New York, I didn't have a choice, so I simply jumped in at the deep end of note reading.'

### **Choosing the right material**

Philippe Aerts : 'Right from the start, finding a good sounding double bass was my main worry. The one I'm playing on today, was built in 1830 in France by Pillement, and had only three strings (I've still got the original scroll). From what I gather there are only 40 or so of the type around. I have seldom played such a precise instrument : each note comes out perfectly and the volume between the various strings doesn't differ one bit, which is highly exceptional in a double bass. The fact that it survived all those plane trips proves it must be extremely sturdy. I also make a point of playing without amplification, to retain full control over the sound and volume of my instrument. It is a labour intensive choice, which forces me to practise a lot to keep up the strength in my right hand and fingers, but it's worth it. That way, I reckon, the deep bass sound - which does swing more when amplified - mixes much more easily with the sound of the other instruments.

My favourites are strings made from guts, because they produce a much warmer sound than the metal ones. They are hellishly expensive, though, go out of tune much more easily, don't always sound equally precise and wear fast.'

### **A few old hands**

Philippe Aerts : 'I owe a great deal to Félix Simeone, whom I still consider one of the best drummers in Europe. Too bad he is so vastly underrated. Did you know that Félix collects model trains? He owns more than 900 locomotives!

By playing in Félix' Act Big Band, I met John Ruocco. The great thing about John, is that he gives his fellow musicians complete freedom. You can take any risk you want with him by your side - he even encourages it, like Joe Lovano, in fact. He has this solid sax technique, both rhythmically and harmonically.

I met Tony Levin thanks to Philip Catherine, who in his turn met him when the German bass player Ali Haurand invited him to play in his European Jazz Ensemble.

Bert Joris' lyrical trumpet technique is heavenly. Its velvet sound is reminiscent of the bugle. No need to say that when he actually does play the bugle it is pure joy to the ear! That is why I insisted he play the bugle, and nothing else, on my latest CD.'

## **Aka Moon**

Over the years, Aka Moon has acquired the status of one of the country's most authoritative jazz trios of the last decade. The formula of the basic trio, consisting of alto/composer Fabrizio Cassol, bass player Michel Hatzigeorgiou and drummer Stéphane Galland, with the customary special guests on their albums or concerts, seems to go down well with their increasing flock of fans. A string of remarkable performances sticks in the mind : the *Oriental Voices* concert at the Brussels *Monnaie* Theatre, with David Linx and the Indian mridangam player Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman, vocalist Neyveli Santhanagopalan, Spanish vocalist José Miguel Cerro and guitarist Juan Ignacio Gomez 'Chicuelo'; the various performances with guitarist Prasanna and percussionist Palanivel - also from India; Jazz Middelheim, where Aka Moon was flanked by Prasanna and two other top guitarists, David Gilmore from New York (cf. Steve Coleman, Don Byron and his own latest CD *'RitualisM'*, which got raving reviews in the Belgian professional press as well) and Pierre Van Dormael (amply discussed

elsewhere in this book); *In Real Time*, a total spectacle together with theatre company Stan and Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker's dance ensemble Rosas whereby musicians, actors and dancers are continuously and interactively linked (cf. CD '*In Real Time*'); various projects with DJ Grazzhoppa... every single one of them a huge success. As a result, people are eagerly awaiting another CD with the above special guests. The CD '*Guitars*' (W.E.R.F.), in the *Brugge 2002* CD box partly fills this gap and features Pierre Van Dormael, as well as Prasanna and David Gilmore.

### The Kaai

No story about Aka Moon would be complete without the story of the *Kaai*. Michel Hatzigeorgiou, who played bass in a band Pierre Van Dormael was busy forming, and in which Eric Legnini and Bruno Castellucci also played, had had his fill of rehearsing and never actually performing. So Pierre, and his good friend Etienne Geraert (a former motorcycle racer with François Louis as his technician) started looking for a place where they would be able to both rehearse and perform. Not far from the KVS (*Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg*, a Flemish Theatre building), on the *Arduinkaai*, they chanced upon the *Kaai*, where apparently concerts used to be given and where they could start working right away, with Fabrizio Cassol - with whom Pierre Van Dormael was working on another project - Pierre Vaiana and Antoine Prawerman in their wake. Together with Stéphane Galland, Michel Hatzigeorgiou and Fabrizio Cassol, Pierre Van Dormael soon founded Nasa Na, with which he played his own compositions. The *Kaai* was run on a shoestring. The musicians, who came there to play, did the bar and took turns serving customers when they were not doing solos. There were concerts virtually every day, even though there were often more people on stage than on the chairs. Because a lot of interesting musicians met there, the *Kaai* became a hotbed spawning many a promising musical ensemble, amongst others Aka Moon, itself a spin-off of Nasa Na after Pierre Van Dormael's departure. The band soon caught the ever-increasing visitors' attention. The somehow dingy joint had become a *lieu branché* and musicians from all over the world flocked in, curious to see, but mainly admiring what those three wildly gesticulating, exceptionally skilled music artists were doing. Even Steve Coleman recently admitted that his first confrontation with Aka Moon made a deep impression on him.

The *Kaai* was short-lived, though, and barely lasted five years : rather chaotic management and not exactly immaculately kept finances (the till actually disappeared a few times) eventually closed the place down. Ambitious bands thought better than to spend their life playing this improvised stage, and like young out of their egg, they left the womb, oozing talent.

The CD '*Live at the Kaai 31.3.1993*' (Carbon 7) contains a sonorous take of Aka Moon's legendary *Kaai* years.

### The Aka Pygmees

Another important element in the genesis of Aka Moon, is their stay with the Aka Pygmees. In the autumn of 1991, four young Belgian musicians went to Central Africa in order to gain a better insight into the Aka Pygmees' strange lifestyle. Having overcome massive administrative obstacles, sat through a series of preparatory chats, the classic initiation process and a long, difficult walk, they finally set foot in a primitive settlement in the middle of the jungle, where they carefully mingled with the locals and spent time living with them, making sure not to drastically influence their hosts' customs. They personally experienced that under this seeming layer of general restfulness, music was ever-present. The Aka Pygmees' conversations, their laughter as well as their shouts hover between ordinary talk, singing and unchecked vocal sound, without ever making any concrete arrangements over this. It is the most natural thing in the world and, more importantly, not in the least

hierarchical. Men, women as well as children 'take charge' singing at any given time and do so in permanent harmony with the forest noises : the rustling of leaves, a bird's whistle, some animal's shriek, the wind... everything, to the Aka Pygmies, contains enough 'music' to generate singing.

Their stay with the Aka Pygmies, changed the lives of Fabrizio Cassol, Michel Hatzigeorgiou and Stéphane Galland forever : the next spring they became Aka Moon and ten years on, they have thirteen albums to their name.

## India

Fabrizio Cassol : 'A third important factor in Aka Moon's existence, are our trips to India, which I visit on my own several times a year. That is how, one day, we came across Sivaraman, India's greatest mrdangam master and a guru who, to this day, is teaching us new things. 'Invisible Mother' (Carbon 7) is the result of the knowledge Sivaraman has given us. Every time we go to India, he offers us a new, tiny piece of his knowledge to take home.'

## Fabrice Alleman

Upon finishing his studies at the Conservatoires of Mons (classical music: first prize for chamber music and clarinet) and Brussels (jazz with, amongst others, Jean-Louis Rassinfosse, Michel Hatzigeorgiou, Steve Houben and Richard Rousselet), saxophonist/clarinetist/flautist/composer Fabrice Alleman jumped in at the deep end of fully-fledged professional musicianship. Two years later, he was given a first prize for saxophone and history, and attended a clinic with Phil Woods, Toshiko Akiyoshi and Steve Slagle at the New York Manhattan School of Music.

Fabrice Alleman feels at home in a wide range of styles. He has worked in studios and on stage with, amongst others, Salvatore Adamo, William Sheller, the Calvin Owens Blues Orchestra, Terence Blanchard, Kenny Werner, Garrett List, Eric Legnini, Jean Warland, Steve Houben and Michel Herr.

Fabrice Alleman belonged to, or still belongs to various groups and projects, amongst which the Act Big Band, Sax No End, the Richard Rousselet Sextet, the Ecaroh Quintet, the Jazz Addiction Band (CD '*Nice Cap*', Lyrae Records), the Brussels Jazz Orchestra (on their first CD '*Live*') and Ten-Tamarre.

With his own quartet - with which he won the *Nicolas Dor* at the Liège Festival in 1997 - Fabrice Alleman released the CD '*Loop the Loop*' (Igloo) in 1998. It was Lyrae who released his duo CD with Paolo Loveri, with whom he recently made a second CD with a string ensemble, under the title '*On the Funny Side of Strings*' (Lyrae Records).

His jazz rock Fabrice Alleman One Shot Band - which also had the late Jean-Pierre Catoul in it - banks on releasing a CD before the end of 2002.

Fabrice Alleman : 'As a child, I used to dream of a career as a footballer - a plan that was shelved when I was diagnosed with heart murmur. My mother decided to make me do music instead, since you had to do *something* outside school. So off I went to the academy, at the age of eight. Flute was out of the question, since the teacher had just died. I chose the clarinet instead, but gave up after a year, until one day I sort of rediscovered the instrument and took it with me all through the Conservatoire.

From day one, I loved to improvise on my instrument. That had nothing to do with the fact that, at home, virtually all I used to hear was jazz. My father started listening to jazz when he was 18 himself (Count Basie, Parker, Konitz, Kenton, Tristano, Jimmy Smith, Miles...), but I had no idea that this music was jazz. To me it was music, full stop. The various emotions and

related sensations I experienced every day, however, did inspire me to make music: reading a book, watching a film, or, simply, a conversation. I would go to my room afterwards, where I recorded my musical antics - which sort of had a life of their own. Soon after, I admitted what I had recorded to paper and played the result to my first girlfriend. Only later did I find out I had mainly been playing blues numbers, even though again - at 13 - I had no idea what I was doing.

I still make my music that way, in fact. Emotions indeed still play a major part in the way I compose my music. I don't care *what* exactly I play. I'd hate having to rationalize what I am doing. The fact that I assimilate really fast *and* had extremely gifted teachers all my life has helped tremendously. I had no idea they were so good, at the time - it seemed only natural. They are the ones who taught me the technique behind the various instruments I play today. As a result, I can now truly give free rein to my musical expression: melodically, harmonically as well as rhythmically (I play the drums too). I always start my songs from a rhythm inside my head, for which I then find a melody. The chords come third. As far as I am concerned, the basis of all music genres is rhythm - wherever in space, and whenever in time.

I only became interested in the saxophone at 18 or so, after buying records in the sales by, amongst others, Weather Report, Chick Corea, Genesis and Supertramp. Only then did I realize what jazz was all about. I got myself that old Eric Dolphy record again, which I had been given as a child but had taken back to the shop because I didn't have a clue. At last, I understood that of all music styles, jazz offers the greatest freedom of expression.

Every music form transcends the power of words, in fact. Try telling somebody to get stuffed. You can bet your life you'll end up in a fight. Sing it, though, and your recipient may well laugh. Even though you basically did exactly the same thing: voice your opinion in a valid manner. Take this a step further and play a few shrill notes on your instrument to tell your guy to naff off, and your sustained note may suddenly be considered a fascinating 'statement'. Which proves my theory that music can be a tool for transforming negative energy into positive energy and, by definition, for sharing emotions with anyone. In that sense, it is much more important to move *one* person with *one* single note than to leave an entire audience open-mouthed with a torrent of virtuoso music playing. Seven years ago, we gave a performance - which we all thought had been lousy - in some small jazz bar in Bruges. This older man came to me with tears in his eyes afterwards and told me how our music had made him forget his problems for two hours. What better compliment can a musician wish for?

To the question what music I would call jazz, I'm afraid I must reply with the old-fashioned cliché that jazz has to 'swing'. However much I sometimes admire skilfully played, extremely complex music - that still doesn't automatically make it into 'jazz'. Assuming someone asks me to label it, of course! Music is not there to be pigeonholed, but to be listened to.'

## **Pierre Bernard**

This exceptionally gifted flautist was born in Leopoldville (The Congo) in 1959 and did classical music at the Liège Conservatoire, where he also got improvisation lessons from Garrett List. Pierre Bernard has a first prize for both flute and chamber music.

Pierre Bernard is yet another musician from the Liège music scene who uses his musical skill and experience to revive Belgian jazz, amongst others by injecting elements from classical and present-day music into it. He was also at the legendary *Kaai* in the late Eighties (cf., amongst others, Aka Moon, Bart Defoort and Antoine Prawerman). Pierre Bernard played in Garrett List's ensemble and was a member of, amongst others, *La Grande Formation*. Today he is a member, amongst others, of Kris Defoort & Dreamtime, *Parfum Latin* and *Rêve*

*d'Eléphant*. Pierre Bernard is pianist Véronique Bizet's other half in the duo Bed and Breakfast.

## **Michel Bisceglia**

Pianist/composer/arranger Michel Bisceglia was born from Italian parents on January 4th 1970 in Zwartberg. He met Randy Brecker when a German jazz ensemble asked him to be their sideman in 1992 (the latter having been invited by the same band). Brecker was clearly impressed by Bisceglia's piano style. The two met again at a concert of the Brecker Brothers, planned that same day as Sketches, Michel Bisceglia's band. When Michel's first album was about to be recorded, he decided to invite Randy Brecker as special guest. He needed another man for the wind section, and since he knew Randy often worked with Bob Mintzer, he invited him as well. They both agreed and thus find themselves on Bisceglia's debut CD '*About Stories*' (BMG).

Other jazz artists with whom Bisceglia has worked, include Toots Thielemans, Philip Catherine, Andy Middleton, Eric Gale, Erwin Vann, Eric Vloeimans, Marcia Maria and Rony Verbiest.

Bisceglia is a much wanted man on the rock and pop scene too, where he has worked with Jo Lemaire, Johan Verminnen, John Miles, Sunny Side Up, Chelsey and others. With Harald Ingenhag and Volker Heinze, Bisceglia currently has the Trio Cattleya, whose CD '*Le Temps Perdu*' (PAO) was recently released. Michel Bisceglia currently lectures at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire.

## **Laurent Blondiau**

Trumpeter/bugler Laurent Blondiau was born on December 24th 1968 and studied at the jazz department of the Brussels Conservatoire, with Bert Joris and Richard Rousselet. In 1990 he obtained first prize and two years later, at the *Festival de Jazz à Liège*, he was given the *Nicolas Dor* trophy.

His debut CD '*The queen of the apple pie*' (W.E.R.F.), with own compositions, was released in 1998 and has Peter Hertmans (g), Nathalie Lories (p), Otti Van der Werf (b) and Jan de Haas (d) on it.

In the mid-Nineties JAM Records (later rebaptized JAS) released Määk's Spirit '*Lives*'. The band still consisted of Blondiau (t, flhn, tim), Jeroen Van Herzeele (ts), Sal La Rocca (b) and Hans van Oosterhout (d) at the time. Sal and Hans were later replaced by respectively Nic Thys and Dré Pallemmaerts and the quartet was expanded with two singers : Anne Van der Plassche and Galia Benali. In 2002, the visitors to the 16th *Festival des Lundis d'Hortense* at the Brussels *Botanique* witnessed a new metamorphosis of Määk's Spirit, which now was a quintet consisting of tenorist Jeroen Van Herzeele, trumpeter Laurent Blondiau, bass player Otti Van der Werf, trombone-tuba player Michel Massot and drummer Eric Thielemans, assisted for the occasion by the French guitarist Jean-Yves Evrard. The latter is now a regular member of the Määk's Spirit sextet.

Blondiau can also be found in various other ensembles, such as the GVA Quintet, Octurn, Dreamtime, Deep in the Deep, the Ernst Vrankx Quintet, the Nathalie Lories Trio + Extensions, Rêve d'Eléphant, Vegetal Beauty and, until recently, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, where he has been replaced by Nico Schepers.

Laurent Blondiau : 'Like my sister, a classical guitarist, I automatically found myself surrounded by notes through my parents, themselves classical musicians. I must have been 12 or so, when they enrolled me at the academy, initially much to my despair. My encounter with other musicians five years later at the Jazz Studio, really gave me the bug - mainly under Bert Joris' influence. A lot of my classmates from secondary school (Uccle 2) became musicians themselves : Bo and Otti Van der Werf, Nicolas Thys... We were in the same class at the academy, even though we felt we learned a lot more outside it, playing our own music to compensate for the boring, classical training. In no time - sometime in the early Nineties - we had formed our first jazz ensemble, the GVA Quintet, with Nic Thys, Bilou Doneux, Fré Desmyter, Bo Van der Werf and myself. We performed a lot together and even won prizes. I didn't go to the conservatoire, but learned a tremendous lot from Bert Joris and Richard Rousselet, my professors in Antwerp and Brussels respectively. I also learned a great deal studying on my own and was lucky enough to be able to work with great musicians in a short period of time, amongst others at Octurn and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, two bands I have been actively involved with since the start.

Even though I admire a lot of great trumpeters, like Miles, Chet, Tom Harrell and Freddie Hubbard, I am never tempted to copy their solos. I much prefer developing my own sound, on which I spend hours every day and which is not about reaching those high notes, but about breathing and controlling the diaphragm. I try to maximally expand and harmonize my sound spectrum without too many high notes. I also like to experiment with other devices, like old ashtrays, to distort the sound.

Today, I only play the bugle when the composition demands it. Other than that, I stick to the trumpet. Anyone who thoroughly masters his trumpet, will have no problems on bugle - but not the other way round.

I'd love to release something new with my quintet, although I mustn't grumble: I am currently recording a CD in *CC de Meent* (Aalsemberg) with Määk's Spirit - my most fascinating occupation right now - and we've got performances in Morocco coming up. I also truly enjoy playing with the Nathalie Lories + Extensions sextet, and with Vegetal Beauty, a project of Antoine Prawerman.

There are also Kris Defoort's various other projects, amongst them the opera '*The Woman Who Walked into Doors*', by *Het muziek Lod* and the *Ro theater*.

I am at my best when I am constantly hovering from one country to another and having to switch from one style to another. That is exactly what I find so fascinating about being a musician - certainly in jazz, the fastest and most spectacularly evolving music form there is. I make a point of keeping the teaching at the Brussels and Gent conservatoires to a strict minimum, because I find rehearsing, playing and working on my own sound much more interesting. My craving for versatility also transcends the boundaries of music. I actually am a qualified nurse. Funnily enough, I don't think I would have evolved in music the way I do now, if I hadn't done those studies.

Of course the music you make and play is large influenced by your lifestyle. If you don't live in harmony with your surroundings, you will automatically have problems making music. Having your share of luck also helps, of course - like the people you meet and get on well with. Friction between musicians inside a band always has a baleful effect on the ensemble. A band cannot function, in other words, without open dialogue. I recently experienced a case of unfair treatment, unworthy of the class of band in which it happened. What goes round comes round, though, as those who lower themselves to that kind of practices will no doubt find out. The world of musicians - certainly that of jazz - is very small indeed.



Even though people like to mock our country, we must admit it's not such a bad place after all. Many of my friends in France admit Belgium has a geniality they miss. Uprightness and honesty must continue to win, otherwise we will all perish.'

In the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series, Laurent Blondiau can be heard on the CDs of the Brussels Jazz Orchestra ('*The Music of Bert Joris*'), Octurn ('*Dimensions*') and Nathalie Lories ('*Tombouctou*').

## Brussels Jazz Orchestra

After the BRT Jazz Orkest stopped its activities in March 1993, Frank Vaganée (a former freelancer with it), Marc Godfroid and Serge Plume decided to found the Brussels Jazz Orchestra. The Brussels Sounds jazz club became the home base for this ensemble, that averages 16 musicians, and the rehearsals soon became public workshops.

The orchestra initially played compositions by the likes of Count Basie, Thad Jones, Duke Ellington, Bill Holman and Bob Brookmeyer, but soon local composers were asked to write for the big band as well : Bert Joris, Kris Defoort, Michel Herr, Erwin Vann and Frank Vaganée himself.

In August 1993, Jazz Middelheim offered the BJO its first stage outside the Sounds. The audience went wild, and the BJO has been present at Jazz Middelheim ever since : in 1997, Jean Warland was guest conductor, in 1999 and 2001, Kenny Werner and Maria Schneider - in that order - were their special guests. Toots Thielemans too was on stage with the BJO on both occasions.

In 1994, the public workshops at the Sounds were complemented with monthly concerts at the Gent *Damberd* jazz club and in 1996 the BJO won the *Nicolas Dor* for their participation in the *Jazz à Liège* Festival. That same year, they commemorated Etienne Verschuere during the 3rd Mechelen Jazz day within the framework of the Mechelen Festival of Flanders and opened the new season of the Dutch radio programme *Tros Sesjun*.

In 1997, the BJO released its first CD, '*Live*', in close co-operation with the BRTN Radio 3. That same year they played with Toots Thielemans at the French *Festival du Jazz* at Junas, performed at the Antwerp *deSingel* (*Nacht van Radio 3*) and at the *5th Stranger than Paradise 7en9tig Jazz Festival* in Tilburg, Holland. A year later, our northern neighbours truly discovered the orchestra (Porgy & Bess at Terneuzen and the Philip Morris Jazz Festival in Bergen op Zoom).

In September 1999, after a tour by way of homage to Duke Ellington, they recorded their second CD, '*The September Sessions*', (W.E.R.F.) in the prestigious VRT Studio Toots. Their music, which is played with particular accuracy on this album, clearly proves that this is a big band of world stature. The CD contains compositions by Bert Joris, Frank Vaganée, Michel Herr, Sir William Walton and Erwin Vann.

1999 was closed in style with a project around Bill Holman and in 2000 even more concerts followed in Belgium and abroad : *Jazzfestival des Lundis d'Hortense* at the Brussels *Botanique*, with special guests Philip Catherine and Bert Joris, the Amsterdam *Bimhuis*, *CC Luchtbal* and *Jazz à Liège* (each time with Jeanne Lee), *Jazzdag Mechelen* (with Bert Joris), *Jazz in 't Park* in Gent, the Leuven Lemmens Institute and the ClaZZic series (Gent and Wevelgem).

In early 2001, the BJO took part in New York in the annual IAJE convention with Kenny Werner.

The BJO currently consists of Frank Vaganée (as, ss, f), Dieter Limbourg (as, cl, f), Kurt Van Herck (ts), Bart Defoort (ts, ss), Bo Van der Werf (bs, bcl), Marc Godfroid, Jan De Backer and Lode Mertens (tb), Laurent Hendrick (btb), Michel Paré, Gino Lattuca, Serge Plume and

Nico Schepers (t, flhn), Bart Van Caenegem (p) and drummer Martijn Vink, who until recently still played with the *Metropole* and *WDR* orchestras. Since Nic Thys definitively settled in Brooklyn in 2002, John Machtel has been the BJO's regular double bass player. Guitarist Peter Hermans is also a regular contributor.

Instead of talking to the sixteen BJO musicians, here are some reactions from foreign artists who have worked with them.

Bob Mintzer : 'I was amazed when I first heard the BJO. Having worked with them for a week, my conclusion just had to be that this is one of the best jazz ensembles I have ever heard, worldwide.

The fact that, without exception, each of the musicians of the Brussels Jazz Orchestra is top class, makes rehearsing with them a true pleasure. I was also struck by the fact that all of them cover a vast range of styles. I had been looking for an ensemble like this for years, since my compositions contain Latin, swing, funk as well as R&B influences and are geared both to big and smaller bands. The BJO spans it all, which is a virtually unaffordable luxury for a composer.

Each of the soloists in the band is exceptional, yet no-one ever claims the floor all to him/herself. Working in team is their credo. Neither do they have any problems optimally filling the spaces I keep open for improvisation or interplay, which in its own turn gives me new ideas for new work. That's exactly what makes jazz so fascinating.'

Maria Schneider : 'When Kenny Werner told me how good he found these musicians, I was ashamed that, somehow, I'd never heard the orchestra play. I soon realized they weren't all that famous, despite the musicians' enormous talent, which I have had ample opportunity to listen to. This is definitely worldclass, I thought. So how come nobody had heard of them?

I find it striking, in fact, that Belgian jazz musicians in general are hardly known in the States. Toots Thielemans and Philip Catherine are about the only Belgians people ever mentioned here, while I increasingly get the impression that your country is teeming with fabulous musicians. It's high time you did something about this. I do hope that the fact that American artists are using more and more foreign musicians, will help improve this situation.

As to the BJO: Toots had told me before that this band had top level musicians in it. After two days of rehearsing I was amazed. I can assure you my music is anything but easy to play, period! I had sent them the scores, most of which I had written for my own orchestra, which is about the same strength, including stand-ins. I couldn't believe my ears when I heard what new material the BJO boys had added in such a short time. They also sound extremely natural.

And Bert Joris, another underrated composer : I found the set he played with the BJO at Middelheim masterly.

My performance with Toots and the BJO is amongst the highlights of my life! It was one of those evenings I truly wished my parents had been there! Words truly fail me to describe this experience.'

Kenny Werner : 'It must be five years or so ago that I met Frank Vaganée for the first time at one of the Jazz Middelheim jam sessions. I sat there, playing the piano, surrounded by this group of bad cats from New York and suddenly this slovenly guy with funny curls and a musketeer's goatee walked on stage. I wondered what this could mean, until I heard him play his alto saxophone : he blew all those bad cats from New York under the table! I immediately wanted to get to know him. As it turned out, he knew I wrote music for big bands and asked me if I would consider doing something with the Brussels Jazz Orchestra at the next Middelheim Festival (1999). We played my music, and I had to admit that this was one of the

best bands I'd ever come across in my life. What I couldn't figure out, though, was why nobody, certainly not here in the US, had heard of them. Countries like The Netherlands, Germany, France or Great Britain would long have done their utmost to inform the world press and audiences about the likes of them. Why can't Belgium do that? It doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg, and most of the money is retrieved via advance levies on your professional income anyway.

To offer the BJO some sort of a springboard, I eventually took the initiative myself and introduced them to the organisers of the annual New York IAJE convention. Their condition for letting the BJO participate in 2001 was that they play my compositions. They immediately accepted, of course. I am not exaggerating when I say that all those present - musicians, organisers, media folk, etc. - listened to the BJO open-mouthed. They really blew everybody away! As a result, quite a few leading magazines suddenly showed an interest in my compositions, alongside that of big shots like Maria Schneider and Vince Mendoza. Until then, people had only known me as a performing pianist.

When it was over, organisers and promoters flocked around the band to get them to come to festivals - and, who knows, to record on their label. Suddenly everybody knew where Belgium was on the world map! Too bad you live in such a small country, where a tour couldn't take long if you tried. All the more reason for the authorities to do something about this, though, and free your artists from the trap that is their stingy, native country.'

Anyone who wishes to find out about the BJO's impending projects, can surf to their homepage : [www.jazzinbelgium.org/groups/bjo.htm](http://www.jazzinbelgium.org/groups/bjo.htm)

## **Bruno Castellucci**

Bruno Castellucci was born in 1944 in Châtelet (near Charleroi), where his Italian parents enrolled him for solfeggio classes at the academy. He was still at primary school at the time. Little Castellucci, who had sat through two years of piano prior to that, soon realized he wasn't really cut out for the instrument. He eventually opted for drums, which he religiously taught himself every day. He was fourteen when he got his first fully-fledged set of drums and in no time he was playing with various bands. That is how, at a relatively young age, he raked in the prize of best drummer at the Adolphe Sax Festival in Dinant. This also incited him to register as a professional musician there and then.

The promising, swiftly evolving drummer soon played with, amongst others, Maurice Simon, Jacques Pelzer, Francy Boland and René Thomas. Since 1963 (he wasn't even twenty at the time!) he has been a member of Alex Scorier's quintet. In the Seventies, he became one of the members of the Belgian jazz rock band Placebo, after which he followed Marc Moulin in a number of other projects (such as '*Sam Suffy*'). Solis Lacus, where he played alongside Michel Herr, Robert Jeanne and Richard Rousselet, also made top-notch jazz rock.. Together with Félix Simtaine and Freddy Rottier, Bruno Castellucci has become one of the top three Belgian drummers.

His encounter with Toots Thielemans, who to this day admires him for his precision, gave a favourable turning to his already checkered career, since he joined Toots' quartet in Europe as a result. Castellucci has worked with virtually the entire Belgian jazz scene and, abroad, with the likes of Benny Carter, Freddie Hubbard, Art Farmer, Slide Hampton, Johnny Griffin, Palle Mikkelborg, Neils-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, Joe Pass, Chet Baker (on the album '*Chet Baker-Steve Houben-Philippe Defalle*') and Jaco Pastorius (on his album '*Word of Mouth*'). He is a familiar face at various festivals - from Montreux, over The Hague and Montréal to Los Angeles.

### **The hairdresser was a jazz lover and a boxing champion**

Bruno Castellucci : 'I grew up in a family of Italian immigrants. I still remember how, as a toddler, I would listen open-mouthed to the miners singing their songs in my parents' canteen, where they came to eat their sandwiches every day. That, in combination with the typical Italian popular songs with which I grew up, made music an intrinsic part of my life. When I was twelve or so, I played my little accordion along with the orchestra at my father's dance hall each Sunday : one singer, one accordionist, one guitar player and one drummer... who weren't always happy with my 'joining in', I must admit. I had a whale of a time, though. I couldn't take my eyes off the drums, on which I would start banging away the minute the drummer took five.

One of those famous Sundays, the drummer really was ill. My father went to Marcel Dubois in Charleroi to buy me a set of drums - a white Sonorus - which I played that night : tangos, paso dobles, marches, cha-chas, boleros... you name it.

One day, at a fair in Châtelet, I heard Glenn Miller's music through the speakers. I couldn't believe my ears! The next day, I went and bought the record and soon after, I discovered the radio programme *Pour ceux qui aiment le jazz* (For jazz buffs) on Europe n° 1 - much to my mum's discontent, who insisted I go to bed early when I had to go to school the next day. I did listen in secret, my transistor radio safely tucked under my pillow.

I didn't immediately realize that this music was actually played by real people, until one summer afternoon, I went to Clément Depasse's - my hairdresser - in the Rue de la Tombelle in Châtelet. Do please mention this. It is highly significant. I heard the same music through the speakers he had just installed in his salon. The man was a jazz buff! From then on, I insisted on going to the hairdresser's every week, who couldn't figure out why I suddenly made a point of letting others go first! One day, he asked me : '*Tu aimes bien cette musique-là?*' (You like this music?), and I nodded enthusiastically. Clem Daps, nine times Belgian boxing champion - hairdresser in real life - stood there giving me a haircut and talking to me about jazz. He worked out to jazz in his tiny garden and needed someone to stop the music every three minutes, so he asked me if I was game. I suddenly found myself listening to the records of Art Blakey, Max Roach, Elvin Jones... An entirely new world opened up for me. I found out that drums could be played that way too, and started practising seriously.

I'll never forget the first Adolphe Sax Festival in Dinant. With José Bedeur on bass, Willy Donni on guitar and Jacques Bély on tenor sax, we not only won best orchestra prize, but each of us was voted best soloist too. Jacques Pelzer, who was also there, of course, took me with him to Liège, where I immediately started performing with all those legendary musicians from Liège, such as Bobby Jaspar, René Thomas, Maurice Simon, Jean Leclère and Robert Grahame. I can still hear myself phone dad to tell him that jazz did exist. It was being played live, a stone's throw from our own home. I was on top of the world!

In a next phase - I was one of Alex Scorier's quintet at the time - I started learning music. Johnny Peret, a drummer/vibraphone player from Jette, not only taught me the basic principles of musical notation for drummers, but also various rhythm structures, such as paradiddles.'

Bruno Castellucci explains his love of jazz as follows : 'All honest styles harbour quality. You should never refuse to listen to a particular record because you are biased against the genre : you can learn to appreciate everything. I adore all Brazilian music, for example, but have drawn equal pleasure from playing the blues. I must admit, however, that my first major passion was jazz, because of the non-conformism it implies, and the fact that, as far as I know, it was the first music form to offer complete freedom of expression. By which I am not saying that playing jazz doesn't call for consummate skill. Audiences used to think that 'those

jazz musicians just played what took their fancy'. Having a classical background, however, does not necessarily make you a convincing jazz musician.'

## Philip Catherine

Philip Catherine was born in London on October 27th 1942 from an English mother and a Belgian father. His grandfather played first violin with the London Symphony Orchestra. After World War II the family returned to Belgium and settled in Brussels.

Django Reinhardt and Barney Kessel are named as Philip Catherine's first influences. Georges Brassens' music moved him a great deal too. Charles Mingus called Philip Catherine 'Young Django' (also the title of an album Philip made in 1980 with Stéphane Grappelli). Django himself died too early (May 1953) to meet the 'Young Django'. Philip Catherine has, however, played on many occasions with Django's brother, Joseph Reinhardt, himself rhythm guitarist at Django's *Hot Club de France*.

At a relatively young age, Philip already performed with the likes of Sonny Stitt, Lou Bennett (even before René Thomas played with him), Jack Sels and Fats Sadie. Little did he know, at the time, that he would win two Djangos d'Or (1995 and 1998), five years after receiving the prestigious Bird Prize, with Stan Getz, at North Sea Jazz.

In 1973 Catherine, Charlie Mariano and Jasper van 't Hof formed the legendary jazz rock band Pork Pie and in 1975 he released his first solo albums with the same musicians: '*September Man*' and '*Guitars*'. Twenty-three years after it first started, Pork Pie got together again to record an album ('*Operanoya*', Intuition) with percussionist Don Alias as special guest.

In the autumn of 2001, Philip Catherine was given the unique opportunity to give a few exclusive concerts in Italy, flanked by guitarists John Pisano (70) and Mundell Lowe (80), who used to play with Charlie Parker, Billy Holiday, Bill Evans and Red Mitchell.

His most recent CD, '*Blue Prince*', released on Dreyfus Jazz in 2000, on which we also find Bert Joris (t, flhn), Hein van de Geyn (b) and Hans van Oosterhout (d), is still one of the best selling jazz albums today.

Philip Catherine: 'I must have been thirteen or so when I learned my first guitar chords from José Marly. It was as if a new world was opening up for me, definitely after I started playing with other students. I also tried to play along with Georges Brassens' records as much as I could, and after that Django Reinhardt and Barney Kessel's. I also took guitar classes from Jo Van Wetter for a while.

Before long, I was regularly playing in bars. Somebody must have discovered me that way, since one day - some time in 1957 - I was invited to play in a radio programme on the RTB, conducted by the rhythm section of Francis Bay's orchestra and with Armand Van de Walle on drums, Jean Evans on piano and Clement De Mayer on bass.

Every Wednesday I played in this hall in the *Galerie des Princes*, where clarinet player Henri Van Bemst rehearsed with his quintet. After a while they asked me to play a piece with them, at least if there was any time left at the end. That wasn't always so, in which case I'd be going home with nothing to show for my pains.

The very first jazz guitarist I saw perform live, was Lesley Span, in 1958, during a jam session in *La Rose Noire* in the Brussels *Petite Rue des Bouchers*, after a concert he had given at the *Palais des Beaux-Arts* with Quincy Jones and Clark Terry. I never did manage to meet Les Span, though. I might have, since I performed in the same club myself that year, where I actually jammed with Sonny Stitt.

Also in 1958, during the World Expo, I stood on the stage of the *Théâtre de la Belgique joyeuse* with Freddy Sunder on guitar. Round about that time, I also played in a trio with the late Robert Pernet.

Even though I was still going to school, I already made some extra money with my performances. With what money I managed to save *and* the profits of my entire Märklin collection - another great passion - which I sold for BEF 6000, I bought the Gibson ES175 at Persy's - still on the Brussels *Place Anneessens* at the time. I still perform on it. I paid BEF 14,000 for it then.

In 1961, Lou Bennett, who was touring here, invited me to perform with him at Benoît Quersin's Blue Note Club. He must have liked me, since he regularly asked me to accompany him on tours until 1969. In the late Sixties I was playing with Freddy Deronde in Casino Railway, a project with Marc Moulin.

I by no means planned on earning a living as a musician then, even though I had stood on various stages for twelve years or so alongside professional musicians such as Jacques Pelzer, whom I also met through Quersin. It is thanks to Jacques, in his turn, that I could perform with other musicians, usually during jams at the festival of Comblain-la-Tour.

When I was 21 I spent some time studying classical guitar with Nicolas Alphonso. I have no idea how it influenced my guitar technique, but I can assure you that I had huge fun doing it, mainly because I learnt to analyse and play Segovia's pieces, whom I hugely admire. The annoying thing was that I had no idea how to combine the classical technique of playing with your fingers with using a plectrum on an electric guitar : two entirely different worlds, which I would never be able to join, I thought. To this day, I haven't been able to develop a jazz technique using fingers. After nine months I stopped my lessons with him as a result.

It may sound unlikely, but it took years before I saw my second jazz guitarist perform live. I was already playing on a Lou Bennett record at the time. The guitarist was called René Thomas and came from Liège, it turned out. He had come back after a five-year stay in Canada. Soon after, I saw Toots Thielemans - an excellent guitar player, which most people seem to forget. In those days very few jazz artists actually came to play in Belgium. We can't imagine that today.

It took until the late Seventies, after I had finished my military service and Jean-Luc Ponty invited me to become a full member of his band on a two-week tour, for me to decide to become a professional musician - without immediately stopping my studies, though. If he hadn't phoned me at the time, I might be working in some office now. Imagine!

I ended up playing in Jean-Luc Ponty's band for sixteen months, even though I was often asked to go and play in Germany at the time, amongst others with Klaus Weiss and Ferdinand Povel.

In 1973, after my studies at the Boston Berklee College, I went and lived in Berlin for a while, where I played with the SFB big band for nine months or so. That same year Jasper van 't Hof, Charlie Mariano and myself founded Pork Pie, a jazz rock project, like that other trio which I formed in the Seventies with drummer Gerry Brown and bass player John Lee. The arrival of rock, soul, funk and R&B music was a true relief to many a jazz musician, after years of playing all those swing and bop numbers which - let's be honest - we had all had enough of. Hence the jazz rock and fusion rage of the late Sixties and early Seventies.

In every band I have led, I invariably try to gauge each musician's value by giving him an optimal platform for both standards and his own compositions. I take the technical skills of the fellow musicians into account whenever I can, and make agreements with them, but I also give them the freedom to express themselves in their music. My compositions are open to evolution, not in the least thanks to contributions from my fellow musicians, but also - obviously - because I keep evolving myself.

I try to have maximum respect for the audience. They have paid to come in, after all, and are entitled to a decent concert. By which I am not saying they can get me to do just anything. People who come to my concerts, however, will never feel cheated.

One piece of advice I'd like to give young guitarists is to make a point of playing a few chord schemes and scales each day, and to keep pushing your own limits. Playing with others - and most of all listening to them - is another essential element in a musician's evolution.'

## **Jean-Pierre Catoul**

Jean-Pierre Catoul was born in Hœi on August 4th 1963. At 8, having already done two years of classical violin, the Francophone programme *Feu vert* elected him one of the biggest young talents. He also played a mean bit of piano at the time. In short, this was clearly virtuoso material.

What is so exceptional about Jean-Pierre Catoul, is that as a violinist he felt equally at home in pop, classical music and jazz. As a soloist in a symphony youth orchestra, he played with the French pop singer William Sheller and collaborated with, amongst others, Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, Stefan Eichler, Pierre Rapsat, B.J. Scott, Alain Souchon, Isabelle Antenna, Alain Bashung, Perry Rose, the pop groups Niagara, Kent, Pow-Wow and Indochine, but also with Toots Thielemans, Jacques Pelzer, Philip Catherine, Charlie Mariano (cf. CD '*True Stories*' on Igloo), Jean-Luc Ponty (who still cites him as his main master), Charles Loos (cf. CD '*Summer Winds*' on Quetzal and '*Sad Hopes*' on Omnivore), Félix Simtaine, Pirly Zurstrassen (cf. '*Septimana*' on Carbon 7), Fabrice Alleman and Gwenaël Micault.

Jean-Pierre Catoul : 'My mother was devoted to classical music. When she was young she never had the chance to study music. You must remember that music education has only been accessible to everyone for thirty/forty years. I'm sure my mother missed it enormously, which is probably why she had my sister and myself doing music at such a young age. My sister still teaches piano at the music academy, in fact. I myself started playing the violin at six. By the age of 20, I had finished the Conservatoire.

Having got my first prize, I felt I'd been there, done that in classical music and moved to jazz. It was the programme *Le Grand Echiquier* on Antenne 2, now France 2, that sparked this. I heard Stéphane Grapelli in it once. I had never heard anybody play jazz on a violin before. I didn't have a clue, but knew there and then that this was what I wanted. Jazz has never left me since.

You have no idea what a liberating feeling it is to leave the world of strictly structured classical music for the rebellious chaos of jazz. Mind you : many people never do cross that threshold, because they feel too insecure and are scared of leaving the score's safe path or ruining the technique they have worked so hard on. Fair enough. If they can live with it - why not?

In 1984 I ended up at the *Séminaire de Jazz* in Liège, where Steve Houben, Richard Rousselet, John Ruocco and Michel Herr were my professors.'

A year later, Eric Legnini, Stéphane Galland, Claude Hastir and Catoul formed the jazz rock group Equation and in 1986 he and, amongst others, Michel Herr and Joe Lovano were guests on Félix Simtaine's Act Big Band's CD '*Extrêmes*' (Amplitude-Igloo), released two years later. A year later Catoul's mind was made up : he would stick to jazz.

Catoul's first CD, '*Modern Gardens*' (B. Sharp) is from 1990, the year in which he met Stéphane Grapelli for the first time and with whom he would collaborate for a while.

Jean-Pierre Catoul : 'I had sent a few demo cassettes to Didier and soon after, he invited me to Paris, where he occupied this big house with two other artistic families. One of them was Toure Kunda.

I had also sent a few demos to Grapelli, and one day he rang me, asking me if I would consider doing something with him. I thought it was a joke at first, but soon realized this really was Stéphane Grapelli. He told me he'd mainly enjoyed the recording of a concert I once gave with Jacques Piroton. The sound was terrible.

Stéphane sent me the score beforehand so I could study the piece at home. As far as I know, there are no recordings of this duo concert, sadly enough. The concert we did in 1993, with his trio, at the *Jazz à Liège* festival, however, was recorded. I have it, but it was never officially released.'

Catoul gradually grew to prefer the electrically amplified violin.

Jean-Pierre Catoul : 'Jean-Luc Ponty remains my great idol. Fusion, in general, has always fascinated me : Pat Metheny, John Scofield, Mike Stern, Wayne Shorter later in his career... That is why one of my first projects, Equation, was also a fusion band.

Catoul's penchant for fusion is still clearly audible in '*Restless*', the fabulous CD he recorded with Peter Hertmans and which was released on Quetzal (distr. Virgin) shortly before his death.

Jean-Pierre Catoul made the following comment on his way of composing : 'I am forever looking for new harmonic schemes on my keyboard. Then, I arrange the various instruments and try to think up an appropriate theme. That is how most of my compositions come about, although I must admit I am increasingly using the computer, which is a huge time-saver. I immediately hear the sound of the various instruments, which is a great help writing the arrangements. Of course I leave ample room for improvisation, although I am adamant that in jazz a well-written basic composition is paramount. If the composition is useless, no jazz chord, solo, rhythm - however perfectly played - can compensate. That's my personal opinion, of course. Free jazz doesn't meet that criterion for a start, and I've never really enjoyed free jazz, at least not on record. Live, however, it can be very enjoyable indeed.'

In the night of Sunday 20th to Monday 21st 2001 fate dealt a particularly merciless blow, disguised as a drunken driver, who silenced one of our greatest musicians forever.

## **Michel Debrulle**

Michel Debrulle was born on August 18th 1955 in Binche and studied music in Liège, where he mainly attended improvisation classes with Garrett List. List and Debrulle played with *La Grande Formation* in the first half of the '90s, which released two fabulous CDs ('*Everyone Lived in a Pretty How Town*' on Igloo, and '*Galilée*' on Carbon 7). Before that he had already released a few CDs on Igloo with the *Collectif du Lion*, Baklava Rhythm and Soul, Henri Pousseur and the Trio Bravo, consisting of the self-willed drummer, Fabrizio Cassol and Michel Massot and founded in 1984. The latter recently ran the project Bathyscaphe 5 (1 CD on Igloo) with Michel Debrulle. After Fabrizio Cassol's departure in 1992, Michel Massot found a new partner in the French, truly versatile reed player Laurent Dehors and Michel Debrulle changed the name Trio Bravo to Trio Grande. Michel Debrulle himself became a member of *Tous Dehors*, Laurent Dehors' own big band (2 CDs distributed by Harmonia Mundi).

Michel Debrulle recently also added another fascinated project to his list : *Rêve d'Éléphant*, a septet with which he released a first CD, '*Racines du Ciel*', on the W.E.R.F. label in 2001. With Trio Grande he has just released a second CD on the same label, called '*Signé Trio Grande*'.



Michel Debrulle : ‘Funnily enough, my own itinerary as a musician is a logical extension of my background, even though my family was not musical at all. Both my parents are from Binche, so we were inextricably linked with its carnival culture. I myself became a *Gilles de Binche* at a very young age. I can honestly say I grew up surrounded by enthusiastic rolling of drums and dancing crowds. Only in secondary school, did I learn to play the guitar, which was not easy in my boarding school, where that sort of thing was forbidden. What I’m trying to say is that, in those days, music education wasn’t exactly my lot. As a university student in Leuven, I organized concerts for two years, while I would much rather have been on stage myself.

After two years of economic sciences, I’d had enough and told my parents the happy news: I was going to become a drummer. You mustn’t forget that people in the Seventies, mainly youngsters, were much less into money and personal possessions than today. We were happy with very little.

When I was twenty I threw myself into drumming - a complete novice - and took classes with Johnny Peret, a fantastic drummer/vibraphone player who often played with Pol Lenders at the Bierodrome and who also was Bruno Castellucci’s teacher. The first three months, he taught me to play congas, but since he was much better at expressing himself on drums, we eventually switched to that.

I then went and took lessons at the Paris IACP, where I met Pierre Vaiana, amongst others. The long drives were a drag, though, so one day we convinced Henri Pousseur that the Liège Conservatoire urgently needed a similar programme. The first Liège Jazz Seminars, with the open improvisation courses and workshops in their wake, started virtually overnight. From 1980 to 1982 I organized a series of concerts at *Le Lion s’Envoile*, which I ran at the time and where I was one of the regular rhythm section players, together with pianist Pirly Zurstrassen and bass player Daniel Zanello.

In 1981 I was given a grant to go and study at the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock for three months, where I mainly followed rhythm classes with, amongst others, Trilok Gurtu, Dolar Brand, Collin Walcott and Nana Vasconcellos. The training Trilok Gurtu (Indian percussionist) gave me, made such a huge impression that she became one of my main sources of inspiration for my music with Trio Bravo. I formed the trio in 1984, inspired by Arthur Blythe, who worked with tuba player Bob Stewart. The latter’s role was perfect for Michel Massot (one of the students at the Conservatoire at the time, whom I met via Garrett List). The trio’s alto, Fabrizio Cassol, developed the idea, at a later stage, to go and study Indian music in his own turn.

A second grant (of the *Fondation Space*) allowed me to go and experience Indian music firsthand in Madras in 1994 and Cuban music in Havana in 1995. This incited me to translate a few typical Afro-Cuban rhythms into figures that could be played on drums, like I had done with Indian rhythms before.

When I compare the arrangements for *Rêve d’Eléphant* with the ones for Trio Grande, one of the most important, clearly audible differences is the musical freedom which in the trio is automatically much bigger than in the septet. To boot, Laurent Dehors’s ingenuity has no bounds. This not only makes it impossible, but also superfluous to agree anything with him. Which, in its turn, considerably increases the unpredictableness factor of each concert.

The arrangements for tuba plus drums in *Rêve d’Eléphant* and the Trio Grande do call for a specific approach, which is another important element. What the audience sees and hears, in other words, is the result of years of intensive experimenting, rehearsing and discussing in order to obtain a sound where the absence of double bass is never an issue - not amongst band members creating the piece, not amongst the audience listening to the end product.

Another, extremely important point is the fact that I clearly feel I have reached an essential phase in my life, not in the least thanks to the help and patience of the people at *De Werf* in Bruges, a priceless asset in the further development of my two projects. Without them, *Rêve d'Eléphant* and the Trio Grande might have disappeared inside the folds of oblivion. Of course, I have had to make a number of difficult decisions. I've also had to disappoint certain people, but I will always be grateful to the people at *De Werf* for giving me the opportunity to finally and fully develop my two projects. As if I were finally able to mix all the ingredients I have thrown into various pots on various burners, into the main course of my life. To think I used to think everything happens before you hit forty!

## **Bart Defoort**

Tenor/soprano saxophonist Bart Defoort was born in 1964 in Bruges and, from 1984 to 1987, he took music theory, harmony and music history at the Gent Conservatoire, followed by three years of saxophone with Steve Houben at the Brussels Conservatoire, where he obtained the jazz prize in 1991. He had been active on the Belgian jazz scene for three years by then, where he immediately felt at home in all styles - from traditional swing and bop, to present-day classic (Blindman Saxophone Quartet) and free improvisation, which soon had him regularly sharing the stages of various clubs and halls with musicians such as Richard Rousselet, Paolo Radoni, Mal Waldron, Félix Simtaine, Michel Hatzigeorgiou, Erik Vermeulen and Chris Joris.

Like many a present-day jazz musician, Bart Defoort quotes the *Kaai* as one of *the* places to have made him the musician he is today. This unassuming Brussels club was run by the musicians themselves and let them try out their compositions in total freedom.

Bart Defoort became a member of K.D.'s Basement Party in 1991 and together with Bo Van der Werf and Jeroen van Herzeele he founded the band Octurn in 1993. He made three CDs with the band and played at many festivals, amongst others Montréal, New York, Middelheim, Liège and North Sea Jazz. In 1993, he also became a member of the Brussels Jazz Orchestra. Since 1995 he has regularly been playing his own compositions with his quartet, in which we find Erik Vermeulen, Nicolas Thys and the American drummer Gene Calderazzo. In 1997, this yielded the CD *'Moving'* (W.E.R.F.) and a concert at Jazz Middelheim.

Between 1998 and 2000 Bart Defoort played concerts with the Ernst Vranckx Quintet (featuring Kenny Wheeler), with whom he made two CDs and toured China. At the time, he was also a member of The Chris Joris Experience, with whom he played in Sweden, France and Germany, amongst others. In 1998, Bart played in India (Bangalore and Bombay), in an Amit Heri project, with, amongst others, the Karnataka College of Percussion. In 1999, he and pianist Diederik Wissels founded the band Streams, which yielded a string of concerts in 2001 as well as the CD *'Streams'*.

Bart Defoort : 'I can't remember one day without music in our house. As a child, I already did music in other words, without consciously being made to. I initially played the classical recorder and regularly sang in choirs, which has everything to do with the fact that my father is a choir master.

Soon, however, I was introduced to other music styles and started singing blues, folk and rock and accompanied myself on guitar. I was a fervent fan of singer/song writers like Neil Young, Nick Drake and Joni Mitchell, a truly versatile musician thanks to whom I opted for jazz (she started releasing records with the likes of Jaco Pastorius and Wayne Shorter at the time). I had also heard my brother Kris and his quintet - he was studying in Liège with Dennis Luxion, it

must have been early 1982 - perform with Gino Lattuca and Pierre Vaiana. I heard Miles live for the first time in those days too, on his 'We Want Miles' tour, with Bill Evans on soprano sax. One thing and another led to my taking saxophone classes with Pierre Vaiana. It was then I realized music was going to rule my life, so I really started concentrating on classical music, amongst others by enrolling at the Gent Conservatoire. After secondary school - as if by magic - each of the above decisions sort of sparked a new chapter in my life that has dominated my existence ever since.

I chose the saxophone because of the instrument's highly vocal nature and also because I felt I had been there, done that on guitar. Since the only available instrument at the music academy was a soprano sax, I spent the first four/five years playing it and only switched to tenor afterwards, an order which has had a positive influence on the way I view sound.

I worshipped Steve Lacy in those days, but also several other tenorists, such as Sonny Rollins and Dexter Gordon. I learnt to appreciate Coltrane later. The famous summer training courses with John Ruocco, who lived in Mechelen at the time, also taught me a lot, as did Joe Lovano, who regularly came to Belgium.

After I'd been doing saxophone for four years or so, I got myself a job in the music theatre, played with avant-garde bands like the Simpletones, and in Fred Van Hove's big band.

Funnily enough, it took until late 1980/early 1990 before I felt a fully-fledged jazz musician, a process which is far from finished and which will hopefully continue my entire life. People evolve, it's as simple as that, and so, by definition, does the music they make. The challenge, for modern jazz musicians, if you ask me, is to find a golden mean between what you picked up from your musical ancestors and the new things you discover, mainly through improvisation - within a certain logic, of course. It is the only way to ever acquire your own, credible identity. It is my greatest ambition, in fact, to become a good improviser: from within this huge respect for the existing jazz repertoire and vocabulary, but at the same time open to all other forms of music. It is, after all, one of the characteristics of jazz that, right from the start, it mixed with all cultures. That also made it one of the fastest and most drastically evolving music styles ever. There is absolutely no point, in other words, in even trying to curtail jazz via all sorts of criteria of so-called 'jazz'.

Jazz may be demanding and difficult music to play, what matters is that the public never notices this. Otherwise you create an unnecessary gap. In that sense, I want all my projects to have a strong bond with logical melodies, swinging grooves and some kind of blues feel.

Jazz is a form of music in which you can be entirely yourself, with your own sound and ideas. You can play a hundred per cent in the 'here and now' because you're improvising, and you are doing so with other people, other individuals who, like yourself, are constantly evolving. That's fascinating, no?

In the series 'The Finest in Belgian Jazz', Bart Defoort can be heard on the Brussels Jazz Orchestra CD.

## **Kris Defoort**

This versatile composer/pianist was born in Bruges in 1959 and did ancient music and recorder at the Antwerp Royal Conservatoire before taking up present-day classical music and jazz at the Liège Conservatoire Royal in 1982. He studied at the Long Island University of Brooklyn from 1987 until 1990. Defoort has performed with many international greats, such as Lionel Hampton, Lee Konitz, Ron Mc Lure, Mark Turner, Barry Altschul, Adam Nussbaum, Jack DeJohnette, Mike Formanek and Tito Puente. His first album '*Diva Smiles*' was released in 1986. Other CDs of his include '*Sketches of Belgium*' (with his ensemble K.D.'s Basement Party - W.E.R.F.), '*K.D.'s Decade Live*' (W.E.R.F.), '*Variations on a Love Supreme*' (with

Fabrizio Cassol - W.E.R.F.) and the double CD '*Passages*' (with Dreamtime & Mark Turner - W.E.R.F.).

Kris Defoort composed the music for *The Woman Who Walked into Doors - an opera for soprano, actress and video screen*, based on the book by the same title by the Irish author Roddy Doyle. It was a production of *Het muziek Lod* (Gent), the *Ro theater* and co-producers *deSingel* (Antwerp), the *Rotterdam Schouwburg* (Municipal Theatre), the Brussels *Monnaie* Theatre and the *Beethoven Academie*. Defoort co-wrote the libretto with director Guy Cassiers, and a largely enthusiastic audience witnessed the result in the autumn of 2001 at ten sold-out performances in Antwerp, Rotterdam and Brussels. The perfect symbiosis between jazz ensemble Dreamtime (you should have seen Nic Thys headbang during one of the grooves that took the opera to an incredible climax) and the classical *Beethoven Academie* under Patrick Davin's baton, formed a previously unheard of, optimum musical base for soprano Claron McFadden's singing voice and actress Jacqueline Blom's acting talent.

Kris Defoort has also composed quite a bit for the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and for Octurn (CDs '*Chromatic History*' and '*Ocean*'). As sideman/pianist he also plays on albums, such as '*The Unbearable Light*' and '*Voyage*' (Garrett List), '*Elohim*' and '*Invisible Sun*' (Aka Moon), '*Snake Ear*' (Deep in the Deep) and '*Vivaces*' (Pierre Van Dormael).

As if the above wasn't enough, Kris Defoort has also been teaching jazz arrangement, ensemble and free improvisation at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire since 1996.

Kris Defoort : 'Even though I did go through the inevitable period of studying pianistics, I have always been quite obsessed with composition. When I play the piano, I automatically liaise with composition because I have always looked upon the piano as a complete orchestra which you operate on your own, to boot. Even whilst improvising, I do not think of notes but of colours when I touch the keys. I want to keep surprising myself when I play the piano, mainly through my way of communicating with fellow musicians. When I do have a certain sound in my head whilst composing, and make a mistake playing what I have written down, I may drop my original idea because I find this chance effect better. A mistake is never just a mistake anyway. Whilst playing a series of notes and chords, your mind may subconsciously drift to a certain follow-up to those notes. The trick - despite all assumptions - is to stay open to the route the music has chosen.

A second important surprise effect lies in the fact that, every time I go and play somewhere, I am faced with another instrument. Some find that a disadvantage. I consider it a challenge and quite like the idea that every concert will sound different, depending on the timbre of the piano I am to be given. Take the symbolic A minor 7th. Give me three different pianos and I'll play you three different A minor 7ths.'

Is the piano the ideal instrument for composing on then?

Kris Defoort : 'No player of a wind instrument, strings or guitar has what pianists have, nl. a survey of all notes at a glance. That's definitely an advantage. As opposed to pianists, saxophonists or guitarists tend to have an entirely different approach of harmonies while composing. Because the notes are right there, pianists have this tendency to automatically work harmonically. I am very careful with that, though. It is exactly that limitation that forces guitarists or players of wind instruments to play contrapuntally, which occasionally yields original ideas. I am quite certain, for example, that Steve Coleman would never have found his musical language had he been a pianist. Such things linger at the back of my mind. That is why I don't play the piano the way you expect a pianist to. Somebody asked me the other day which pianists I am currently listening to, and I came to the disconcerting conclusion that I have not been playing one record with a pianist on it all year. I adore Ornette Coleman's music, for example, even though he hardly ever uses pianists.'

So how does Kris Defoort go about composing for an orchestra, his own ensemble Dreamtime, or a jazz ensemble like Octurn?

Kris Defoort : 'My musical past - ancient music, present-day music, jazz... you name it - seems to be developing into its own language. I find it fascinating to work with large ensembles, even orchestras, combined with jazz musicians, as was the case, recently, in that opera or with the *Vlaams Filharmonisch Orkest* (May 2002 : *Conversations with the Past* for 20 winds, harp, piano, double bass and percussion). I invariably respect both orchestras' musical world and use their strongest assets. Classical musicians, for example, have this incredible dynamic precision and mastery of their instrument. With my own ensemble or Octurn, on the other hand, whose strength is their knack for improvisation, I'll try things out on the spot. I love to mix two worlds which usually function completely separately and to see how a composition may establish fascinating contacts between musicians and thus create a communal language there and then, away from all style pigeonholes.'

To the question whether Kris Defoort considers himself a jazz musician or a classical one, he answers : 'I asked myself that for ages, but now I know for sure that I am a jazz musician. The starting point of all my musical adventures - be it as a composer or player - remains my hearing and improvisation. Jazz, more than any other music, continues to evolve, even while it is being created - inside the *now*, so to speak. It is a genre that keeps putting itself into question, which I by definition do with myself as well.'

## **Fabien Degryse**

Fabien Degryse was born in 1960 and studied at the Boston Berklee School of Music from 1980 until 1982. He got first prize for guitar and harmony at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire. Fabien Degryse has played with, amongst others, Toots Thielemans, Philip Catherine, Charles Loos, Bruno Castellucci and Calvin Owens. In the trio *L'Ame des Poètes* Fabien Degryse replaced Pierre Van Dormael alongside Jean-Louis Rassinfosse and Pierre Vaiana.

In 1997 he released the remarkable CD '*Hommage à René Thomas*' (Igloo), with the *Big Band de Guitares*, formed especially for the occasion. In 1999, Fabien Degryse brought out a guitar course called *l'Improvisation jazz par les arpèges pour la guitare*. In his own quartet, with which he recently released the CD '*Fabien Degryse Jazz*', he is currently assisted by pianist Michel Herr, bass player Roman Korolik and drummer Laurent Mercier.

Fabien Degryse's website ([www.multimedia.com/fabiendegryse](http://www.multimedia.com/fabiendegryse)) gives information, amongst others about the guitar book and a number of MP3 files.

## **Jan de Haas**

Jan de Haas, who won first prize at the 1982 Hoeilaart European Jazz Contest is a talented percussionist, and an excellent drummer, which he has amply proved with, amongst others, Chet Baker, Eddie Daniels, Toots Thielemans, Philip Catherine, Steve Houben, Richard Rousselet, Michel Herr, Jacques Pelzer, Jack Van Poll, Nathalie Loriers, Erwin Vann, Pirly Zurstrassen, Roger Vanhaverbeke, Jerome Richardson and many others.

On '*For the One and Only*' (Igloo), his solo debut, and the recently released CD '*Parfum Latin*' (Mogno Music), Jan lets us enjoy his pure drumming style, as well as his talent on vibraphone, marimba and other percussion instruments.

Jan de Haas : 'Each instrument has its specific potential. On vibraphone and related instruments, the perfect touch in the perfect place with your sticks at the right angle is the

ultimate challenge. Even top players sometimes get this wrong. What you must never do, however, is start thinking when a concert begins : ‘What if I get it wrong?’, because then you’ve had it. One instant of doubt is enough for me to lose control over the instrument. It’s less bad with drums for me - unlike others, for whom it’s exactly the opposite.

## **Bart De Nolf**

Bart De Nolf was born in Bruges in 1965. From 1981 to 1984 he attended the annual summer workshops at Dworp with John Clayton and Hein van de Geyn. In 1986 (when he joined the then BRT Jazz Orkest) and 1987, he won first prizes for sight reading and double bass at the Gent Conservatoire. Since 1988 he has been lecturing at the Gent and Brussels Conservatoires. Bart De Nolf has accompanied great artists such as Mal Waldron, Kenny Wheeler, Von Freeman, Horace Parlan, Jacques Pelzer, Toots Thielemans and Michel Herr. In April 1997, he was in the line-up for Toots Thielemans’ 75th birthday concert in Brussels, together with Oscar Castro-Neves, Philip Catherine and Bert Van den Brink.

## **Ecaroh**

Trumpeter Richard Rousselet (61) decided, in late 1997/early 1998 that the time had come to make one of his wildest boy’s dreams come true : a musical project around the work of pianist/composer Horace Silver. He got tenorist/soprano Fabrice Alleman, pianist Ron van Rossum, double bass player Jean-Louis Rassinfosse and drummer Bruno Castellucci involved and in no time the five were playing all over the place with growing success under the name Ecaroh (Silver’s first name back to front).

As we all know, being a jazz musician isn’t exactly a money-spinner, and one single jazz quintet by no means guarantees each band member a decent salary. Jazz artists, in other words, must develop side activities to make ends meet - be it as sideman, member of other music bands, studio musician, lecturer, or a combination of the above. Ecaroh too is in that situation and regularly disappears for a while.

At the end of 2001, the quintet resurfaced at the Brussels Sounds jazz club with a three-hour programme, exclusively consisting of arrangements around Horace Silver’s repertoire.

### **Return trip between cool jazz, hard bop and jazz rock**

Richard Rousselet : ‘Horace Silver appeared on the jazz scene at a significant time. You had fast bebop, born during World War II in the large East Coast cities as a black reaction to white-ruled swing. Six-odd years later, a much quieter kind of jazz blew in from the West Coast : cool jazz, influenced by classical music and mainly played by whites such as Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker. Cool jazz’ huge success was such a thorn in the eye of many blacks that they started playing their music - to be labelled hard bop later on - even more wildly.

Horace Silver - initially as founding member of Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers, and since 1956 as leader of his own quintet, had the elements of cool jazz and hard bop merging into something unique, some sort of synthesis of both extremely important trends that irrevocably changed the itinerary of jazz. Horace Silver returned to blues, in fact, which was no longer fundamentally present in cool jazz. He added the typical, whirling, preferably many-voiced brass melodies of bop to it, often underpinned by swing rhythms - with their strong Latin feel - and came up with something unmistakably his.

I myself have always been fascinated by Horace Silver’s music, which we hardly heard in Europe, and not at all in Belgium, at a time when in the States it could be heard on virtually

every radio station. Today, this highly fascinating music is still kept off the air. That is why, one day, I decided to arrange his compositions for a quintet. The public immediately fell for them and many a youngster has thanked me for discovering Horace Silver's music through Ecaroh.'

About his co-operation with Marc Moulin in the early Seventies, Richard Rousselet says : 'The success of *'Top Secret'* (Blue Note), Marc Moulin's latest project, made several youngsters decide to buy his Placebo albums from between 1971 and '74 (not to be confused with the pop group by the same name in the UK), as well as *'Sam Suffy'*, a record which he made under his own name in 1975. Thank God the material has been rereleased on CD.

As opposed to Placebo, the core group that recorded *'Sam Suffy'* consisted of three people only : Marc Moulin, Bruno Castellucci and myself. If I'm not mistaken, the music was recorded at *Studio Madeleine* in Brussels. One recording took place on a carless Sunday (during the oil crisis) and we needed written permission from Minister Willy Claes to drive our car to the studio that day.

Nicole Fissette, myself and the other brass players - amongst whom saxophonist Nic Kletchkovsky - agreed amongst ourselves who was going to play what. I still remember being given quite some freedom in the scores Marc had written and arranged for us. I was playing an electrically amplified trumpet, a bit like Miles Davis : a microphone inside the mouthpiece was connected to an electronic device, so you could have your notes come out in two octaves and bring in all manner of effect pedals.

Each single live concert with Placebo was great : they were all sold out and the audience was hugely enthusiastic about this new type of music, to be called jazz rock later on.

Solis Lacus too, Michel Herr's jazz rock project in which I also took part, with Robert Jeanne, Félix Simtaine plus Freddy Deronde and Nic Kletchkovsky respectively (Félix was to be replaced by Bruno Castellucci later on) was very successful.'

## **Fabian Fiorini**

Fabian Fiorini was born on March 23rd 1973 in Liège and studied at the Brussels and Lièges Conservatoires, where he obtained prizes for solfeggio, history, harmony and analysis. With the Trio Vanderstraeten-Charlier-Fiorini, he was awarded a prize for jazz composition in 1993.

This exceptionally fast developing pianist is still unknown to many jazz concert goers. That has everything to do with the fact that he spent and still spends a large chunk of his time composing for theatre and film *and* that he is active in classical music. For a few years now, Fabian Fiorini has been working closely together with Aka Moon, where his typical keyboard work adds an unmistakable, extra dimension to Fabrizio Cassols compositions, as clearly transpires from their *'Invisible'* trilogy and their CD *'In Real Time'* (Carbon 7).

Octurn's music too - which Fiorini has been playing with since 2000 - would lose much of its impetus without his typical synthesizer and piano chords.

In the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' he can be heard on the Octurn CD *'Dimensions'*.

## Marc Godfroid

When Marc Godfroid was six, his father insisted he take up solfeggio classes at the music academy of his home town Geraardsbergen. One year later, he started taking piano lessons and aged ten, his father started him on the clarinet.

Before he knew it, he found himself playing with the Garret Band, a local Dixieland band. That Marc eventually opted for the trombone has everything to do with a trombone performance he saw when he was fourteen. He developed a deep fascination with the instrument and, having tried his hand at it in two brass bands, he definitively opted for it and joined the local big band – which he still conducts – virtually at the same time.

Marc Godfroid's musical career really took off when he was 21. Today's leader of Eurojazz - the youth orchestra of the European Union (Peter Vandendriessche and himself are the only ones to have played all the sessions over five years) - joined the then BRT Jazz Orkest under Etienne Verschueren, followed a year later by the Tony Bauwens Sextet. That same year - he played with the Wetteren Big Band Sound at the time - he won the solo prize at the Tros Big Band Festival in Amersfoort, where Félix Simtaine heard him play, after which he asked him to join his Act Big Band. In 1985, the BRT elected Marc Godfroid to represent Belgium with the European Broadcasting Union Big Band at the International Jazz Festival in Pori (Finland). As a member of the Dutch *Metropole Orchestra* under Rogier Van Otterloo, Marc Godfroid was to meet the great Carl Fontana. Since 1991, Marc Godfroid has been a member of the renowned Peter Herbolzheimer Rhythm Combination and Brass, the Joe Haider Big Band and the Joe Haider Sextet. In November 1992, he joined the WDR Big Band for the Two Bones project, alongside Bill Watrous. Four months later, in his home country, he co-founded the now world famous Brussels Jazz Orchestra with Frank Vaganée and Serge Plume.

Since 1995, he has been a much loved musician with the Stuttgart SWR Big Band, with whom he has played alongside great names such as Slide Hampton, Frank Foster and Terry Clark. Also in 1995, he was the very first Flemish musician to win a *Django d'Or*.

Marc Godfroid has been giving jazz trombone classes at the Gent Conservatoire since 1986, whose jazz department he has been co-ordinating since 1993. In 1998, he was also made visiting professor at the Amsterdam Sweelinck Conservatoire.

The following conversation with Marc Godfroid was recorded at the then brand-new bar on the corner of the Art Deco Flagey building, which is being restaured and now houses the Brussels Jazz Orchestra.

Marc Godfroid : 'When I took up the trombone at 14, I had already done eight years of music - at the music academy and with the Garret Band -, so it was a cinch. Thanks to my clarinet technique, I came up with surprising stuff on it. I expected I would have to churn out those bars just as fluently as I had been doing on the clarinet, so I spent ages practising. I never quite got the hang of it, though, but did develop what you might call a rather unusual trombone style.

The first big orchestra of some stature I played with, was the Wetteren Big Band Sound, with trumpeter Edmond Harnie - amongst others -, who introduced me to Etienne Verschueren, his employer with the BRT Jazz Orkest at the time. Trombonists were even more of a rarity in those days (during the summer courses at Dworp most of my teachers were saxophonists, in fact), so in 1981, I landed myself a job with Etienne Verschueren's orchestra. They hadn't had a proper trombonist since 1978!

Ten years on, the orchestra folded. They never did have the money to envisage truly big productions, in fact. Keeping jazz financially viable is an uphill struggle. Top-quality music, largely born and rooted in grubby clubs and bars, was – and often still is - brought to the



public by musicians who earn a pittance offering consumers hours of entertainment. Personally, I never did feel the need to spend entire nights jamming away for a meagre 50 Euros and three drinks on the house for jazz's sake. I have no qualms whatsoever about playing the same pieces over and over again with the big band in Germany: Glenn Miller, but also Ellington and Basie. At least it puts me in a financial position, outside this context, to concentrate on jazz from a different angle.

The Brussels Jazz Orchestra has had a great decade, and is itself the result of a long and difficult fight. Maria Schneider, one of the leading artists to have worked with the BJO on several occasions, recently opened up an entirely new world for me: that of salsa music. In Stuttgart, her producer, the Dutch trombonist Bart Van Lier and myself took part in an opera by a South American composer, where the vocalists are assisted by a choir and this huge salsa band with an impressive rhythm section and wind quartet. A number of the musicians in it teach salsa music at Berklee actually.

I had no idea how good those musicians could be. As is invariably the case, perfect technique is by no means the answer: you must make your music sound as natural and spontaneous as possible. And that can only be done after lots of practising.

I want my students to realize that trying to emulate your idol's solos is not the best way to coming anywhere near him/her. You're bound to get stuck. The answer is to patiently and carefully start at the bottom rung with simple stuff and gradually move up. You'll get there eventually - provided you keep practising. Only musicians who have made tradition their own, and respect it, can be innovators. Like all things, jazz evolves, but we must never look down upon what our ancestors have done before us.

Innovation is a bonus for all styles of music. That does not mean, however, that we have the right to eliminate even the tiniest sliver from its past.'

## **André Goudbeek**

André Goudbeek (1946) gave two memorable concerts in the first decade of the annual *Mechelen Jazzdag* (Jazz Day) : one with Fred Van Hove (2000) and one with Xu Feng Xia, with whom he had never worked before - in other words : free *and* improvised in the telling and tender sense of the words.

Having done violin for eight years as a youngster, André taught himself to play the alto saxophone and bass clarinet later on, and specialized in bandoneon with his Argentinian teacher Alfredo Marcucci. His first group was the Full Moon Trio in 1969 (LP six years later), with bass player Pol Feyaerts (now the man behind the Gent *Damberd* (Draughtboard) and drummer Ronnie Dusoir. With Fred Van Hove he then founded WIM and in 1976 he started *Hommage* - the first freely improvising saxophone quartet in Europe with Michel Mast (ss), John Ruocco (ts) and Luc Houtkamp (bs). At Jazz Middelheim 1981 the band consisted of François Janneau, Philippe Maté and John Tchicai, with whom Goudbeek also briefly had a duo.

He then (1981-'83) joins Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath. In 1982 Willem Breuker asks him to join his *Kollektief*, with whom he goes around the world in a lot more than 80 concerts, for twelve years.

He continues to work very closely with Fred Van Hove: MLB III, the 'vlomsch' ('Flemish') septet MLF7 and 't *Nonet*. In the latter two, Fred Van Hove calls Goudbeek his first lieutenant, because it is much easier for André to give a sign than it is for Fred from behind his piano.

In 1995 he is commissioned to write music for the silent movie *Nanook of the North*. It is performed live with the film in both Flanders and The Netherlands by a quartet with Bart

Maris (t), amongst others, with whom André still works a lot. He also regularly works with Peter Jacquemyn (b), with whom he has a duo V2, and a trio called *Gojama* (name to be read in letter pairs).

## Grand Groove

One day, Jazzlab Series - an organization founded by the Bruges *Werf* to promote and support young, budding jazz musicians and ensembles - chanced upon a demo labelled Grand Groove. It turned out to be a project of young trumpeter Sam Vloemans (a student of the likes of Jarmo Hoogendijk and Erik Vloeimans), who felt the time had come to bring the compositions he had been doing for years out into the open. With a few friends (drummer Jan-Kris Vinken, bass player Steven Van Loy, percussionist Kobe Proesmans, Pieter Van Malderen on keyboards, guitarist Stijn Norga, tenor saxophonist Wietse Meys and Frank Deruyter) he had recorded his sweeping Latin jazz, as well as his highly danceable, instrumental funk pieces whose strict themes leave ample room for improvisation in the solos. The result was a number of concerts. The audience's unanimous enthusiasm shows there is absolutely no need for jazz to stop in its tracks. Drummer Teun Verbruggen, double bass player Henk Delaat and organist Arno Krijgers, who have joined Sam Vloermans' brand new quartet, couldn't agree more.

## Greetings From Mercury

One of Jeroen Van Herzeele's most ambitious creations so far carries the name Greetings From Mercury, a project mixing jazz, rock and hip-hop into a highly musical spectacle that breaks fresh ground and is the extension of the trio he founded with guitarist Peter Hertmans and drummer Stéphane Galland, and with which he released the CD '*At the Crossroads*' (Carbon 7) in 1994.

Since then, the trio has become a sextet, with bass player Otti Van der Werf, sitar player Michel Andina (who does the sound during recordings) and vocalist Steven Segers. They have released three CDs together : '*Greetings From Mercury*', '*Continuance*' (Carbon 7) and '*Heiwa*', in the *Brugge Jazz 2002* box (Tracks/ Blue Note), which they spent exactly one week recording in the Jet Studios.

When a lady left furiously during the Greetings From Mercury concert at Jazz Middelheim in 1999, claiming this no longer had anything to do with jazz, I wanted to stop her and point out what Steven Segers had rapped minutes before : 'Free your mind...'. Not that it would have helped. Upon hearing Charlie Parker's first bebop tones people must have wondered whether this had anything to do with jazz too, also ignoring the famous : 'It's a jazz thing', which means as much as 'what chaos'.

Jeroen Van Herzeele : 'It is high time a few people broadened their horizons. What *is* jazz today? Our music - and this mainly applies to solos - contains just as much jazz as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Duke Ellington or Joe Henderson's, but, like them, we do not make music for purists either and, also like them, we are continuously improvising - one of the main characteristics of jazz.'

A string of criterions, some jazz purist's claim, which music should meet in order to be called jazz, are based on misconceptions. In that context, Steve Coleman teaches us : 'Without rhythm there can be no harmony or melody, which both exist by the grace of time, tempo. They need a destination, a place to go to. Take Art Tatum and Charlie Parker : they both

played identical harmonies, but the rhythms were totally different. That is what makes it so hard to compare their styles. What Monk, Dizzy and even Don Byas played, had been done by Tatum long before. They have admitted this too. Because they used other rhythms, we got the impression they were doing something entirely different. The effect would never have been the same, though, had they played Tatum's rhythms with altered harmonies. In music history, we are being led to believe the famous flat fives were typical of bebop. Rubbish! Duke Ellington was already playing flat fives in the '20s. The place in the song structure where they are being played : *that's* what makes the difference.'

According to that theory, rhythm is solely responsible for every change in music, in other words : an identical harmony in two different songs will never sound the same unless the rhythms are identical. This interesting point adds an extra dimension to what Greetings From Mercury does on '*Heiwa*'. For the first time, rhythms (Stéphane Galland) and grooves (Otti Van der Werf) indeed form the basic elements behind the harmonies and melodies, which are added in a second stage.

### **Then and now**

Jeroen Van Herzele : 'While we used to start from my sax melodies, to which I added rhythms and grooves concocted on computer - which boiled down to a purely mathematical approach of music - we now start from rhythms and grooves, and add harmonies and melodies, the way Pierre Van Dormael does. That is one of the most important differences with the previous albums.

Stéphane and Otti played the grooves and rhythms first and only then did Peter focus on harmonies, while Steven integrated his texts - complete with chorus and all. This was completely unheard of for Greetings From Mercury. We also dubbed a number of Steven's singing lines one over the other in parts.

Pro Tools helped a great deal with this too.

We also made a point of keeping tracks short : they last 3 to 4 minutes at the most, and no song is longer than 8 minutes - not even the remix of 'Closer', which lasts over 10 minutes on our live CD '*Continuance*'.'

Jeroen Van Herzele resolutely distances himself from the role of band leader : 'We are increasingly trying to make Greetings From Mercury's music sound like one, homogeneous whole, with no dominating parts and minimal improvised passages.'

Steven Segers : 'Hierarchy is a dirty word in music. As long as every musician feels happy where he/she finds him/herself, I am convinced there is no need for a leader, at least not in the sense of someone wielding power. Someone invariably takes some responsibility, of course, someone on whom the entire band can fall back. Without centre you don't have a circle either. That centre is extremely mobile and flexible in Greetings From Mercury. Anybody, anytime may take the lead in a passage.

Neither do I think there is such a thing as jazz, rock, pop, blues, classical music, techno, folk, you name it : there is music for everybody, end of story.'

Over the years, his vocal contributions have evolved from pure rapping to straightforward singing, whereby the timbre of his voice closely approaches that of black soul and R&B. Steven Segers has also adapted his lyrics, and often puts his fingers on the sore spots of a failing system : 'I stopped using slang as a rapper ages ago, and certainly don't use it when I'm singing. As large an audience as possible should be able to understand my texts. That is why I don't sing in Dutch. With all due respect for those who do: I stick to English, as a universal means of communication.

What's the point of churning out lyrics that are neither here nor there, mean nothing to people? I'm the last one to criticize, though. Instead, I try to limit myself to purely

highlighting conclusions that make people think, and may eventually spawn criticism. But that is the listener's job. I myself never pass judgements.'

## **Manu Hermia**

Manu Hermia was born on November 9th 1967 and took 10 years of clarinet classes at the academy. From 1988 to 1990, he did saxophone at the jazz department of the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The next four years were spent studying at the Brussels Conservatoire, where he obtained first prize for saxophone in 1992.

Manu Hermia has worked with, amongst others, Fred Wesley (1997 tour), Ben Ngabo, Pierre Van Dormael, Gino Lattuca, Mimi Verderame, Paolo Radoni, Daniel Romeo, Roland Van Campenhout and Ron van Rossum.

On his jazz rock CD '*Acid Colors*' (Team4Action) we find Francis Charlier, Paolo Ragatzu, Willy Nsita and Xavier Tribolet and on his latest post bop jazz CD '*l'Esprit du Val*', he is accompanied by Erik Vermeulen, Sal La Rocca and Bruno Castellucci.

Slang, the trio founded by bass player François Garny, with Hermia and percussionist Michel Seba, plays a stylish mix of energetic ethno jazz and solid rock riffs. The band has released 2 CDs so far on Carbon 7 : '*Los Locos*' and '*Save the Chilis*'.

## **Michel Herr**

Michel Herr was born in Brussels in 1949 and was active on the European jazz scene in the Seventies already, although it was by no means sure at first that young Michel Herr was going to be a musician. He even pulled out of the piano lessons - his parents enrolled him - because he couldn't get on with the teacher. He did go on playing on his own, though - classical music first (he had quite a record collection). When he was 15 he happened upon a record by trumpeter Teddy Buckner and became passionate about jazz overnight. New Orleans, swing, bebop, modern jazz... he covered the lot in record time, flabbergasted by every new discovery : Parker, Monk, Miles, Coltrane... the scenario has acquired cliché proportions.

The pianist soon profiled himself, not just as an exceptionally ingenious composer, but mainly as an exceptional soloist, at a time when there was no jazz education in our country. Having a career as a musician hadn't even occurred to him, even though he did use every spare minute during his university years to play jazz, not only with Bill Evans, but also innovators like Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock and Joe Zawinul.

He actually wrote music reviews for a film magazine for a while before becoming a jazz musician. He wanted to perfect his technique first, which at the time could only be done abroad at various training programmes. This, in its own turn, yielded very interesting encounters. He never really left the film world, though, and keeps making soundtracks.

His first trophy, as best soloist at a jazz competition in The Netherlands in 1971 definitively made him choose for musicianship. A year later, in Germany, he met Wolfgang Engstfeld, a saxophonist with whom he still works regularly. Together they founded Jazz Tracks, followed by the jazz rock fusion band Solis Lacus with, amongst others, Richard Rousselet, Robert Jeanne, Freddy Deronde, Nic Kletchkowsky, Félix Simtaine and

Bruno Castellucci. With Engstfeld he formed the Michel Herr-Wolfgang Engstfeld Quartet in 1978, one of Europe's most renowned ensembles of its day. Today the same saxophonist can be found in Michel Herr's European Quintet, together with Bert Joris, Ricardo del Fra and Dré Pallemarts.

In 1975, a second important encounter followed, with the Dutch flautist Chris Hinze, in whose Combination he was to play for a few months. A year later, having spent a few weeks at the Boston Berklee College of Music without really learning anything there, he became a member of Steve Houben's Solstice. In 1977 he released his own album with his trio, accompanied by bassist Freddy Deronde and drummer Félix Simeane, under the title '*Ouverture Eclair*' (solely with his own compositions).

Michel Herr had also become quite an active sideman in various companies by then, amongst others the BRT Jazz Orkest and the Hamburg NDR, and in 1980 he was part of the Liège millennium band Saxo 1000. He was artistic director to Félix Simeane's Act Big Band right from the start.

Since 1984, Michel Herr has been a regular member of Toots Thielemans' ensembles, with whom he has toured the world a few times. This gave him the opportunity to share the stage with bassists such as Rufus Reid, Ray Drummond or Ricardo del Fra and drummers such as Adam Nussbaum or Billy Hart. Michel Herr was one of the three composers/arrangers for the big band playing the concert for Toots' 70th birthday. The other two were Quincy Jones and Peter Herbolzheimer.

Both the RTBF and the VRT elected Michel Herr best arranger in 1998 and a year later, he conducted the Belgian Jazz Orchestra for the recording of his 'Celebration Suite' on the CD '*September Sessions*' (W.E.R.F.).

In 2000 Michel Herr was guest of honour at the Belgian *Django d'Or* presentation. Listing all the musicians - Belgian or foreign - Michel Herr has worked with would fill an entire chapter. Amongst them, we find : Archie Shepp, Joe Pass, Chet Baker, Joe Henderson, Joe Lovano, Palle Mikkelborg, Palle Danielsson, Johnny Griffin, Steve Grossman, Lew Soloff, Lee Konitz, Bill Frisell, John Abercrombie, Philip Catherine, Didier Lockwood, Scot Colley, Marc Moulin, Daniel Humair, Tom Harrell, Paolo Radoni... and so on and so forth.

Michel Herr : 'As a child I soon realized that the piano's main attraction - we had one at home - lies in the fact that, unlike the trumpet, saxophone or guitar etc., you can produce a decent sound virtually the minute you start. That is also why I immediately had this urge to improvise.

I have been lucky enough to accompany several great American artists who were passing through, when nobody could afford to fly their own band over from America. Neither were there any schools in Belgium at the time where you could take jazz classes, so I had to learn everything on my own. The summer training courses in Switzerland and Germany - Belgium didn't have them at the time either - taught me a lot too.

One of the main differences between the American and European approach, is that the Americans are still mainly linked with swing, groove and the like, while the Europeans have moved away from this in order to create an entirely different type of jazz, whose roots don't necessarily lie in the States either. Personally, I have been lucky enough to be closely linked with the American jazz culture *and* to belong to one of the first generations of artists who went looking for other influences, like various types of European folk music and present-day classical stuff. I feel just as much at home in Bert Joris or Félix Simeane's American swing jazz as I do in Erwin Vann or Jean-Pierre Catoul's European jazz, and I by no means feel compelled to pigeonhole jazz into categories, styles or movements.

My compositions, which are mainly fed by chords and melodies, spring from ideas which I get whilst practising and improvising at home. I also rely on my fellow musicians enriching whatever piece we are playing.'

## Peter Hertmans

Peter Hertmans was born in Gent on April 10th 1960 and is amongst the elite of Europe jazz guitarists. He has played on twenty-odd albums so far, as leader and as sideman. In 2000, he released the CD *'Restless'* (Quetzal) with violinist Jean-Pierre Catoul and made compositions for Ivan Paduart's *'True Stories'* (Igloo Sowarex), on which he also plays. The CDs *'Buddies'*, recorded with Marco Locurcio, Nicolas Thys and Hans van Oosterhout, released a few years ago on the Jazz'halo-label, and *'Waiting'* (Timeless), on which he is assisted by John Ruocco, Billy Hart and Hein van de Geyn are both musts. He also regularly plays in various ensembles, amongst which Greetings From Mercury and Ode for Joe (with Jeroen Van Herzeele, Sal La Rocca and Jan de Haas), with whom he plays on two CDs (one on Igloo, one on W.E.R.F.). Check out his contributions on Fabien Degryse & Guitars Big Ban's *'Hommage à René Thoms'* (Igloo) and *'The queen of the apple pie'* by the Laurent Blondiau Quintet (W.E.R.F.) too. Other greats with whom he has played or still plays, include Toots Thielemans, Philip Catherine, Slide Hampton, Jean-Louis Rassinfosse, Bert Joris, Bruno Castellucci, Phil Abraham, Frank Vaganée, Erwin Vann and Charlie Mariano.

Peter Hertmans is a busy bee, to say the least. He also lectures at the Leuven Lemmens Institute, where he is co-ordinator.

Peter Hertmans : 'People sometimes ask me how I manage to combine teaching with making music. Personally I like to refer to it as 'cross-fertilization'. I have been teaching since 1983, starting with the Jazz Studio, and since 1992 at the Brussels Conservatoire, where I still teach one day a week. For three years now I have been co-ordinator at the Lemmens Institute. I teach two days a week there, which means I teach some seventeen hours a week, mainly guitar (in Brussels only last years, whom I help towards their final exam). All final-year guitarists get two extra hours from me each week in one of the hardest jazz disciplines : playing in trio (with bass and drums). I confront them with various pieces which we arrange together and where they have to do everything themselves : voicings, lead, improvisation... you name it. As a result, there are often small concerts at the Conservatoire, like the other day with Quentin Dujardin, a name to remember.

The third subject I teach is didactics, which means I train students to be teachers at music academies. At the Lemmens Institute, I also teach harmony in the first two years. Teaching is an activity which is very dear to me, in the sense that I really care about the students. It is inextricably linked with making music yourself, my other main activity.

In 1979 - I was 19 and fully self-taught - I started playing jazz. To this day, I regularly find new things on stage or in the rehearsal space which I invariably use in my lessons. The students' enthusiasm, on the other hand, often incites me to explain things differently, which in its own turn influences my guitar playing.

I myself have been influenced by, amongst others, John Scofield, Bill Frisell and John Abercrombie. Guitar maker Jacky Walraet is also a landmark on my itinerary. I was sixteen when I first met him. He must have been twenty at the time. Jacky has what you call 'golden hands', with which he'll literally put anything together effortlessly. In his urge to combine this dexterity with his endless passion for guitar and jazz, he ended up at the instrument building school in Puurs. Because of his enormous skill, he was asked to come and teach there after barely two years. He has tenure now and acoustic and electric guitars are being built under his guidance. He himself repairs and builds double basses. He has built two remarkable, electric double basses for Jean-Louis Rassinfosse (one with five, another with six strings).

I asked Jacky in 1990 to make me an electric guitar and this is the result. From a distance, you'd swear it's a Fender Stratocaster, but if you take a closer look, you will notice the two

couldn't be further apart. The solid body is in fact half hollow. The elements (two humbuckers and one single coil) are from Seymour Duncan. I am convinced I would never have become the musician I am today without this instrument : I owe all my ideas of the last decade to this exceptional instrument.

I record on four tracks simultaneously: stereo for both guitar synthesizer and guitar proper, which produces an open, spacy result, but also offers endless opportunities, like the sound of an acoustic piano on 'Let the Cat Out!' (CD *'Buddies'*) or that typical 'bowed strings' synthesizer effect on 'Song Three' (same CD) which Pat Meheny also likes to use. By the way, the CD *'Buddies'*, which I recorded with Marco Locurcio, is still one of my best albums. On this CD, as well as on 'Restless', with Jean-Pierre Catoul and Ivan Paduart's *'True Stories'*, I also play the acoustic guitar Jacky built. The original concept now veers towards a folk guitar with a soundboard the size of the Gibson J200, but also with a single cutaway and an arched back to produce the sound of a semi-acoustic jazz guitar with arched front. Paolo Radoni also plays a Jacky Walraet jazz guitar.'

In the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series, Peter Hertmans can be heard on the Greetings From Mercury CD.

## **High Voltage Sextet**

A closer look at this sextet tells the observer that this is, in fact, an extension of the Bart Van Caenegem Trio - with Peter Verhaegen on double bass and Lieven Venken on drums - in the shape of three young guys from the Brussels Jazz Orchestra in the wind section : trumpeter/bugler Nico Schepers (who won the Erasmus Jazz Prize with his own quartet in 1998), tenorist Dieter Limbourg (cf., amongst others, Blue Blot) and trombonist Lode Mertens.

If you have ever seen the HighVoltage Sextet, you will remember these six promising musicians, who clearly helped revive the hard and post bop tradition thanks to the particular angle from which they interpret the existing repertoire *and* the way in which they structure their own compositions. Their enthusiastic audiences simply adore the skill with which they give traditional styles a crisp, topical sound.

## **Steve Houben**

Steve Houben was born on March 19th 1950 in Liège. His mother was a classical pianist and his father a jazz player. It wasn't the latter, though, but his cousin, the great Jacques Pelzer - with whom he was to found the band Open Sky Unit in 1973 - that brought him to jazz.

At the age of twelve, Houben started learning the flute, even though he had already been playing the piano - still his favourite instrument - for a few years. He also sang in a local orchestra from a relatively young age on, hoping secretly to emulate his old idol: Frank Sinatra.

He was 16 when he saw René Thomas and Jacques Pelzer's quartet for the first time at the Liège Jazz Inn. The world of jazz never let go of him since. Two years later, together with his cousin, whose alto sax he had been given as a present - and whose white saxophone, which he had got from Ornette Coleman, fascinated him - he played a Paris stage, where he met people like Archie Shepp and Ornette Coleman himself.

It seemed only logical for Steve Houben to enrol at the (Verviers) Conservatoire shortly after, where he mainly did piano and got a first prize for flute and chamber music.

In 1973 Steve Houben and his cousin started the band Open Sky Unit, with Guy Cabay (vib), Janot Buchem (b), Micheline Pelzer (d) and the American pianist Ron Wilson. At a later stage, he founded Merry-Go-Round with Guy Cabay.

In the mid-Seventies, Steven Houben studied at the Boston Berklee College, after which he came back to Belgium with a few Americans and formed the band Solstice, with whom he made his first studio recording. Apart from Houben himself, you will hear Michel Herr, Janot Buchem, John Thomas, Eddie Davidson Greg Baldato as well as Chet Baker on it.

After a second stay in Boston, Steve Houben, Bill Frisell, Greg Baldato, Kermit Driscoll and Vinnie Johnston founded the rock jazz band Mauve Traffic in 1978 (album '*Oh Boy*') and in 1979 he started the Jazz Seminar at the Liège Conservatoire together with Henri Pousseur.

Since the early Eighties, Steve Houben has been freelancing in many projects, amongst which Saxo 1000, the Act Big Band, Lemon Air and the Richard Rousselet Quintet. Abroad, the likes of Peter Herbolzheimer, Kenny Wheeler and Emil Viklicky have called upon him.

In 1983 Steve Houben realized every jazz soloist's wet dream : a recording with a string ensemble, consisting of no less than 14 violinists around a custom-made sextet, with Denis Luxion, Michel Herr, Michel Hatzigeorgiou, Guy Cabay and Mimi Verderame (CD '*Steven Houben + Strings*', Igloo).

He then worked with pianist Charles Loos on some sort of subdued chamber jazz, after which he went from project to project : the fusion band Cocodrilo (1986), *Steven Houben Invite* (for the Adolphe Sax year in 1994), the Pirotton/Houben/Pougin Trio, Pantha Rhei (with Luc Pilartz), Belgo-Tunisian Anfass, the Belgo-Cuban collective Cuban Breeze (with Didier Labarre), ...

Steve Houben won a *Django d'Or* in 2000 and in February 2001 Toots Thielemans invited him as special guest at his concert in the *Monnaie* Theatre.

### Interest or passion?

Steve Houben : 'Few music styles have been through the same fascinating episodes as jazz, which at times was accessible, extremely enjoyable, highly consumable yet always uncompromising.

The higher its intellectualistic approach of music, the lower jazz' enjoyment factor, I reckon. If I need a minor or major chord to have a melody line make sense, I do so, even with a hundred critics shouting from the sideline that this is 'no longer fashionable'. They haven't got a clue what Clifford Brown meant with 'The Joyful Conception of Jazz'.

The same goes for classical music, in fact. When I hear somebody do a Bach piece in a fascinating way, I couldn't care less whether or not this is done according to the method imposed by so-called connoisseurs and purists.

I apply this in my daily activities as well. Who cares what clothes you wear at what time, as long as you feel good in them?

By which I am not saying that you should ignore all norms, on the contrary: we need norms - to sin against! Some free jazz musicians made the mistake of doing away with all norms. Consequently, there was nothing left to destroy, so they stopped evolving. First, you carefully build your house of cards, then you destroy it.

I also love to have cultures from the farthest corners of the world merging as naturally as possible. That is one of the *raison d'être* of projects such as Anfass or Pantha Rhei. The bonus challenge lies in fathoming and understanding music that is thousands of years old and managing to play it on our instruments. Why rationalise everything? All you have to do, is make sure the instruments are played skilfully, even though this may call for hours of studying and rehearsing, which the audience must never notice, of course: making it sound effortless is the trick.



Making (and keeping) music accessible and fascinating, has been another one of my worries. Quality shouldn't necessarily be associated with elite. Always be wary of the merely 'interesting'. It has nothing to do with passion per definition. Being interested in something, is by no means the same as being fascinated by it.'

## **Gilbert Isbin**

Gilbert Isbin was born in Bruges in 1953. Having initially concentrated on lute and baroque music, Gilbert Isbin gradually started showing a growing interest in composing and performing present-day guitar music. He soon developed an entirely new style in which jazz and music that float on uneven bars and polyrhythmic structures with ethnic influences and present-day classical music, harmoniously coincide. That is clearly audible on his eight solo albums so far, a few of which were released on his own label (Tern).

With multi-instrumentalist/singing bowls specialist/composer Geert Verbeke, Gilbert released 'Twins' (DAM) in 1999. That same year, his album 'Gilbert Isbin Plays Nick Drake' came out, commissioned by the German Traurige Tropen label. In 2001 'The Fingerstyle of Gilbert Isbin' was released on DAM.

Gilbert Isbin has worked with, amongst others, Fred Van Hove, Pierre Vaiana, Steve Houben, Chris Joris, Ernst Reijseger, John Ruocco, Cameron Brown and Eric Thielemans.

## **Peter Jacquemyn**

Peter is a self-taught bass player of free improvised music. As he says himself : 'Each action produces a sound, each sound produces new ideas, the music in fact creates itself. I try to blur the border between myself and my instrument. I want to enter it, I am my bass. Bases are such wonderful instruments: huge, robust pieces of wood with four strings that you can caress, stroke, strum or hammer on... You can make a bass sound like a bass drum, or have it whisper like a tiny Tibetan clog fiddle - as an instrument it can do almost anything. Sometimes I want a sound, soaring and large as a cathedral, at others I want it soft as silk or sweet as honey. Yet at others, I want it to be razor sharp.'

Peter Jacquemyn has been a member of WIM for ten years now and co-organizes the *Free Music Festival*. He solos a lot, but also regularly works with André Goudbeek, Dirk Wauters, Bart Maris, the American saxophonist Jeffrey Morgan, the German violinist Gunda Gottschalk, the German bassist Peter Kowald and accordionist Ute Völker, the Franco-Vietnamese percussionist Ninh Le Quan, vocalist Phil Menton, and has played with the Chinese guzeng player Xu Feng Xia. He is a member of Fred Van Hove's MLF7 and one of his regular projects is a double duo (with Kowald, Goudbeek and Morgan).

With the latter he recorded the CD 'Sign of the Raven', produced by the Antwerp fanatic/radio maker John Rottiers, who also helped make the *WIMpro* CD 'As it happened' with Goudbeek, Minton and Maris.

Peter also works as a visual artist and gives drawing classes in Brussels. The bridge between his visual work and his music is built on his co-operation with dance, amongst others with choreographer Maria Clara Villalobos.

## Bert Joris

Bert Joris was born in Antwerp in 1957 and studied classical violin, piano and double bass as a child. Aged 14, he started playing the trumpet. He stopped his studies at the Antwerp Conservatoire because he was becoming increasingly involved with jazz. Thanks to his exceptional talent as a soloist, he was a member of the BRT Jazz Orkest under the late Etienne Verschueren at 24 already.

With his own quartet (in which he was accompanied by Michel Herr, double bass player Philippe Aerts and drummer Dré Pallemmaerts) he recorded the album '*Sweet Seventina*' (Jazzcats) in 1986.

In 1987, Bert Joris started teaching at the Swiss Jazz School in Bern. He currently teaches at the Leuven Lemmens Institute.

In 1987, Bert Joris received the *Django d'Or* as best Belgian jazz musician and two years later he was elected best Belgian trumpeter by both listeners and critics. Still in 1996, on the occasion of their 20th birthday, *Les Lundis d'Hortense* commissioned a piece for the Brussels Jazz Orchestra with him. Four years later, on the occasion of their annual festival at the Brussels *Botanique* this time, the *Lundis* asked him to conduct the BJO playing his own arrangements and with Philip Catherine as special guest.

Since 1992 he has been a prominent member of Philip Catherine's quartet. These last few years they have played myriad events, amongst which the Brussels Jazz Marathon (Brussels *Grand'Place*), the Sounds jazz club and the biennial Middelheim Jazz Festival (where Bert Joris has been a regular guest for years). Joris can be heard on Philip Catherine's latest album, '*Blue Prince*', released in 2000 and one of the best selling albums today. In the spring of 2002, they toured Mexico together.

During the Europalia Horta Festival, Bert Joris led *You ain't heard nothin' yet*, a show with music by the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and The Sweet Substitutes in combination with a series of silent movies by way of tribute to jazz legends. Some of those pieces can be found on the BJO's CDs '*Live*' and '*The September Sessions*' (W.E.R.F.), which Joris also produced.

Bert Joris can also be heard on Marc Moulin's 2001 '*Top Secret*', the very first CD to be released by a Belgian musician on Blue Note. Some of the orchestras Bert Joris toured with as soloist (amongst others the EBU Big Band, the big jazz orchestras of the WDR, the NDR, Klaus Weiss, Al Porcino and Peter Herzbolzheimer, the *Dutch Metropole Orchestra*, Félix Simitaine's Act Big Band and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra) still regularly play his compositions and arrangements.

Bert Joris himself composed and arranged all the pieces he played with the Brussels Jazz Orchestra on September 13th and 14th 2001 at the Bruges *Werf*, which can be found on the first CD in the series 'The Finest in Belgian Jazz'. This double CD once again illustrates how skilled the musicians in our most prestigious big band today really are. Elsewhere in this book, you will notice the enthusiasm with which top artists from Belgium and abroad speak about this, our national jazz pride. The same series also contains a CD of Bert Joris' own quartet.

### Musical Family

Bert Joris : 'My sister, my four brothers and myself grew up with music. I was the benjamin. It seemed only natural that, as toddlers, all six of us played the recorder. Our father, himself a church organist, enrolled each of us at the music school. We simply didn't have a choice : we were going to be classically trained and had to start off with a year of piano before being allowed, by way of reward, to choose our own instrument. I quite liked the idea of playing the violin. I also sang in the opera children's choir. What I really looked forward to, however,

was the day somebody would ask me to play in church, even though the quartet my father coached was winds only. As a result, I switched to the trumpet when I was about 13.

Four years or so later, when I started studying at the Lemmens Institute, my brother Dirk got totally wrapped up in jazz: Coltrane's *'A Love Supreme'*, Tyner's *'The Real McCoy'*, Eric Dolphy & Don Cherry... that kind of stuff. I soon followed in his tracks. He would philosophize about music for hours and was incredibly knowledgeable.

Round about the same time, I had a school friend, himself a drummer, who had quite a few jazz records at home. He had bought *'Thermo'*, a double album by Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, with Freddie Hubbard on trumpet. I had never heard anybody play the trumpet as fabulously as him. I can honestly say that that record changed my life, so much so that at the Swiss Jazz School in Bern, where I have been teaching for some time now, I have been teaching the work of The Jazz Messengers for seven years now. Only now - at 45 - am I finally able to correctly play those trumpet parts.

I never really found my own sound until I started playing with Philip Catherine, now ten-odd years ago. I had the reputation of a ballad specialist at the BRT Jazz Orkest, so that was all they let me play. Ballads require huge concentration and self-confidence from the musician, which I had a hard time keeping under permanent control.

The first years I played with Philip Catherine we played in trio, without drums. As soloists, we thus constantly found ourselves in a very vulnerable position. That, in combination with the ease with which Philip played and the reassuring attitude of Hein van de Geyn, visibly boosted my self-confidence, which obviously also helped perfect my technique. Seeing Tom Harrell work with Philip also helped me a lot, because suddenly, as a member of the audience, I understood that the people on stage are also of flesh and blood. The way in which those three men, however, touched the audience's heart strings, nipped every urge for technical tours de force in the bud. Maybe that was one of the most important insights I ever got in my life. Of course I keep on perfecting my technique. I use a classical mouth piece with a relatively wide opening for a warm sound. The wider the opening, the harder it is to play, because of the amount of air you need to get that sound.

The music on the latest double BJO CD, in fact offers a survey of my musical itinerary. *'Walkin' Tiptoe'* and *'For the Time Being'*, for example, are from the days I played with the BRT Jazz Orkest. *'Atonal'* is probably even older. *'Jeux de reflets et de vitesse'*, *'Magic Box'*, *'Nuées d'Orange'* and *'Warp 9'* are also a few years old and *'Mr. Dodo'* was written entirely in pencil at the time.

Only in pieces such as *'Innocent Blues'*, *'Blue Alert'*, *'Kong's Garden'* and *'Benoit'* did I truly start making the most of computers. *Benoit* was entirely written on the coach, in fact, while touring with Philip Catherine in 2001 - obviously after I had tried things out for hours at home on the piano first and stuffed my head with lots of useful data. The arrangements for the symphony orchestra for Raymond van het Groenewoud at *Brugge 2002* were also entirely done on computer, on yet another tour with Philip (through Germany this time). I have wonderful memories of it. As you can see, computers are excellent time-savers, even though I do miss those instructive strolls through distant cities and reading interesting literature in trains, planes and any number of waiting rooms. As far as I am concerned, *'The Music of Bert Joris'* is sort of my starting point. I haven't released a single album under my own name for 15 years now, so in my concerts I feel I am forever going back to pieces from that repertoire. The fact that the material has been canned, so to speak - which means it has been saved for posterity - enables me to get a lot of new ideas and to come up with a totally new repertoire.

### **What is jazz?**

*'To me, jazz isn't a music style at all, it's a mentality. During my classical years, I exclusively saw musicians whose main worry was how someone else had intended such-and-such a piece*

to sound - the quality of which you never, under no circumstances, question. Jazz musicians, however, are forever looking for innovation and variation. I can't help but think, too, that classical musicians insist on as faithful as possible a rendering of the music, whilst jazz musicians put content and emotion before form.

I wouldn't dream of volunteering my own description of 'jazz'. The day I am able to do so - assuming someone asks me - hopefully lies in the distant future.'

## Chris Joris

In the rhythm section, rhythm and tempo tend to be decided by both drummer and bass player. If there is a pianist in the ensemble, he is regarded as part of the rhythm section, since the left-hand keys, at least in a traditional ensemble, tend to act as rhythmic support for the melody, most of which is played on the right-hand keys.

It is the blacks who - after being taken to the American 'promised land' - passed on a huge chunk of their musical traditions to blues and jazz. Another factor is that because jazz - more than any other style of music - mingled with other cultures right from the start, its music contains various percussion instruments like triangle, woodblocks, cuica, bongos, congas, claves and gueros, as well as berimbau, balafon, udu drums, didgeridoos and a few hundred other tooters and bells.

Marimba and vibraphone are also classified as percussion instruments, even though they do tend to be used for playing melodies, even harmonies. That has everything to do with the fact that in a standard orchestra, the musician who plays the percussion instruments - including kettledrum and woodblocks etc. - is also responsible for marimba and/or vibraphone and the like.

Chris Joris is doubtless amongst those musicians who have made a name for themselves in Belgian jazz: an idiosyncratic percussionist/composer/pianist who has been experimenting for almost 25 years now with any number of ethnic forms of music, which he merges into a new kind of fusion of world music and jazz like no other. One day he does so on his own, in two sets during which he entertains his audience with his impressive collection of percussion instruments from all corners of the world for two hours via a fascinating spectacle of bizarre sounds and often stirring rhythms. The next, you find him in a trio or quartet, and yet another day you see him on stage with a group of musicians from various continents, like that one time at the Leuven *Trans(e)fusie*.

In the Sixties, Chris Joris founded the so-called Experimental-Jazz Trio, in which he had a series of musical encounters with, amongst others, pianist Fred Van Hove, saxophonists John Tchicai and Michael Mast, and the South-African bass player Johnny 'Mbizo' Dyani.

In 1987 Chris Joris took part in '*A Lover's Question*', an album with compositions by himself, David Linx and Pierre Van Dormael, based on texts by James Baldwin. Other participants were, amongst others, Jimmy Owens, Slide Hampton, Steve Coleman, Victor Lazlo, Toots Thielemans, Hein van de Geyn, Michel Hatzigeorgiou, Pierre Vaiana, Diederik Wissels, Bob Stewart and Deborah Brown.

Typical of Chris Joris is not only the way in which he cleverly makes the banalest objects into percussion instruments - never without a serious pinch of humour - but even more so that, by injecting parts of the traditional drum kit - such as cymbals and toms - into his percussion, he partly takes over the drummer's task. Which begs the question whether Chris Joris considers himself a percussionist or a drummer.

Joris: 'I try to integrate all manner of typical, popular percussion instruments, such as djembe, conga, berimbau, didgeridoo, likembe, balafon and all sorts of bells, gongs, cowbells

and woodblocks into improvised (jazz) music. It took years, in swing, for those instruments to be accepted, because of this huge misconception that they belong in typically Latin or African types of music.

Percussionists are still treated in a stepmotherly fashion and pigeonholed as 'toucher-uppers'. Whether it be Brazilian, Cuban, Mexican or African forms of music, Latin Jazz or just plain jazz, percussionists invariably are subordinate to the drummer. That's exactly what I've been fighting all those years, by taking up a central position with my instruments and using them in combination with various sections of the traditional drum kit, like cymbals and toms. By doing so, I want to prove that hand-played percussion instruments - without your obligatory bass drum, hihat, snaredrum and toms - can play just as leading, rhythmic a part in the jazz idiom. I also try to tell my own story with typical Latin or African percussion instruments, without necessarily resorting to the typical, clichéd idioms associated with them, yet always fully respecting the instruments' inherent function.

In my concerts, djembe is given a multifunctional role to play: not only is it the accompanying subharmony for the cymbals, I also use it as a solo instrument in combination with the tom and floor tom. This looks easier than it is. It took me years, in fact, to really swing on cymbals merely by hitting them with my hands. It also took me quite a while to learn and imitate the sound of swinging brushes with my fingers. Feeling and motor activity, in hand percussion, couldn't be more different from the technique with which a drummer regains his chops whilst beating various rhythms.

It took me years, and quite a bit of money, to find the right material too. Finding a nice-sounding djembe was easy; choosing cymbals, however, was not.'

### **Unknown makes unloved**

Chris Joris' CD '*Benkadi*' comes with its own Adama Dramé story: 'One day, Dora Mols of the *Zuiderpershuis* contacted me to tell me that Adama Dramé had been giving a number of group performances under his own name and that the public had loved it. Apparently, he had his own fan club in Antwerp. Dora Mols had therefore decided to let Adama Dramé perform with guest musicians from an entirely different musical background. The result was four gatherings or so, during which we discovered each other and made a number of tentative attempts at making music together, which eventually yielded a fantastic concert, after which we showered each other with enthusiastic comments and thanks. The next concert was recorded via a mobile studio. The result was this extremely honest album, which I recently played to Cubans. Their enthusiasm means a lot more to me than this one review in *Jazz Hot*, labelling the music as '*inclassable*' and *therefore* (!) bad - while most other magazines were full of praise.'

### **Sal La Rocca**

Paul Chambers' bass playing definitively had Sal La Rocca (born in the Liège region in 1961 and initially a rock guitarist) opting for the double bass. Soon after, he played in Jacques Pelzer's band, through whom he performed with Jon Eardley and Chet Baker, amongst others. Sal La Rocca: 'One day a friend saxophonist lent me a few jazz records to listen to. A new world opened up for me, even though, subconsciously, I'd been waiting for it for ages. One day, he told me I looked like a double bass player, really, with my bushy beard and all. Believe it or not, but I took his words to heart, as if all this was meant to be and manifesting itself on the lower half of my face. 'You're going to be my bass player', he added - and I am!

Today, Sal La Rocca is one of the most wanted double bass players in our country. You may see him alongside Philip Catherine, Bruno Castellucci, even Toots Thielemans. He is a member of the Nathalie Lories Trio and the band Ode for Joe.

In the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series, Sal La Rocca can be heard on Nathalie Lories' CD 'Tombouctou' (W.E.R.F.).

## **Gino Lattuca**

Gino Lattuca was born in 1955 and started playing the trumpet at the age of 13 in the Havré brass band, near Mons. He obtained the city's first prize for trumpet at the Conservatoire. That same year, he and a number of Brussels fellow jammers (amongst whom Philippe Leblanc, Alain Rochette and René Harvengt) formed the Minority Sextet. Two years later he started a quartet with Michel Ardui (p), Ferdinand Philipot (b), and Koen Vandendriessche (d). Within months he was signalled on numerous stages in the company of, amongst others, Paolo Radoni, Baklava Rhythm and Sounds, Mimi Verderame, Félix Simtaine's Act Big Band, Claudine Simons Lilith, Kris Defoort, Charles Loos, Jean-Louis Rassinfosse, Michel Herr, Bruno Castellucci, Ivan Paduart and Michel Hatzigeorgiou.

Harry James, Louis Armstrong, King Oliver and, in a following phase, Freddie Hubbard are cited as this talented trumpeter's main sources of inspiration, who has been performing with his own quartet since 1989. Its current members are Ivan Paduart (p), Bart De Nolf (b) and Mimi Verderame (d). In his quintet, he plays alongside Kurt van Herck (ts), Christoph Erbstösser (p), Christophe Devisscher (b) and Mimi Verderame (d).

Gino Lattuca has also been a member of the Brussels Jazz Orchestra's brass section since their first recording in 1997. The band can be heard on the first CD in the 'Finest Jazz in Belgian Jazz' box.

### **A Natural**

Gino Lattuca : 'Where I grew up as a child, near Mons, we had this neighbour across the road (a school pal) who played the bugle. I was fascinated by it, and he taught me how to blow it : I had to pretend I was spitting out tobacco, and the sound would follow. Soon after - a few days before St Cecilia, in November 1968 - I enrolled with the Havré brass band. He became a policeman.

I must have been a natural on the bugle, and the C scale seemed custom-written for me. I vividly remember the school head's reaction when I enrolled at the academy : 'Are you sure you're not just enrolling to take part in next week's St Cecilia eating and drinking spree?' He soon realized, though, that I was passionate about the bugle. Years later, I bought myself a trumpet as well, and yet another new world opened up for me.

Then came the day I had to go and earn a living in a factory. I never gave up my classical music lessons, though. I compared the elementary and advanced courses and said to myself : the day I master this, I'll be a great trumpeter. Thanks to my mother, I was able to enrol at the Mons Conservatoire. I studied there for five, six years (I never really finished the academy).

At school I learned classical music, but at home I listened to jazz records. That was the world I wanted to belong to. I was determined not to spend my days in some symphony orchestra, where I'd forever be competing with great virtuosos. Jazz clubs : that's where I wanted to play, that was my future.

The first trumpeter I saw live was Chuck Mangione in 1979, at the Brussels *Théâtre 140*. His technique blew me, but his music wasn't exactly my thing. I found out what I really liked soon after in Mons, when Richard Rousselet and after him Steve Houben came to play at the *Vieux Puits*.

That's when I enrolled at the Liège Jazz Seminar, even though Richard Rousselet had already hinted I wouldn't learn a thing there. I earned a bit on the side making music at Saturday dances. In 1981, having pocketed my first prize, I moved to Brussels, where I briefly earned a living playing with salsa bands. I bumped into fellow students from the seminar there, such as Charles Loos. A few years later, I found my way to the *Travers*, where I ended up living for six years and attended all their Monday jams. That, in combination with various courses I bought to perfect my technique, was my best training. I owe a lot to people like Pierre Van Dormael, whom I meet regularly. They helped me broaden my jazz horizon and brought me one step closer to the men I wanted to be: Freddie Hubbard or Woody Shaw. I never attempted to emulate their solos, though. I am determined to remain myself, and never did limit myself to trumpeters. I have spent just as much time listening to pianists, such as Bill Evans or Oscar Peterson.

I also owe a lot to drummer Koen Vandendriessche, who in 1983 gave me the opportunity to play at Jazz Middelheim. In the late Eighties, like many jazz musicians in those days, I regularly played at the *Kaai*, where I again found myself in an entirely new universe. Life is an endless learning curve.

I still try to perfect my technique each day, but I feel I have a long way to go. I like to compare myself to wine ageing in a huge barrel in the cellar. One day its owner will decide it is ready to be drunk. I too occasionally turn the spigot, for a particular performance or so, and then close it again : definitely not for consumption yet!

I often get called a pessimist. I'd say I'm a 'perfectionist'. Another good thing about jazz, is that you don't have to be handsome to be allowed to play.' (*roars with laughter*)

## **Eric Legnini**

Eric Legnini, born on February 20th 1979 in Hoei, is considered one of our most talented young pianists. With a singing mother and a guitar playing father, it comes as no surprise that already at six, Legnini was obsessed with music. In 1977, he enrolled at the Hoei Academy, where he met Stéphane Galland in the solfeggio, percussion and piano classes. In 1982 trombonist Sébastien Jadot confronted them with jazz and, together with bass player Eric Antoine, they became members of the Jazz Quartet 47. Charles Loos was to be Legnini's first jazz piano teacher. Pirly Zurstrassen was his teacher at the Amay academy from 1985 - the year during which Legnini became a member of Jean-Pierre Catoul's jazz rock band Equitation - to 1988. By that time, he had founded his own trio with Stéphane Galland and Jean-Louis Rassinfosse (cf. CD '*Natural Balance*', Jazz Club), to which they regularly added Michel Massot and Fabrizio Cassol to make a quintet (cf. CD '*Essentiels*', Igloo).

In 1988 - he had just started teaching, amongst others at *Les Lundis d'Hortense* - Eric Legnini left for Brooklyn, where he studied at Long Island University with pianist Richie Beirach and trumpeter Cecil Bridgewater. This two-year stay (only interrupted to come and play at a few Belgian summer festivals) was, of course, larded with jams with, amongst others, Lonnie Plaxico, Gary Bartz and Ron McClure.

Since then, this promising pianist has performed in many countries like Canada (International Jazz Festival Montréal), Congo-Brazzaville, Zaïre, Spain (Bilbao Festival), Norway, Sweden, Germany, France and Italy. Amongst the Belgian and foreign bands and artists Eric Legnini has played with, we find Michael Brecker, Mike Stern, Henri Salvador, John Ruocco, Joe Lovano, Toots Thielemans, Jacques Pelzer (cf. CD '*Never Let Me Go*', Igloo), Philip Catherine, Félix Simtaine, Serge Reggiani, Marcia Maria, Bruno Castellucci, Mimi Verderame, Aka Moon and Daniel Romeo (cf. CD '*Live at the Sounds*').

In Paris, where Legnini lives, he regularly performs with, amongst others, André Ceccarelli, Stefano di Battista, Flavio Boltro, Paco Sery, the Belmondo Quintet, Aldo Romano and Eric Le Lann.

Eric Legnini has been lecturing at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire since 1990.

Eric Legnini : 'I grew up in a musical family (my mother, a classical singer, often sang me my favourite Negro spirituals and gospel songs), and at seven I started at the music academy myself. I desperately wanted to play the trombone, but because my teeth weren't yet formed, that was out of the question. I did a bit of violin first, but wasn't too impressed. In the end, I opted for classical percussion and all that comes with it, closely followed by piano. I had to give up drumming after a while, though, because the combination of both instruments caused tendinitis. After a while - I must have been 15 or so - I started losing interest in the piano and seriously considered giving up music altogether. I dreamt of a career as a football player, until one day my mother played me a few jazz melodies on the piano. I immediately changed my mind. This sounded like nothing else I'd been practising until then : the freedom, the playfulness of it. I tried to imitate those pieces from morning till night, and before I knew it, I was bracing myself for a career as a jazz pianist. At the Amay academy, I met Pirly Zurstrassen. I also enrolled for a few of the famous summer training courses at Dworp and Wépion. I started having quite a few performances in those days, amongst others with Guy Cabay, who made me a member of his band right from the start. It was the beginning of a fascinating itinerary full of interesting encounters with remarkable artists, such as Stéphane Galland (a school pal) and Fabrizio Cassol. With the money I made performing, I was able - three years later - at 18, to afford a trip to New York. I ended up staying twice for eight months or so, mainly to practise on my Fender Rhodes on my own, sometimes ten hours a day (when I was not attending some jazz club concert). My personal mission was to gather as much musical information as possible.

Back in Belgium, in 1990, I immediately got a job at the Royal Conservatoire in Brussels. Teaching has turned out to be one of my biggest passions. I like to share the musical voyages of discovery I embark on via countless CDs.

Those were also the days when I worked with Jacques Pelzer a lot, a key moment in my life, it turned out. I have always hugely admired musicians from the early bebop days. Pelzer, who lived in my neighbourhood and didn't think twice about playing with us, was one of the only living witnesses of that era. I often went to his house, not only to make music, but to play table tennis, take him to concerts, share as much as possible with him. I have learned a tremendous lot from him.

Another key moment in my life was the period I replaced Michel Herr with Toots, after the former decided to take two sabbatical years. Toots' hospitality and generosity are legendary. My time with Nasa Na (since its beginning), the rehearsals and performances at the legendary *Kaai*, have also been invaluable in my development as a musician.

I met trumpeter Flavio Boltro by accident at the Brussels Sounds. He was already playing with Rosario Bonaccorso on double bass and I jammed a piece with them. They told me I absolutely had to meet this young saxophonist Stefano di Battista. As luck would have it, he also came to play at the Sounds a few months later. He immediately invited me to jam with him, after which he suggested accompanying him to Paris, where he had this project with Flavio Boltro. As a bachelor I had no ties. My mind was soon made up and I went for it. After a number of jams, which regularly yielded interesting encounters, Aldo Romano was on stage with us. Our audience increased, and grew more enthusiastic with each performance.

I soon went from one band to the next: Belmondo Quintet, Eric Le Lann and others, until one day, I was lucky enough to have Paco Sery invite me to work with him on a project around Miles. Apart from Flavio and Stefano, Richard Bona and Louis Winsberg were also involved.



I seized the occasion to introduce my good friend Daniel Romeo to Paco, who was very impressed by his talent.

Another man who has taught me a lot, is Dado Moroni. He had me buying three hundred old LPs in one year! Such knowledge. Incredible!

My all-time favourite, however, is black soul music, with Donny Hathaway as the absolute top. I spend quite some time listening to hip-hop these days, which to me is clearly an extension of soul.

As to the role each musician plays in the band, I reckon music and teamwork are more important than putting yourself in the spotlight. Band members must respect one another for the music to sound honest and spontaneous. Just listen to the magic, which is almost tangible in Miles' music: he was the leader of his bands, but always had each member - excellent musicians, all of them - contribute a truly individual element to the sound that was unmistakably his. Only a genius can do that.'

## David Linx

This godchild of Nathan Davis was born on March 22nd 1965. He has been playing the piano since the age of six and soon after that added the flute to his list of instruments. He was eleven and living in Hoeilaart - where his father, Elias Gistelincx (whom you may know as the founder of Jazz Middelheim) taught harmony - when he met four-year-old Diederik Wissels, who was then composing for a band consisting, amongst others, of Jan de Haas, Frank Michiels and Nicolas Fiszman.

I personally remember seeing a young David Linx play drums in the Brussels *Travers*, with Hein van de Geyn and Diederik Wissels, if I'm not mistaken. I can't tell whether he was living with Kenny Clarke at the time, but one thing is certain: in 1988, when he was still part of the band with Steve Coleman, Bob Stewart and Pierre Van Dormael, David Linx said goodbye to drums and was suddenly, and often, spotted singing in the Brussels Jazz Club, alongside, amongst others, Pierre Van Dormael, Philippe Allaert, Nicolas Fiszman and Philippe Decock.

The year before, on December 1st 1987 to be exact, David had lost a dear friend: the 63-year-old poet James Baldwin, with whom he lived for a time in New York and with whom he had been in a recording studio three months earlier for the fantastic CD '*A Lover's Question*'. Pierre Van Dormael and Michel Hatzigeorgiou are on it too, as well as an impressive guest list with people like Steve Coleman, Jimmy Owens, Toots Thielemans, Bob Stewart, Slide Hampton, Deborah Brown, Chris Joris, Pierre Vaiana, Diederik Wissels... too many to list. By way of tribute to the deceased James Baldwin, David Linx brought the album's entire line-up together again the year after, for an unforgettable live version, with James' brother, David Baldwin, reading the poems. The performance was broadcast by Sky Channel. In 1998 the CD was remastered and rereleased on the French *Label Bleu*, in a beautiful box with a 150-page poetry collection. It is through James Baldwin that David Linx became friends with great artists such as Sarah Vaughan and Miles Davis.

Linx himself has made 12 CDs so far, the latest one of which, '*Heartland*', was recorded with Diederik Wissels, Paolo Fresu, Palle Danielsson and the Jean-Paul Dessy string ensemble on Emarcy-Universal. Amongst David Linx' students - either at one of his master classes in Libramont or Dworp, or at NYU, or even the Brussels Conservatoire - we find big names such as Arno, Khadja Nin, Viktor Lazlo and Marie Daulne.

So what made eternal seeker David Linx decide to solely concentrate on singing?

Linx : ‘One day I realized I could do a lot more with my voice than with any other instrument. The human voice is much more than just an instrument to me. Singers indeed possess the strength to give you a melody with words. Caetano Veloso, to name one, is terribly aware of this. That is what makes his way of singing so fascinating.

Many jazz singers are very limited and I never did like scat singing. That is why I concentrate on fully exploiting the potential of the voice which no other instrument has. Betty Carter is a master at this. With her idiosyncratic way of using her voice, she is one of the only ones - to me - to escape the clichéd image of the jazz vocalist. She indeed keeps taking her voice to places no instrument has ever been.

I still remember singing along to Ella Fitzgerald records for hours as a toddler. I even met her in person once, as well as Betty Carter.

I learned to explore my voice at an early age, in other words. And since I mainly listened to female vocalists, I have developed a very supple voice, which I kept using on solos by, amongst others, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Michael Brecker.

Does that make me a jazz singer? To me jazz, before anything else, is the freedom to develop your own language. Which definitely makes mine a jazz approach. By which I am not saying that I consider my singing to be jazz. Styles are no more than tools to me. It makes absolutely no difference, whether I am singing with Diederik Wissels or Aka Moon, whether I am doing a *valse musette* or on stage with Cecil Taylor. That’s the freedom I have wanted all my life.

The biggest influence on my approach as a jazz vocalist has to be Miles Davis. We used to have these long chats when he was holidaying with James Baldwin. He gave me a golden piece of advice : ‘From the beginning, you always think you are going to be the best. Never stop thinking it, but never say it loudly’. Miles was a genial guy, regardless of what many journalists claim. That he occasionally played with his back to the audience had nothing to do with arrogance or conceit, but everything with shyness, respect for his fellow musicians *and* a desire to play good jazz, of course.

Another musician who has taught me a lot, is Michael Brecker. He combined technical perfection with emotion like no other. Which I find very important.’

To the question which present-day jazz artists he feels on the same wavelength with, David Linx answers: ‘Cassandra Wilson. Me’Shell Ndegéocello, Cassandra Wilson and myself have the same producer: Craig Street. I also adore Chris Whitley. Fabrizio Cassol is definitely my favourite instrumentalist. I invariably like his melodies and have known him for fifteen years. As a result, studying an Aka Moon piece has become a matter of minutes.

I mainly compose on the piano, where I can start from texts as well as melodies. I tend to concentrate on melodies lately. I can tell from the way a singer does a ballad, whether he can manage an uptempo number and vice versa : I truly admire musicians such as Betty Carter and Egberto Gismonti, who can make me cry, even with an uptempo number. Now there’s knowledge and wisdom for you.’

## **Charles Loos**

Charles Loos was born in Brussels in 1951. Initially, this classically trained pianist was fascinated by the music of The Beatles. Bossa nova too was a favourite of his. In a next phase, he gradually became interested in jazz, which all in all did have elements of the three above sources of inspiration in it.

In 1972, Loos went to Boston, to study jazz composition and orchestration at Berklee. Upon his return to Belgium, he initially impressed jazz rock audiences with his keyboard work in COS, which also had Daniel Schell, Pascale Son and, occasionally also, Marc Moulin, playing in it. From 1976 on, he led his own jazz band, Abraxis, where his lyrical piano really made a

statement, as it did in Julverne, that other eclectic ensemble that mapped out new routes for itself thanks to the support of Belgian jazz audiences.

In 1987, Charles Loos released his first solo album under the title *'Egotriste'*. Three years later, Sava's first CD was released on LDH. Sava was an international ensemble in which Loos was surrounded by Greg Baldato, John Ruocco, Serge Lazarevitch, Ricardo del Frà, Jean-Louis Rassinfosse and Eric Ineke, amongst others. He also played a lot with Steve Houben in those days, in a duo that became a trio after they had been joined by singer Claude Maurane under the name H.L.M. - not some social housing project in a French suburb, but the initials of their surnames. It became the title of their CD as well. With drummer Luc Vandenbossche and tenor/clarinetist André Donni, Charles Loos founded the Dixieland trio The Sweet Substitutes in 1993.

Various albums - some under his own name - followed one after the other and the list of Belgian and foreign artists Charles Loos has worked with, has acquired astronomical proportions. It includes names such as Toots Thielemans, Chet Baker, Philip Catherine, Weber Iago, Johnny Griffin, Etienne Verschueren, Pierre Van Dormael, Ali Ryerson, Félix Simtaine, Dré Pallemarts, Chris Joris and the much missed Jean-Pierre Catoul, with whom he released *'Summer Winds'* in 1997 and *'Sad Hopes'* in 2001.

Charles Loos currently plays in the ensemble *Parfum Latin* (with Anne Wolf, Pierre Bernard, Henri Greindl and Jan de Haas) and is working on a project with Steve Houben (on soprano sax only here), cellist Kathy Adam (Pantha Rhei) and violinist Igor Semenov (Ictus Ensemble), another significant enrichment of the European jazz landscape, that couldn't be more different from American swing and bop culture.

Charles Loos is also very active in drama and works closely together with a number of poets.

In 1997, Charles Loos received the *Django d'Or*, although he does see the relativity of such prizes:

Charles Loos: 'Awards are but random indications, subject to many factors. In some cases they are given for the wrong reasons as a result. I considered refusing the *Django d'Or*, but my mother would have been disappointed, which I didn't want.

You may have noticed that I often work with strings instead of compiling my bands according to the classic piano-bass-drums-plus-wind section-and/or-other soloist-recipe. That's because I love to improvise - one of the pillars of the jazz attitude, let's face it - *and* to do classical music. We mustn't forget that in classical music too, musicians used to improvise quite a bit, until the day Schoenberg put his oar in with his contradictory laws.

For years now, I have been experimenting with some kind of improvised classical (chamber) music, like Julverne did in the past : 15 to 20% of written material, while the rest leaves room for - structured - improvisation. Improvising too is indeed ruled by dos and don'ts.

The famous marriage of the 'serious', classical world and the rebellious jazz scene was Henri Pousseur's dream twenty years ago already. He did *Les Iles Déchaînées* with a symphony orchestra, a jazz ensemble and a present-day classical ensemble, whereby the three islands, which started off in their own language, gradually grew nearer until there was this gigantic fusion. Henri Pousseur was always ahead of his time.'

## **Nathalie Lories**

Nathalie Lories was born on October 27th 1966 in Hoei and had a classical training. Over the years - attracted as she was to jazz and through various training courses and seminars - she met people like Steve Houben, Charles Loos, John Ruocco, Alex Ulanowsky, Jim McNeely, Dave Frank, Rob Madna and Diederik Wissels. At the Brussels Royal Conservatoire, where

Dennis Luxion, Steve Houben and Pirly Zrustrassen were amongst her teachers, she obtained first prize for harmony and piano in 1990. Other prizes include the Sax Prize (Jazz Critics Association, 1989), the Belga Prize for best soloist at the Brussels Jazz Rally (1990), first prize of the Francophone Radio Competition (1991), the Bobby Jaspar prize for her merits as European musician (French *Académie du Jazz*), the *Django d'Or* 1999 and the Euro Django as best present-day European jazz artist (2000).

Nathalie has worked with, amongst others, Steve Houben, Diederik Wissels, David Linx, Félix Simtaine, Toots Thielemans, Philip Catherine, Ivan Paduart, Laurent Blondiau, Rachel Gould, Paolo Fresu, Aldo Romano, Charlie Mariano, Emanuele Cisi, Al Levitt and Lee Konitz, with whom she recorded the CD '*Discoveries*' (AMC) in 1993. She has been giving piano lessons at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire since October 1994.

Nathalie Lories has demonstrated her talents as a composer since forming her first quartet with Kurt Van Herck, Philippe Aerts and Mimi Verderame (CD '*Nymphes*', with Igloo). Her second CD was recorded with Rick Hollander and Jeroen Van Herzeele ('*Dance or Die*' with Igloo).

Nathalie Lories is currently touring with two formulas. In her trio we find double bass player Sal La Rocca and drummer Hans van Oosterhout (CDs '*Walking Through Doors*', '*Walking Through Walls*', with Igloo, and '*Silent Spring*', with Pygmalion). In the Nathalie Lories Trio + Extensions ensemble, the trio is joined by Frank Vaganée (as), Kurt Van Herck (ts) and Laurent Blondiau (tp). The sextet's first CD, '*Tombouctou*' (W.E.R.F.) will be released as part of the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series.

Nathalie Lories : 'Like everybody who went to the music academy, I started off from a classical angle. We had an organ at home, which I used to play for hours as a child. I was forever trying to imitate the songs we heard on the radio.

Interpreting work from the classical repertoire, means making it sound as if you wrote it yourself, however familiar the audience may be with the compositions. Just listen to Gould interpreting Bach. Goose bumps material. I have just as much respect for people who spend their entire lives limiting themselves to interpreting existing works or jazz standards, as I do for those who want to compose new material or spend their lives improvising.

So how, after ten-odd years of classical training, did I veer towards jazz? Simply because I love the music and I just can't get enough of it. The communication (between artists but also with the audience) and improvisation aspects of jazz appeal to me, as does the fact that in jazz you never stop discovering and inventing new things - preferably as spontaneously and honestly as possible -, which keeps the child in you alert. That is why I feel increasingly at home in jazz. When a man like Toots Thielemans tells you on the phone he hopes you will have just as much fun playing jazz at 80 as he does, you are able face any mishap, and the future looks bright.

By which I am not saying I don't enjoy listening to classical music anymore. I know a lot of classical musicians, in fact, who truly look forward to years, decades, of practising to be able to play in exactly that particular way.

The very first jazz piece I ever played - or at least a fragment of it - was by Ellington. I'll never forget it. The last page of the scores I bought to practise my piano technique, often had a promotional fragment of an existing piece of music by a famous composer on it. One day - I must have been 16 - I spotted an Ellington score - '*Solitude*', I think - made up of chords that were completely new to me. When I started playing them, it was as if an entirely new world opened up for me : my piano was producing harmonies I had never heard myself play. It simply drove me crazy and I just kept on playing those chords, both at home and at the academy, much to my professor's delight, who turned out to be a fervent jazz lover. When I happened to see Steve Houben live in Dinant soon after, my mind was made up: jazz would

be my thing. I started buying one record after the other and when I realized that that very same Steve Houben lectured at the Liège Conservatoire, I immediately enrolled, even though I didn't have a clue how to start a jazz piece. One thing led to another and before long I was playing jazz music in front of an audience with a number of fellow students. For a brief while, it looked like I was going to pick the saxophone, my second instrument during my classical training. I soon realized I felt much more at home on the piano, though, which I had been enormously attracted to as a child. In that sense I do think children should decide themselves which instruments they like best - just let them loose in an instrument shop, you'll soon know. Approaching an instrument spontaneously, naturally is still the best. No true virtuoso flaunts his or her technical skill on the instrument - however complex the piece. What they do is make it sound as natural as possible, as if anyone could do the same at home.'

## **Bart Maris**

Bart Maris seems ubiquitous these days : in the chaotic, world jazz brass band Think of One, Peter Vermeersch' loony orchestrations for Flat Earth Society, the hip-hop collective Yutakasa, the Dutch *musique concrète* ensemble Blast, over his brother Piet's pixilated *Jaune Toujours* to Betty Goes Green's pop rock, not to mention his own free jazz project Kamikaze, his co-operation with André Goudbeek and Fred Frith, his taking part in the mambo surf rock collective The Whodads or his presence on Marc Moulin's recent album '*Top Secret*'. Fans of X-legged Sally, which died a truly untimely death, will have spotted Bart Maris' name in their various liner notes too. No concert is indeed beneath him. He recently gave a guest performance in Maubeuge with the French ensemble Art Zoyd, alongside Daniel Denis and Gérard Hourbette. It came as no surprise, in other words, that Bart Maris was given the 2000 Zamu Award for best musician.

One of Bart Maris' teachers was Marc Godfroid. Bart Maris : 'I was one of the first ones to be taught jazz at the Conservatoire. Marc Godfroid let me solo to my heart's content, on one condition: I had to learn to read perfectly. That was the whole idea. Boy, did I have a hard time; but I'm eternally grateful to him. I still have articulation problems, though.

I graduated with Oliver Bodson, whom I admire tremendously. The man finished with 95%, while I had to make do with 80. Incredible! Final marks, however, which have everything to do with technique and skill, should not be the only criterion for judging a musician. Being creative is not something you can learn. It is an art to turn your shortcomings into weapons, in fact. Each shortcoming is an opportunity. Take Jan Mues, for example. He's a great musician, but as a trumpeter he is incredibly limited. Yet he manages to draw strength from this limitation and produce a highly recognizable sound. Laurent Blondiau's limitations are mainly physical. He knows he really has to watch the way he doses things. Serge Plume, on the other hand, manages virtually anything with his *embouchure*.

Then there are the great salsa players on winds, like Arturo Sandoval, who literally stumble into jazz and sail through the scores. I invariably wonder whether or not they can still play soberly, in fact, and if they would have the guts to play with *fragility*. Bert Joris, for example, who knows very well he has no such gifts to flaunt or outdo others with, makes beautifully fragile, sober playing his trademark, which yields a highly moving sound that will hush anybody up. The same fragility is also present in Bert Joris' compositions and arrangements.'

### **Earning a living with music**

Years ago, Bart Maris resolutely opted for earning a living making and playing music. 'It is incredibly difficult to earn enough as a full-time musician in Belgium. I do not teach and get no allowances whatsoever. I have to join myriad projects to earn a decent net salary. I would

never be able to go on, financially, without projects like Flat Earth Society, that give me a status in theatre productions too. Even though that does mean giving up some of my freedom. What I hate the most about all this, is having to beg for months for what I'm actually entitled to, especially with record companies that usually don't even know your name, while you're a guest performer with their best-selling artist. You tell them about accessory rights, and they fill you in on how badly the record has flopped... assuming all other demands and agreements have been met, of course. Mind you : when I was still playing with X-legged Sally, I found out the CDs were being sold as 'Belgian progressive music'. No wonder the sales figures were bad!

American trumpeters have been known to scrape the varnish off their instruments, which is meant to enhance the sound spectrum. Bart Maris' is a different story : 'In my case, the varnish came off with wear. If you want, you can buy an unvarnished Quesnon trumpet for a song, but certain importers do the varnishing or silver-plating themselves - quite a money-spinner. That by no means makes it a precision instrument like, say, Laurent Blondiau's Kanstul bugle or Bert Joris' old Selmer. I personally like to get my instruments on second-hand markets or fairs, where you find a huge choice of reliable instruments that have been played in nicely. I remember picking up a Jupiter pocket trumpet once for BEF 5000. Rummaging around takes time, of course, and you need experience, but it's definitely worth it. Bert Bernaerts, a young musician who lives near Antwerp, chanced upon a vintage Martin Committee once - Miles Davis' brand - on a second-hand market in Boston. I made some enquiries about the name 'Martin Committee' and found out that the trumpet was designed by a committee of 50-odd music academy professors who licensed their patent to instrument maker Martin to be able to produce their instrument.'

Bart Maris has his own theory about avoiding feedback : 'I stick to the old principle, used by many a dance orchestra in the past: a small plexiglass shield is slid over the microphone, which projects your own sound straight back at you without feedback. It is also the most natural way of hearing your own sound.'

## **Michel Massot**

Tuba player/trombonist Michel Massot (°1960 in Halle) started off as a classical musician, amongst others as a soloist with the *Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège*, the BRT Orchestra, *Ensemble Synonymes*, which he founded himself in 1985, Georges-Ellie Octors' ensemble *Musique Nouvelle* and the Paris *Musique Oblique*. He was soon active on the present-day and avant-garde music scene, with Garrett List, Henri Pousseur and Jean-Pierre Peuvion, amongst others, and participated in works by the likes of Phillippe Boesmans and Bernard Foccroulle. With Michel Debrulle and Fabrizio Cassol, Michel Massot founded the Trio Bravo in 1984 (cf. albums '*Pas de Nain*', '*Hi-o-Ba*', '*Compact*' and the CD '*Quatrième Monde*'. See also : Michel Debrulle).

Michel Massot has also played, amongst others, with Baklava Rhythm and Sounds, *La Grande Formation*, *Le Collectif du Lion* (with Steve Lacy), Félix Simtaine's Act Big Band and Kris Defoort's Variations on a Love Supreme, and founded the band Bathyscaphe 5. He currently plays with, amongst others, *Rêve d'Eléphant Orchestra*, the Trio Grande, Kris Defoort & Dreamtime, Thomas & Co, *Tous Dehors*, Määk's Spirit and the Ictus Ensemble.

Foreign artists with whom Massot has worked, or still does work, include Claude Barthélémy, Gary Valente, Evan Parker, Christof Lauer, Wolfgang Pusching, Rabih Abouh Khalil, Martial Solal, Louis Sclavis, Henri Texier, Kenny Wheeler, Michel Portal, Ray Anderson, Andy Sheppard, Geoffroy de Measure, Han Bennink, Marc Ducret, François Merville, Nguyen Lè, Gilles Coronado and Guillaume Orti.

Michel Massot has been lecturing at the Liège Conservatoire for more than 20 years now and teaches improvisation.

Michel Massot : 'I must have been in the fifth year of primary school when I started playing the soprano sax. After six months, however, I'd had enough and my father - who played in a local brass band - gave me a bugle and a trumpet. I knew then that I was going to be a professional musician, instead of an athlete, my initial ambition.

When I was thirteen, I got my first prize at the academy: a record of Dizzy Gillespie with Stan Getz. I adored those wild bebop melodies, without realizing I was in fact listening to jazz. Meanwhile, my younger brother Olivier (now a soloist with the *Orchestre National* in Lyon and Paris), had introduced me to Frank Zappa's music.

When I was fifteen, I already earned money as a semi-professional jazz trumpeter in a ballroom orchestra, even though my parents didn't really like the idea of my being out until some ungodly hour every Saturday and Sunday. I also started playing in Dixieland bands then.

When my professor, himself a gifted tuba player/trombonist, saw me struggle on my trumpet, he lent me his tuba for a bit. A week later I had my own.. I had finally found the instrument I'd subconsciously been looking for all my life - amongst others because, apparently, I approached music as a bass player. The way I'd been playing my trombone had been giving this away too.

The very first jazz musicians I ever played with, were Gino Lattuca, Philippe Leblanc and Arnould Massart - I was still studying at the Mons Conservatoire at the time.

By enrolling at the Liège Conservatoire Jazz Seminar, where I also did improvisation, I automatically bumped into Garrett List one day. I hardly ever went to classes, I must admit. I was mainly interested in the jams with, amongst others, Jacques Pelzer, John Eardley, Fabrizio Cassol and Kris Defoort. Steve Grossman too, who lived in Liège at the time, often joined in, although I didn't like the mass hysteria over his person.

I also played in a jazz band where Jean-Pol Schroeder played the piano for a bit in those days. Schroeder is an excellent composer, by the way. In 1984 Michel Debrulle suggested to found the Trio Bravo with Fabrizio Cassol. Initially we played existing pieces by Pierre Vaiana, Denis Pousseur and Monk, but Fabrizio soon had us playing his own compositions. His first piece with the Trio Bravo was called Red Monk. People couldn't believe their ears. It was as if we came from another planet. Trio Bravo's music, which mainly floated on binary rhythms, was closer to rock than to jazz in those days. The absence of a bass and the limited strength created a few gaps in the sound spectrum, which I could only partly fill on my tuba. So we had to be extra inventive on Michel Debrulle's drum kit, for whom Fabrizio and myself made several arrangements. We have much less of a problem with that in the current Trio Grande. After all those years, Michel has sort of become an intrinsic part of the system. We also owe a lot to Laurent Dehors' wonderfully creative reed work.

I couldn't define the concept 'jazz' if I tried. All criteria music should meet to be termed jazz, according to some, have a limiting and - by definition - stifling effect. *Must* we have that ticking on the ride cymbal? *Must* people absolutely take turns playing? *Must* the double bass always play in such a way and the piano in another?... I'm quite able to decide whether or not something *feels* like jazz, thank you very much. Take a classical jazz student. He knows exactly how to play a swing, bebop or other jazz piece, because he has been taught to do so by interpreting other people's scores, including other people's improvisations, without having any say in the matter whatsoever. That musician has learnt how to phrase, but doesn't have a clue how to improvise. Once, in an improvisation exercise in France I was doing for a jazz master class, I invited each jazz student to present a jazz piece. I heard the most predictable, clichéd phrases: a piece of badly played blues on piano, a spasmodic passage of walking bass,

a miserable bossa nova ditty on guitar, the pits - but most of all: anything but jazz. Then I asked them to play what took their fancy in an uncontrolled fashion. Incredible! The craziest, most fascinating things : a polytonal version of 'Au clair de la lune' on piano, a wild bass solo, a guitarist gone crazy..., at last they had started improvising with their own sound. Jazz at last! - I concluded, pleased as punch.

The ensemble playing too is extremely important. The best soloist will draw a blank unless he or she gets the support of an ensemble that plays together perfectly, in which each player sustains his/her part. I talked about it the other day with Guillaume Orti. He's an absolute master, I reckon. He can do anything and truly masters all the parameters. He never flaunts this either and stays extremely humble. Which does him honour.'

## **Octurn**

Anyone who regularly attends concerts at the Sounds jazz club, Athanor Studio or the former Marcus Mingus, knows how often they degenerate into wild jam sessions. More often than not, some musician somewhere in the audience, who happens to have brought his/her instrument along and has become so wrapped up in the atmosphere, lets his hair down, joins in. Some musicians actually go and jam at such clubs each week. The cherry on the cake is when, after some time, chance encounters generate ensembles whose improvisations yield a clearly recognizable repertoire. That's exactly how Octurn saw the light: at Sounds, in '90. Striking about it all, is that the ensemble's strength keeps changing. They have released three truly excellent CDs on the Bruges W.E.R.F. label ('*Chromatic History*', '*Ocean*', '*Round*') now followed by '*Dimensions*' in 'The Finest in Belgian Jazz' series, and performed at, amongst others, the North Sea Jazz Festival, *Jazz à Liège*, Jazz Middelheim, *Festival des Lundis d'Hortense*, What is Jazz at the Knitting Factory (NY), the *Festival de Jazz de Montréal* and the Audi Jazz Festival. Octurn, today, consists of Laurent Blondiau (t, flhn), Geoffroy de Masure (tb), Guillaume Orti (as), Bo Van der Werf (bs), Pierre Van Dormael (g), Fabian Fiorini (p), Jean-Luc Lehr and Otti Van der Werf (el b) and Chander Sardjoe (d). What its strength will be tomorrow, nobody knows.

The music Octurn currently produces lies somewhere between present-day classical and polyrhythmic, M-base like jazz groove. At Jazz Middelheim 2001, the American saxophonist Greg Osby was their guest. The new Octurn repertoire has been composed by Geoffroy de Masure, Bo Van der Werf and Antoine Prawerman. Anyone familiar with their music, knows what unpredictable sounds the different blends may produce. It is that very unpredictability, combined with the dialogue between explosive, polyrhythmic beats, rich, funky bass lines and a wonderful mix of contemporary music, big band swing, bop tunes and jazz rock fusion which make the public crave more after each performance.

### **Work by important composers, custom-written for Octurn**

The music Octurn played at their latest projects, was not composed by the group members alone, but mainly by others too, and not just anyone either. Pianist Kris Defoort, who has done guest performances with them, has written quite a few pieces for them. Other renowned composers have done so too, like the New York pianist Kenny Werner, Frederic Rzewski, the New York saxophonist Patrick Zimmerli, Walter Hus and Denis Pousseur. The result of such compositional diversity, is a fascinating cross-over between present-day, classical and jazz.

### **Musicians with a wide variety of backgrounds and educational curricula**

Bo Van Der Werf: 'All the composers we asked to write music for Octurn, had watched us play extensively before. That is what's so nice about it: we never had to twist anybody's arm.'



Kris Defoort, Denis Pousseur, Frederic Rzewski are all so enthusiastic about our way of playing that they'll gladly write music for us. Even Kenny Werner must have found it a challenge to compose for us. I'd never heard anything like it from him before. Our way of playing has apparently inspired some of us, especially Chander. Chander is an excellent successor to Stéphane Galland, who recently had to leave the project for lack of time. Each piece takes place in an entirely different universe, which is unavoidable in view of the various composers' different backgrounds. Rzewski, Hus and Pousseur are present-day classical composers before anything else, whilst Werner and Defoort are more familiar with jazz. That is why we must move from one world to the other seamlessly and as naturally as possible, without ever letting our attention slacken. Quite a few music pieces are indeed made up of changeable passages which have been known to take unexpected turns. Imagine the public seeing us slave away on stage or ploughing our way through those scores. The very thought! We need tough rehearsals to give the impression it's all a piece of cake. Only then does the audience get value for money.

I have heard reactions from critics checking our staff list, asking themselves whether this hotchpotch of musicians from such a variety of backgrounds and trainings, could ever play coherently - until the moment they did hear us play. The biggest challenge lies in adding value to the scores written by others through your way of playing. It is those confrontations that make it so fascinating to work with Octurn.

Not all composers leave equal room for improvisation, though. For the CD *'Round'*, for example, Kenny Werner first handed us a series of basic score fragments which we could improvise on during the first rehearsals, which he also attended. What new elements were found, were neatly strung together in the shape of modules and after the odd adaptation, he seamlessly glued them together again. Frederic Rzewski, on the other hand (*'The Cradle Will Rock'* and *'When the Wind Blows'*), wants us to play exactly what is written in the score, be it with maximum abandon and conviction. We are free, however, to play the way we are used to: we decide on the timbres, grooves and such.' We have decided to mainly play compositions by the group members themselves, or at least pieces related as closely as possible to our own musical approach. And, wouldn't you know it? Overnight, this new formation has given the group a new dimension: today's method opens entirely new perspectives for us, take us to apparently endless horizons.'

## **Odds On**

Odds On was founded not so long ago by composer/saxophonist Tom Van Dijck (°March 25th 1967), together with guitarist Andreas Suntrup, bass player Mark Haanstra and drummer Kris Duerinckx. Their CD *'About Time'*, released in June 2002, illustrates the quartet's approach of standards - which they tend to transform so drastically, that more often than not the original is hardly recognizable at all in their present-day version.

The combination of the tenor sax' lyrical sound and the limpid guitar parts - occasionally reminiscent of Bill Frisell -, with their typical fretless bass lines and subtly, dynamically drummed rhythms, yields a crisp and infectious sound that takes the listener to the meeting place of bebop, cool and modern jazz, with M-base like musical forms, whilst the traditional jazz vocabulary is injected with elements from African and Indian cultures.

## Ivan Paduart

Many artists, amongst whom Tom Harrell, Toots Thielemans, Richard Galliano, Didier Lockwood, Philip Catherine, Bob Malach, Charlie Mariano, Marcia Maria, Claude Nougaro and Maurane have either worked for or with pianist Ivan Paduart (35), whose *'Trio Live'* must be his thirteenth album or so.

Ivan Paduart : 'Today, in the jazz section of your record shop, you come across heaps of music that barely deserves to be termed 'swinging'. A lot of people refuse to consider this music 'jazz', quite rightly. Some will argue that a touch of saxophone and a bit of improvising suffice to make something into 'jazz'. I don't agree. To me Aka Moon's music is not jazz, because it desperately lacks harmony. By which I am not saying the music is no good, on the contrary. I find it fascinating. Michel Hatzi is amongst the best bass players in the world - but don't try and tell me that what Aka Moon plays is jazz. Pianist Martial Solal is another genius. But one thing is beyond dispute : his music doesn't swing.'

## Dré Pallemmaerts

Dré Pallemmaerts was born in 1964 in Antwerp and took his first drumming lessons at 15. Two years later, he met bass player John Clayton, who introduced him to Jeff Hamilton, his drum teacher in the States in 1984. One year later, the Belgian minister of culture asked him to play at the Singapore Jazz Festival with some great artists from Belgium, such as Jacques Pelzer, Steve Houben, Michel Herr, Bert Joris and Charles Loos.

In Jack van Poll's trio, he not only shared the stage with Hein van de Geyn, but also with international top soloists and vocalists such as Deborah Brown, Arnett Cobb, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Dave Pike and Etta Cameron. He has played with several ensembles, both in Belgium and abroad, amongst which the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, Määk's Spirit, Bob Brookmeyer, Toon Roos and Kurt Van Herck's quartets and the trios of Kris Defoort, Erwin Vann, Michel Herr and Frank Vaganée. 'Youth and Music Flanders' gave Dré Pallemmaerts first prize in 1991. In 1998, he took part in the recordings of Bert Joris's soundtrack for Julien Vreebos' film *Le Bal Masqué*. Amongst the great artists Dré Pallemmaerts has worked with, we find names such as Toots Thielemans, John Scofield, Art Farmer, Archie Shepp, Norma Winstone, Slide Hampton, Junior Cook, Teddy Edwards, Mal Waldron, Wolfgang Engstfeld, John Ruocco, Joe Lovano, Fred Hersch, Dave Kikoski, Philip Catherine (on the CD *'Oscar'*, Igloo) and Serge Lazarevitch. Dré Pallemmaerts has been a member of the Bill Carrothers Trio for a while now, alongside Nic Thys (on the CD *'Swing Sing Songs'*). In his own drum'n bass project *Mother*, we find tenorist Erwin Vann, bass player Otti Van der Werf and vocalist Ann Van der Plassche. Dré Pallemmaerts lectures at the Antwerp Jazz studio and the Leuven Lemmens Institute and holds workshops, amongst others, at the Rotterdam Conservatoire and the Bern Swiss Jazz School.

In the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series, Dré Pallemmaerts can be heard on the Bert Joris Quartet CD.

### No judgement

Dré Pallemmaerts : 'To me, music is a state of mind, something I cannot do without to feel good - both mentally and physically -, like others need going to the sauna or going fishing, skiing, boozing or watching football, you name it. Music has a meditative effect on me. In that sense, I find every form of music fascinating and never stop to think whether what I'm doing is jazz, rock, pop, techno or something else, as long as it is music.'

What matters in music, to me, is that it frees you completely from what anchors you in this world. The minute you manage, as a musician, to retrieve that freedom whenever you start playing, you have met one of music's prime goals. If, on top of this, you also succeed in transferring that feeling onto your audience, in becoming one with them *and* the site you're playing, you're truly on your way to becoming a great artist. This goes for any activity, in fact - whether you're a sports person, cabinet-maker, architect, florist, captain at sea, whatever.

The other day, someone came and asked me how I managed to resist the temptation of latching things on to my relatively sober set of drums. I have no desire whatsoever to do so. I by no means look upon my instrument as a mere set of drums anyway. All I have to do is think, say, of a piano to actually hear it instead of the drum skins and cymbals I'm currently playing. It is not uncommon, in my solos, for me to suddenly hear myself playing bass, sax, you name it. At times like those, words such as tom, snare drum or hihat are just as remote as - say - frost patches in Provence in July or forest fires in the Sahara.

I'm more of a timbre man myself, which I like to determine whilst actually playing. I love to toy with the sound of various drum skins by bending them into the most unconceivable sounds, for example. Call it the *flexible element* of music making, if you like.

I also literally sing along with everything I drum (be it usually between my teeth). Another, equally important element in everything I do - certainly in my music - is energy retention. It is my way of *measuring* music, like surfers do the strength of rolling waves to draw maximum energy from, make the most of and blend with them. Every note you play actually contains extensive information about the next one, which you are being sucked into, so to speak. No way will you find that note if you think rationally. You have to abandon yourself to it. That's what we call the *inflexible element* in the musical learning curve.

'No judgement' is another important element in music making. Why rack your brains over whether what you are playing is beautiful or horrible? As soon as you start passing that kind of judgement, you become vulnerable and automatically less confident about how you're playing. Your own ratio is a great creator of paradoxes and will invariably limit you in your actions. The minute you give in, what you are doing is no longer spontaneous or honest.

It starts with the way you observe, perceive and analyse what you have just perceived. It is not uncommon for the intellect to take over the very minute you start doing so. As a result, many a musician goes against the grain of the music's energy. In my opinion, our intellect should only be used to store experiences and reflect upon them, not to decide what you will or will not do.

I am at my best with musicians who get completely carried away by the music. I have been working on this electronic project with Joachim Saerens, a young pianist. He is the only one, so far, with whom the project has been successful, because we are obviously on the same wavelength regarding making the most of a moment and using its energy. Joachim's sounding board is a Fender Rhodes, while I solely rely on electronics. I have also become increasingly fond of using my laptop. Where I derive my inspiration from? If you really want names: Elvin Jones is the absolute top. Tony Williams was a true innovator. The way in which Philly Joe Jones and Mel Lewis make a set of drums sound like a symphony orchestra has taught me a lot too. From Billy Hart and Paul Motian I have learnt heaps about the evolution of my own music. Those are but a handful of the people on my list, of course.

## Pay Day In March

Tom Wouters (° July 9th 1971 in Turnhout), whom we know from Flat Earth Society, Think of One and Kamikaze, and as frontman of the trio Pay Day in March, was introduced to a motley variety of music genres by his mother and brother (Louis Prima, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, as well as Velvet Underground, Joy Division, Will Tura and Louis Neefs). When he was 9, he started doing percussion with the local brass band. He was not exactly a whiz kid at melodic dictation, so at fourteen, he was told to learn a melodic instrument to sharpen his ear. He eventually opted for the clarinet.

Tom Wouters actually practised on Peter Vermeersch' bass clarinet, after the latter lent it to him for two years. Percussionist/composer Frank Nuyts, one of Tom Wouters' lecturers, has played a major part in his development as a musician.

Tom Wouters : 'These last few years, I've mainly concentrated on carrying groove and swing across as spontaneously and smoothly as possible. In the past, when I was too serious about music, the thought never crossed my mind. Even the most difficult and most complex pieces must be experienced by the public as a cinch. When I used to watch Captain Beefheart and his musicians, I said to myself : 'I can do this too' ... until I tried it at home.'

## Jacques Pirotton

Jacques Pirotton was born in Xhoris (near Liège) in 1955 and played the guitar - which he fully taught himself - in various dance orchestras and rock groups from the age of 15. Immediately after coming across jazz, he started taking guitar lessons with Bill Frisell at the *Séminaire du Jazz* at the Liège Conservatoire.

In 1980, Jacques Pirotton - then a member of the jazz rock group *Sambal Oelek* - definitively opted for a career as a professional musician. A year later he started a close co-operation with Jacques Pelzer. As The Two J.P.s, they recorded an album in 1984. Since then, Pirotton has worked, amongst others, with Serge Lazarevitch, John Thomas, John Eardley, Garrett List, Chet Baker, Woody Shaw, Dave Pike, Charlie Green, Steve Houben, Michel Herr and Guy Cabay.

With Eric Legnini (ky), Benoît Vanderstraeten (el b) and André Charlier (d), Pirotton founded Artline in 1987, for which he composed a number of fusion numbers (LP '*Labyrinthe*'). He has released a few other CDs with the trio, without Legnini. The many CDs with Pirotton on them, include Octurn's '*Ocean*' and '*Round*' (W.E.R.F.).

## Antoine Prawerman

This Paris born clarinetist - who now lives in Brussels - and his ensemble Deep in the Deep have released two CDs with his own compositions ('*Au Fond, dans la Mer, une Etoile se Réflète sur le Ventre d'Argent des Poissons*', with Art Public, and '*Snake Ear*', J.A.S.). The project has since been replaced by Vegetal Beauty, in which, alongside Prawerman, we currently find trumpeter Laurent Blondiau, alto Stéphane Payen, bass player Luc Evens and drummer Frank Vaillant. They often perform with hip-hop dance collective Mad Spirit, led by his partner, choreographer Fatou Traoré. Prawerman also regularly composes for Octurn.

Prawerman can be heard on CDs by Aka Moon (Carbon 7), Pirly Zurstrassen's H Septet (Carbon 7), *La Grande Formation* (Igloo and Carbon 7) and Fabrizio Cassol & Kris Defoort (W.E.R.F.).

In 1998 Antoine Prawerman was voted best clarinettist in Belgium by both the Francophone and Flemish national radio stations.

Antoine Prawerman : 'The fact that I spent so much time concentrating on figures, their logic and mechanisms, is one of the main elements in the genesis of my compositions. It has helped me quickly absorb various complex polyrhythmic structures, for example, such as Pythagoras' thesis - one of the pillars of arithmetical harmony.

Striking a perfect balance between rhythm, harmony and melody is one of my main concerns when I'm composing. All three must be present. Every way in which music can be experienced - singing, dancing or mere listening - is equally essential.'

## **Paolo Radoni**

Paolo Radoni, born in 1949 in Cairo Montenotte (Italy), came to live in Belgium with his parents at a relatively young age. As he grew up, Paolo's musical interests grew from classical over Italian popular songs and variety to rock and jazz. The latter was mainly the result of his parents' impressive collection of 78s.

From the age of twelve, Radoni taught himself to play the guitar. It soon became clear that this was an excessively broad-minded artist. He immediately had a band of his own too.

At fifteen, he held his first electrical guitar. He immediately tried out pieces by The Shadows, Stones and Beatles, even though jazz did keep the upper hand.

From 1968 to 1978 Paolo Radoni made his debut as a professional musician in the progressive blues rock formation Here and Now, together with Marc Hollander, Denis Van Hecke, Vincent Kennis and Daniel Denis. He also became a full member of the cult bands Kleptomania and Arkam (again with Daniel Denis).

Four years or so later, Paolo Radoni returned to jazz and joined Chris Joris and the South-African bass player Johnny 'Mbizo' Dyani for a number of performances and recordings.

By then, Paolo Radoni not only played concerts in most European countries, but also in Japan, Canada and Africa. Lee Konitz, Ricardo del Frà, Paolo Fresu, Clifford Thornton, Christine Schaller, Joe Lovano, Rachel Gould, Joe Lee Wilson, Francis Varis... are but a few of the artists he has worked with.

Together with Jean-Louis Rassinfosse and Bruno Castellucci, Radoni founded a trio a few years ago, that has been made into a quartet with pianist Ron van Rossum on many occasions. Ben Sluijs, Bas Cooijmans and Félix Simtaine are also full members of Paolo Radoni's bands. With them, he released the CD '*Coast to Coast*' (Lyrae Records) in 1999.

Paolo Radoni teaches guitar at the Brussels Conservatoire.

Paolo Radoni : 'In my time you still got music lessons at primary school. I was lucky to have a brilliant teacher, who taught me to sing. I immediately joined the school choir, even though I had already set my mind on becoming a guitarist. When I was twelve, my parents gave me a guitar. It had cost them BEF 1,200. Finally I was able to sing and accompany myself - a dream come true.

I remember that, as a child, I often heard Louis Armstrong on the radio. Little did we know then that this was jazz. To us, this music meant as much as what is now called 'pop'. I soon realized that Armstrong was a man of many talents. He sang, played the trumpet, entertained and even acted in a number of films. At the age of 12, I read his biography and studied his work, because I somehow sensed that I was headed in the same direction myself. I also listened to chanson, variety, rock'n'roll and pop in those days, all the radio music people my age were into. My favourites were The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Cream,

The Who, Zappa and a thousand others. With our school band, we played covers of The Shadows, preferably pieces in which you could improvise, which already hinted to a clear preference for jazz, *and* blues. Jazz largely owes its sense of adventure and freedom to blues, which I experienced myself as a member of my good friend Paul Ambach's Ambach Cirkus (who hadn't hit the stage as Boogie Boy yet in those days). The first foreign artist Ambach brought to Belgium as a concert organizer, was Muddy Waters (with myself and the Ambach Cirkus as supporting act). I'm convinced he is the reason why, to this day, I invariably include some blues in my concerts.

To be honest, I have always considered jazz and blues to be one huge house with many rooms in it. When I listen to jazz, I never ask myself whether I'm listening to New Orleans, swing, bebop, cool jazz, what have you, even though I clearly hear the differences between each period. What really gets me is the way in which those differences are increasingly being cultivated. As if the record industry and the media, ignoring all principles of natural evolution, want to make us believe that every few years somebody, somewhere will come up with a totally new genre from within this Darwinistic survival-of-the-fittest ambition. True innovators do not innovate for the sake of it, but rather as a result of their itinerary.

Over the years, I have come to realize that bebop is one of the most fundamental pillars in my personal development as a musician. When I was about 23, I spent virtually an entire year listening to Charlie Parker's music, which made me realize that bebop is the natural synthesis of the spontaneous and wild character of blues and the structuredness, sophistication and complexity of classical music. Just lend a careful ear to Art Tatum and Coleman Hawkins. They used entire passages from classical composers in their effervescent improvisations, which was unusual in those days.

Most reassuring, to me, in the way a lot of today's musicians and jazz lovers experience jazz, is the way boundaries between the various movements get blurred. Inside one concert, it is not uncommon to hear a healthy mix of swing, bebop, fusion, Latin, jazz, etc. without the public considering it a mishmash of styles. What matters in jazz, is the way in which the artist puts his own personality into what he does, using the existing, huge repertoire as creatively and honestly as possible : every music belongs to everybody, so let's respect it.'

## **Jean-Louis Rassinfosse**

Jean-Louis Rassinfosse was born in Brussels on January 9th 1952 and started off singing - accompanying himself on guitar -, mainly songs from the *chanson* repertoire (Brassens etc.), as well as pop and rock. He also had his own blues band at the time. Little Rassinfosse grew up with the nd music his parents played. Only when he happened to hear a Django Reinhardt record, however, did he truly become a jazz convert. When his strict guitar teacher Emile Letellier, turned out to be a jazz lover to boot, young Rassinfosse started playing more and more jazz on his guitar. Whilst listening to records by Django, for example, he invariably took the bass line, which incited him to swap his guitar for a double bass.

Jean-Louis Rassinfosse: 'Over the years, my fingers seemed to have grown too big for guitar, a problem I initially tried to solve using a 12-string instead of a six-string guitar. One day, however, I got myself a 1920 double bass through a small ad, and I haven't looked back since. I must have been 20 or so.'

Dixieland and middle jazz were the first styles Rassinfosse taught himself on his double bass, amongst others via many jams with people such as Marc Herouet and André Knapen who, like himself, soon became part of Pol Closset's Dixieland Gamblers, the band with which he made his very first professional recording, barely six months after having played his first double bass notes.

Double bass players were few and far between in those days in Belgium. Apart from Roger Vanhaverbeke, Paul Dubois and Freddie Deronde - who had been active in the field for quite a while by then - and Jean Warland, who spent most of his time abroad, the jazz combos depended on foreign double bass players. Rassinfosse gradually started taking over the trombone parts on double bass, which obviously made the bass lines sound much richer and gradually had him evolving towards bebop, until one day, in 1975, he met pianist Charles Loos, who had just returned from the States, where he had studied at Berklee College. The two ended up intensively playing together for almost 7 years. Meanwhile, Rassinfosse - now a much wanted double bass player at many concerts - had accompanied many a touring artist, such as Bill Coleman, Slide Hampton, Philly Joe Jones, Sal Nistico, Pepper Adams, Clifford Jordan, Joe Henderson and Michel Petrucciani. This exceptionally fast developing bass player was often called upon abroad as well, and has played alongside Sam Rivers and Martial Solal at the festival of Juan Les Pins, for example.

Another important encounter for 24-year-old Rassinfosse was with Chet Baker, with whom he initially toured for three months and then non-stop for an entire year. Upon his return in Belgium, everybody suddenly wanted him for performances and recordings: Toots Thielemans, Etienne Verschuere, Jacques Pelzer, Michel Herr, Philip Catherine, Richard Rousselet, Steve Houben, Bruno Castellucci, the Act Big Band, Saxo 1000 etc. In the ten years during which he often got together with Chet Baker, the latter released six albums with Rassinfosse. As a trio with Philip Catherine, they performed all over Europe.

Rassinfosse took up a lecturing job at the Liège *Séminaire du Jazz* in the early Eighties. Round about the same time, he co-founded *Les Lundis d'Hortense*. With Charles Loos, Greg Badolato, Serge Lazarevitch and Félix Simtaine, he released the first record ('Sava') on their band label LDH, now the prolific Igloo-Sowarex.

Jean-Louis Rassinfosse: 'No major label was interested in our music at the time, which is why we ended up taking the initiative ourselves: organizing festivals, recording and releasing albums, contacting jazz clubs and so on. You have to record and release your music, take it into the outside world, if you want it to evolve. This eventually yielded *Les Lundis d'Hortense*, with the idea of promoting budding jazz artists and making sure the jazz spirit was preserved - this eternal finger on the pulse of democracy and freedom inside music and the bands playing it. Improvising on known standards and new material - by definition one of the basic principles of jazz - perfectly symbolises this freedom.'

Stéphane Galland and Rassinfosse played together in the trio founded by Eric Legnini in the early Eighties, with which he recorded various CDs.

### **Humour in jazz and a clearly recognizable sound**

With his hilarious commentaries (full of puns and double entendres) at concerts with *L'Ame des Poètes* (cf. the recent CD '*Elle est à toi, cette chanson*', Igloo) and his own octet (cf. the recent CD '*Crossworlds*', Igloo) Rassinfosse deflates the cliché of the intellectualistic, present-day jazz ensemble that has become totally alienated from its audience, and bridges the current gap between audience and artist. Striking, in all this, is his typical bass playing.

Jean-Louis Rassinfosse: 'The fact that I am very attracted to vocal music, clearly transpires in my bass playing, which tends to be quite melodic, not to say melancholy, rather than rhythmical. I also like bass players who play cantabile a lot, like Red Mitchell, one of my all-time idols.'

Any reason why Rassinfosse's double bass has five strings?

Jean-Louis Rassinfosse: 'When I bought the double bass I am still playing today, I noticed that the instrument had one string more than usual. Someone suggested to have it made into a

4-string bass, but I decided to keep the instrument in its original state and added a higher c-string, which, in retrospect, strongly increased the melodic factor in my bass playing, even more so since that high c-string reverberates a lot longer than the others.'

Jean Louis Rassinfosse was voted best Belgian acoustic bass player by both the Francophone RTBF and Flemish VRT radio stations in 1998.

## **Daniel Romeo**

This self-taught musician, who once got the odd lesson from Michel Hatzigeorgiou, combines the styles of Jaco Pastorius and Marcus Miller.

Belgian pop artists, like Axelle Red and Victor Lazlo, are avid users of his talents and he is well known in Paris, where he has been a member of Electric Six for 7-odd years now (with Eric Legnini, Stefano di Bastista, Flavio Boltro, Jean-Pierre Taieb and Paco Sery, the drummer of The Joe Zawinul Syndicate). Anyone who ever saw him play alongside Kurt Van Herck, Nic Thys, Dré Pallemmaerts, Eric Legnini or Stéphane Galland, to name but a few, will be familiar with Daniel Romeo's unique bass playing. Those who have seen him work with his own band, to boot, which usually has pianist Legnini, Hammond organist Bert Gielen, guitarist Martijn van Agt, saxophonist Kurt Van Herck, keyboards Xavier Tribolet and drummer Patrick Dorcean in it, will agree this country is too small for his immense talent. His debut CD '*Live at the Sounds*' more than meets international standards of excellence. Guitarist Mike Stern and others, play on two tracks on his next CD (not yet released when this book was in progress).

## **Richard Rousselet**

(see History & Ecaroh)

## **Slang**

A few years ago, a three-headed monster surfaced from the muggy morass that is the ever-increasing, ever-muggier twilight zone between jazz, rock and world music. Slowly but surely, it is making its way to a fast growing flock of fans. The shouts it produces have various influences merging into a completely new sound, in which we recognize blues, Coltranian jazz, Hendrix-like rock, jazz rock with a hint of Tony Williams, Arab music, even Latino and flamenco elements. This gigantic mix of cultures seems most natural in the band's compositions, all written by the members themselves : bass player/vocalist François Garny (who played with Arno and Jack Bruce), alto-soprano flautist/vocalist Manuel Hermia and percussionist/vocalist Michel Seba - better known to us as Slang.

## **Ben Sluijs**

Ben Sluijs was born on March 6th 1967 in Antwerp. He did 5 years of classical music, followed by another 4 years at the Jazz Studio, where he attended John Ruocco's Wednesday afternoon classes as a free student. Steve Houben was his professor at the jazz department of the Brussels Conservatoire.

No less than Stacy Rowles, Dré Pallemmaerts, Nathalie Lories and Stefan Lievestro play on Ben Sluijs' debut album. Amongst the various bands and projects Ben Sluijs participated or



still participates in, we find the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, Octurn, the Paolo Radoni Quartet, *Ten-Tamarre*, the Jan Mues Septet, Emanon Five, the Jos Moons Big Band, the Yellow City Big Band, the BRT Big Band, Sax No End, the Act Big Band, Jean Warland's ensemble and the Myriam Alter Quintet. He has worked together with, amongst others, Philip Catherine, Michel Herr and Bert Joris.

In 1992 Ben Sluijs won the Jack Van Poll Award and in 1999 he received the Antoon Van Dijck Prize.

With his own quartet, in which pianist Erik Vermeulen, bass player Piet Verbist and drummer Eric Thielemans lend him their professional assistance for his compositions, Ben Sluijs has released the CDs '*Food for Free*' (On Purpose), '*Candy Century*' and '*Seasounds*' (W.E.R.F.). '*Stones*', a duo CD with Erik Vermeulen was released on Jazz'halo virtually at the same time as '*Seasounds*'.

### **Punk, new wave and jazz**

Ben Sluijs : 'My father only listened to classical music. Even though I wasn't exactly keen, I did subconsciously take some of it in, which doubtless accounts for the classical influences in my compositions. My father also insisted that I learn to play the violin and enrolled me for it - much too early, in fact. I didn't have the patience, let alone the interest, and despite the custom-made, private lessons, I didn't do very well. The teacher also made it very clear that I was much too young.

My first confrontation with jazz took place when I was about five, when my brother came home with a Joe Jackson record: '*Jumpin' Jive*', in which he plays with a full big band. Those were the heydays of punk, followed by new wave and its various offshoots, such as UB40's reggae and Madness' ska, which I positively adored. The sound of the saxophone in all those bands greatly appealed to me, but my father refused to get me one. Until, one day, much to my mother's relief, he gave in - but insisted I shouldn't give up the violin. I was 15. Thank God you make relatively dramatic and spectacular progress on the saxophone when you first start. I see exactly the same thing in my students. Take Bart Defoort : he must have been 18/19 when he took up the saxophone, and look what he's doing now!

I clearly remember my mother coming home from the academy with the alto sax. I immediately started playing it. Come evening, I couldn't sip my drink because I had blown my lips to tatters. Little did I know that the reed had to point down instead of up...! And it sounded good too! A year later I was playing in a new wave band.

I also remember how impressed I was by John Ruocco's charisma, the very first time he taught me at the Jazz Studio - which hasn't been the same since he left. John immediately hit it off with his students. What I liked so much about the Jazz Studio, was the enormous freedom you got as a student. I also met lovely people there, such as Jeroen Van Herzeele, Frank Vaganée, Kurt Van Herck (an alto, in fact, which you can hear from the way he plays tenor sax) and Nic Thys. The latter had already founded a funk jazz band with drummer Bilou Doneux, pianist Ivan Paduart and tenor Frank Deruyter.'

### **In quest of an own, musical identity**

Ben Sluijs : 'I'm convinced I owe a great deal of my free spirit, as a composer and player, to my father's sometimes shattering dominance, which I was forever trying to escape. I have the impression my music contains a large dose of escapism, at least that's what people sometimes come and tell me. I myself feel as if I'm constantly trying to 'play myself away'. By which I am not saying that I'm a great innovator. That's certainly not the plan. I want to approach existing material as creatively as possible and be as truthful as possible to myself whilst doing so. I also keep putting myself into question. What I want exactly, isn't clear. I do, however, know what I *don't* want and immediately throw it overboard. In that context, I am often

reminded of an important remark my teacher made, which I'll never forget : 'Don't play the way you *want* to play, just play the way you play.'

I have always experienced music as a mystery, whereby magic and dynamism are caught in sound. That is why lyricism will always be important to me. I am not judging people like Steve Coleman, who push the concept of 'emotion' to the background and use computers to write their compositions, which you clearly hear. By intellectualising music, you make it very complex, which may yield fascinating and highly imposing results, but also automatically eliminates part of the mystery and dynamism - purely by rationalising it and 'making it accessible'. Personally, I still prefer the magic and strength of the simplicity of one or two truly felt notes to an overwhelming torrent of many-layered melodies over a complex rhythm structure which is meant to blow me away, but doesn't move me in the least.'

## **Emmanuelle Somer**

This composer, born in 1972, who studied at the Brussels Conservatoire from 1989 to 1993, studied collective improvisation with Fabrizio Cassol and Michel Massot. At the Boston Berklee College of Music, where she did three years of jazz improvisation on oboe and composition, she attended classes with Greg Baldato, Bill Pierce and Ken Pullig, amongst others. In 1995, she received the Berklee Annual Wind Ensemble Concerto Composition Award. Together with pianist Marc Mangen, Emmanuelle Somer formed the Somer-Mangen Quartet at the time.

As leader of the Helios Quartet, with, amongst others, guitarist Peter McCann, she plays her own compositions, mixing modern jazz, jazz rock fusion and avant-garde. She recently started a new band with Michel Massot, Chander Sardjoe and Marco Puntin.

In June 1998, Emmanuelle Somer released the CD '*Apple Tree*' (Lyrae Records), with the Helios Quartet and the Tone Poets (with, amongst others, Chris Potter and Jim Black).

## **Eric Thielemans**

Eric Thielemans was born in 1969 and started percussion and solfeggio classes at the Overijse academy at the age of ten. He also did classical piano, harmony and ensemble at the Brussels academy. His masters at the Antwerp jazz studio were Dré Pallemmaerts and Jan de Haas. At various summer training courses, he followed classes with Billy Hart. Eric Thielemans also attended various initiation courses in Indonesian music.

His refined drumming style is mainly characterized by an unrelenting quest for timbres, which many musicians greatly appreciate : Erik Vermeulen, Michel Hatzigeorgiou, Michel Bisceglia, Erwin Vann, Serge Lazarevitch, Kurt Van Herck, Ben Sluijs... have all made use or still make use of his talent, which has meanwhile also found its way into free jazz (Barre Phillips, Eddy Loozen, Véronique Bizet and others).

In 2002, Eric Thielemans participated in the recordings of the new CD of Laurent Blondiau's Määk's Spirit at *CC De Meent* in Alsemberg. That same year, he also introduced his own project, *Rrauw*.

## **Think Of One**

This funny travelling band, whose dilapidated van doubles up as a mobile stage, plays highly infectious music you couldn't reduce to a common denominator if you tried. Live, they are a

true revelation : a motley crew that does, however, dish out the most complex pieces of music with the greatest ease. The musical nucleus around which Think of One operates, currently consists of David 'Swa Mobile' Bovée (g, v), Tomas 'Matsi' De Smet (b, d, v), Tobe Wouters (tba), Eric Morrel (ts), Bart Maris (t) and Roel 'Porino' Poriau (d), with Tom Wouters (cl), Jan Peeters (bs), Tom Pintens (ky) and Ruben Deprez plus Stefan Blancke (tb) as occasional contributors.

Their latest CD '*Naft 2*' has just been released on Zonk. The Antwerp dialect on it has definitely acquired a Maghreb ring, and David Bovée's typical solo guitars still hover somewhere between the late Frank Zappa and John Abercrombie. The wind sections occasionally make the music slightly more jazzy, yet the brass band element, mixed with any number of ethnic style figures is never far away.

To find out about this band, simply surf to [www.thinkofone.be](http://www.thinkofone.be) and [www.makerij.be](http://www.makerij.be)

## Nic Thys

Bass player Nic Thys (32) finished his studies at the Hilversum Conservatoire in 1993 and took extra lessons with Marc Johnson, Marc Helias and Dave Holland. He soon became a much wanted bass player and worked with the likes of Lee Konitz, Michael Clark, Toot Thielemans, Garrett List, Wim Overgaww, Jasper Van 't Hof, Mark Turner, Bob Malach, Toon Roos, Rick Hollander, Ferdinand Povel, Kris Defoort, Jarmo Hoogendijk, Richard Rousselet and Marc Ducret.

Nic Thys' name can be found on 30-odd CD's, amongst which K.D.'s Decade '*Live*' (W.E.R.F.), Félix Simtaine's '*Intensive Act*' (Igloo), '*Le Singulier des Pluriels*' by Tomas & Co, '*Another Day, Another Dollar*', by the Kurt Van Herck Quartet (Igloo), '*Live*' and '*The September Sessions*', by the Brussels Jazz Orchestra (BRTN and W.E.R.F.), '*Moving*' by the Bart Defoort Quartet (W.E.R.F.), '*Into Pieces*' by the Eric Vermeulen Icarus Consort (Igloo), '*Hybrid Offspring*', by Martinez Move (VIAJazz), '*Clair Obscur*' by Ivan Paduart (A Records), '*Ocean*' and '*Round*' by Octurn (W.E.R.F.), '*Buddies*' by Peter Hertmans (Jazz'halo), '*Speed Life*' by Nils Wogram (Enja), '*Standards*' by David Linx (Travers) and '*Swing Swing Songs*' by Bill Carrothers. In 1997 he released his own CD, '*Alice's 5 Moons*' (Crossover) - which Jan Kuijken refers to as the most fun musical experience of his life. On the sleeve we see Alice, Nic's little daughter, with the *Five Moons*, the five members of the quintet overhead : Thys himself, Falk Willis (d), Jan Kuijken, (clo), John Schröder (g) and Jeroen Van Herzeele (ts).

In 2000, Nic Thys moved to New York, doubtless in quest of new challenges and a better future. He works there with, amongst others, Bill Carrothers, Ben Waltzer, Takuya Nakamura, D.D. Goodman, Dan Weezer, Christian Ulrich and the High Noon Quintet, with pianist John Dryden.

In his own country, Nic Thys regularly surfaces in jazz clubs, preferably the Brussels Archiduc, as special guest with his brother's band Take The Duck, or with Dré Pallemmaerts on the occasion of a concert of the Bill Carrothers Trio.

In short: any excuse will do to cross the ocean and visit friends and family.

As opposed to musicians such as Philippe Aerts, Sal La Rocca, Roger Vanha and Mario Pavone, who - at least in public - only play the double bass, or Michel Hatzigeorgiou, Daniel Romeo and Marcus Miller, who religiously stick to the electric bass, Nic Thys is one of those bass players, like Bart De Nolf, Christian McBride, Stanley Clarke or Lonnie Plaxico, who switch from electric bass to double bass, and vice versa, without problem.

Nic Thys : ‘I started playing the electric bass when I was about twelve. Playing by ear, I covered the entire itinerary, from rock to funk. When I was eighteen, I did one year at the Jazz Studio with Maarten Weller, and worked my instrument like a madman. A year later, I went to the Hilversum Conservatoire. After a year - I must have been 21 - my professor suggested switching to double bass. Even though I had never had a close look at one, I immediately bonded with the instrument. I never had any problems alternating between instruments, although I must admit that I do practise more on the double bass than I do the electric. The double bass I am playing at the moment, is an English Hawks from the early 1900s, like the one Dave Holland used to have.

When asked to compare the American and European approach of jazz, my logical conclusion has to be that we all automatically take some of our culture with us. Two important differences spring to mind. On the one hand, there is the humbleness with which most Belgians approach their instrument, which sharply contrasts with the American way. On the other hand, when I’m playing with Americans, I clearly feel their close bond with the traditional jazz culture that took shape on their continent, via a mixed bag of cultures from all over the world which fate literally threw together. No need to go into detail on a history that has filled many a book. If I had to choose a place to live anywhere in the world, I would choose Belgium, even though I must admit I am having a great time in The States, or rather: in sultry New York. The Friday after Nine Eleven, I took part in an unannounced jam in a jazz club where a few musicians had gathered. The solidarity amongst musicians spoke volumes, and the magic we all felt has given me great hope for the future of music. It obviously remains an important means of communication, even more so at times of misfortune and misery. It is exactly *that* higher aim that gives us the necessary courage to go against the grain of huge commercial institutions, which are only interested in form, and gave up on content ages ago.’

## **Alexi Tuomarila Quartet**

At the 21st edition of the Hoeilaart International Jazz Contest, the prize for best solo 1999 went to Alexi Tuomaria, a 25-year-old pianist born in Por (Finland). His quartet, around tenorist Nicolas Kummert, double bass player Christophe Devisscher and drummer Teun Verbruggen, so flabbergasted the audience and jury that it won first prize as well.

Alexi Tuomarila took his first Suzuki method piano lessons when he was four (!) and from 1980 to 1992, he studied classical piano at the Finnish Espoo Music Academy. He spent the next two years studying at the Oulunkyla Pop & Jazz Conservatory of Helsinki.

In 1994, Alexi Tuomarila settled in Belgium, where he took lessons with Diederik Wissels and Nathalie Lories at the Brussels Conservatoire. The quartet’s debut album (*‘Voices of Pohjola’*, Igloo) clearly shows how Tuomarila mixes elements from Finnish folk into his light, transparent compositions. And that is exactly - or at least partly - what makes them unique. Alexi Tuomarila Quartet signed up with Warner Music in 2002.

## **Frank Vaganée**

Frank Vaganée was born on March 19th 1966 in Mechelen and started making music in the local brass band at the age of seven. He took classical music lessons, first at the Mechelen Conservatoire, then in Antwerp. Around 14, Frank Vaganée first came across jazz and soon after he enrolled at the Jazz Studio, where one of his teachers was John Ruocco.

A year later, he was already leader of a number of bands and in 1985 he was on stage at Jazz Middelheim. From 1986 on, he worked as a freelance saxophonist with the BRT Jazz Orkest, just after Bob Porter had taken over. From 1990 to 1992 he toured Europe and Japan with the Glenn Miller Timeless Orchestra and recorded a CD.

In 1991 - he was a member of the Del Ferro-Vaganée Group (with Dutch pianist Mike Del Ferro), a quartet with which he toured extensively for 4 years and recorded 2CDs - Frank Vaganée released a first CD with his own quintet (Vaganée, Christoph Erbstösser, Frans Van der Hoeven, Dré Pallemmaerts, Chris Joris), called '*Picture a View*' (B-Sharp).

In 1993, Frank Vaganée co-founded the Brussels Jazz Orchestra. Five years later, tenor John Ruocco, double bass Rosario Bonaccorso and drummer Dré Pallemmaerts founded the band with which he released the CD '*Two Trios*' (W.E.R.F.).

In 2001, Frank Vaganée received the Belgian *Django d'Or* and was asked to join Jambangle, founded in 2000 by Karel Van Marcke. Frank Vaganée currently teaches at the Gent Conservatoire and the Leuven Lemmens Institute.

In the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz Music' series, Frank Vaganée can be heard on the CDs '*The Music of Bert Joris*' by the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and '*Tombouctou*', by the Nathalie Lories Trio + Extensions.

Frank Vaganée : 'When I was seven, like my two brothers, my father made me a member of the local brass band. It had quite a few young players and, soon, we also had a youth ensemble. The trumpet they pushed in my hands was no good, they decided. The bugle, which I got instead, didn't do much for me either and I was too small for the cavalry trombone : the slide simply reached the floor. They did have a spare tenor sax, but my right hand couldn't reach the lower valves. Since the instrument did appeal to me the most, I got an alto saxophone instead.

As a logical consequence of my brass band years, I was enrolled at the academy at 8 and eventually attended classes in classical (alto) saxophone, flute and piano.

I must have been 13 or 14 when, during one of those traditional joint brass band evenings, I met René Jonckeer, the conductor of another brass band. His band was the last to play and I couldn't believe my ears. For the first time in my life, I was being confronted with the massive decibels and the overwhelming energy a big band can produce. This was miles away from anything I'd been used to in our brass band. The way in which musicians took turns standing up and doing solos, after which they went back to playing with the others as if nothing had happened, threw me. I soon found myself rehearsing with them and was totally wrapped up in big band jazz.

With my brother - we're talking 1981 - I started attending jazz courses, which were organized every other Sunday by the *Halewijn* foundation. There were workshops by Maarten Weyler, who was then playing bass in René Jonckeer's selfsame big band. As luck would have it, Erwin Vann, Kurt Van Herck, Dré Pallemmaerts etc. - all of us about the same age - also attended those workshops.

I seemingly had the knack for improvising and things went really fast from then on. The Jazz Studio started, as an offshoot of the Sunday classes. Eleven of us enrolled (the above lot and Hendrik Braeckman, Kris Goessens and Piet Verbist - Ben Sluijs joined us later). John Ruocco, whom I had known for a while since he also lived in Mechelen, barely a kilometer away from us, was our teacher. He sometimes did replacements in the big band and one day, obviously intrigued by my style of playing, he asked if I would like him as his teacher - which he eventually ended up being. I did continue to attend classes at the Royal Conservatoire in Antwerp, where I wisely didn't tell a soul about the Jazz Studio. I'm sure they would have chucked me out if they had found out.

I spent three fruitful years at the Jazz Studio, not in the least because you could spend the entire day playing and jamming there - which also yielded fascinating encounters. I actually founded my first quartet there in 1983, which later became the quintet Tough Talk. Together, we played my first concert for a large audience at Middelheim in 1985.

From 1987 until 1990, I taught at the Jazz Studio myself, after which I joined the Glenn Miller Timeless Orchestra for two years. After that, I taught for two years at the jazz department of the Amsterdam Sweelinck Conservatoire.

In 1993, the year during which I co-founded the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, I was asked to teach at the Lemmens Institute and at the Gent Conservatoire, two jobs that still give me great pleasure.

## **Pierre Vaiana**

Pierre Vaiana was born in Waterschei on October 14th 1955. Before he was even one year old, his parents took him to the Liège commune of Seraing. Around 15, Pierre Vaiana started playing the soprano saxophone, even though he only really took up jazz until 1976. He studied with Jacques Pelzer and Steve Houben at the Jazz Seminar of the Liège Conservatoire, took jazz classes with Steve Lacy and Karl Berger and improvisation with Garrett List.

In 1981, Pierre Vaiana joined Félix Simtaine's Act Big Band. Other bands soon followed : Diva Smiles, the Pirlly Zurstrassen Quintet, the Richard Rousselet Quintet... Three years later, he formed his own, pianoless success trio Trinacle, with Hein van de Geyn and Félix Simtaine (album on Igloo).

By the way: elsewhere in this book, Charles Loos talks about Henri Pousseur's piece *Les Iles Déchaînées*. Pierre Vaiana was one of the performing musicians in it. He studied with Joe Lovano at the Brooklyn School of Music, NY (1986-'90, with the odd short trip to Belgium), where he obtained a much coveted Bachelor of Fine Arts.

In 1988, he took part in 'A Lover's Question', together with, amongst others, David Linx, Bob Stewart, Toots Thielemans, Pierre Van Dormael, Byard Lancaster and James Baldwin, to whom the work was dedicated. That same year he recorded the album 'Eldorado' (Igloo) with the Trio Bravo, and he was regularly spotted in the legendary *Kaai*, where he worked closely together with the very musicians who were to become Aka Moon.

During his New York years, he played with, amongst others, Butch Morris, Mike Formanek and Tito Puente.

He returned in 1992 to record an album with Formanek, Salvatore Bonafede and Jeff Hirshfield. That same year, he founded the trio *L'Ame des Poètes* with Jean-Louis Rassinfosse and Pierre Van Dormael, later replaced by Fabien Degryse. He has released 4 CDs on Igloo so far. In 1993 Jazz'halo released Chris Joris' *Bihogo*, on which Pierre Vaiana also plays. Pierre Vaiana spent four years teaching in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in the mid-Nineties. Foofango, one of the Burkina Faso bands he brought to Belgium and of which he is himself a member, has released 2 CDs on his own Azeto label, named after the ethno brass band to which he also belongs.

Pierre Vaiana also regularly works with the Malinese pianist Jo Kaïat, who - for a few years now - has been looking into ways of arranging African balafon music for piano.

Pierre Vaiana : 'I come from a Sicilian family that listened to music a lot. My father was a great opera lover. Merely listening wasn't enough for me, though, and when I was 14 or so, I enrolled at the Seraing academy (I was already doing fine arts at the *Académie des Beaux Arts* then). I immediately settled for the soprano sax I was offered, since I was already a fan of

Sidney Bichet and John Coltrane. Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton were also amongst my big idols. We heard all that music on the radio at night, in Marc Moulin's *Cap de Nuit* at the time. Fantastic. I couldn't quite make up my mind between soprano sax and guitar for a while. Money sorted out that problem for me, since I couldn't afford a guitar. I never regretted choosing the soprano sax, though. The minute I got home with it, I started playing away like mad. I was (and still am) truly in love with the instrument.

I never finished my year at the academy. Playing jazz was absolutely forbidden at the time, let alone learning it. Yet my friends and I mainly improvised to jazz rock themes. We weren't really interested in jazz standards, certainly not after seeing Miles at the Brussels *Palais des Beaux-Arts* in 1973. Even Jacques Pelzer's Open Sky Unit played more jazz rock than jazz. I myself, however, remained a mere amateur until the age of 21.

After I had finished my studies at the *Beaux-Arts*, in 1976, I rented a studio where I spent days painting on my own. To escape the loneliness, I went to a jazz club one night and to this day I still hang around jazz bars where you can jam. The jazz rock madness had ebbed away by then and standards and bop were on the up. I soon met Lou McConnell in a bar, an American who lived in Liège and who truly introduced me to the tenor sax. He even let me buy one of his, and was my teacher for a while. In the late Seventies/early Eighties, Steve Houben and Henri Pousseur started the Jazz Seminar at the Liège Conservatoire. Down to real business, it seemed. A number of really interesting people joined, like Kris Defoort, Michel Massot, Fabrizio Cassol, Pierre Bernard. Something big was about to happen, no two ways about that.

I soon played in a number of bands, such as the Act Big Band and in 1984 I had my own trio, Trinacle. Two years later, I took my family to New York for four years. I had a day job to support the family and played jazz at night.

Thanks to my love of the soprano sax and the skill I have developed over the years, I am now able to play music from the three worlds in which I feel at home: traditional jazz - complete with its standards, ballads and bop -, Mediterranean music and African music. I love the challenge of making my soprano sax sound like a typical ethnic instrument in an Arab or African traditional song. I must admit, though, that without François Louis' silver mouthpiece I would never have been able to develop the sound I now produce so easily on my saxophone. Without jazz and present-day improvised music - the two worlds in which I have been moving since my youth - I would never have learnt how to improvise. My quest for the roots of jazz and my own identity have taken me places: I went to live in the States for four years and another four years in Africa. This huge awareness that I am neither American nor African never stopped me from diving deep into their respective cultures. I wanted to make as large a contribution to keeping jazz culture active each time I came back to Belgium, you see. That is why I took part in events at the *Kaai*, why I helped found *L'Ame des Poètes* and why I keep looking for new forms of improvisation by meeting people from other cultures, which in its own turn has yielded projects such as Foofango and the Azeto Orkestra.

My quest is currently taking me to the Mediterranean. I have just finished touring Morocco, together with Jo Kaïat - a fantastic musician! One musician who never ceases to amaze me here in Belgium, is Chris Joris, with whom I share the following opinion on music : it is a universal means of communication that draws people from all over the world closer together, without them having to speak each other's language or knowing each other's culture.'

## **Bart Van Caenegem**

This son of a Dixieland pianist literally grew up with the piano. Having finished his secondary education in the arts in Leuven, Bart Van Caenegem went to the Lemmens Institute, where his

lecturers included Jan Vermeulen, Ron van Rossum, Bert Joris, Philippe Aerts, Frank Vaganée and Dré Pallemmaerts. He currently teaches secondary-school arts students in Antwerp.

Bart Van Caenegem has worked with, amongst others, Dré Pallemmaerts, Chris Joris and Gino Lattuca. He has been performing with High Voltage Sextet for a while now and recently joined the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and *De Frivole Framboos*. Next to himself, his trio contains Peter Verhaegen on double bass and Lieven Venken on drums.

Bart Van Caenegem: 'If only the classical programme wasn't so focused on merely reproducing notes. Why can't they teach students to improvise, like they do in jazz? In my quest for my own sound, it is my personal goal to have the classical world and that of jazz - which were miles apart inside my head for years - merging.'

## **Johan Vandendriessche**

Some people may remember Johan Vandendriessche from Milkshake Banana, the ensemble with which he won the Hoeilaart International Jazz competition. His name may also bring back memories of other great artists or famous ensembles. Philip Catherine, Toots Thielemans (with whom he recorded an album), Randy Crawford, Debbie Harry (Blondie), Roger Hodgson, the BRT Big Band, the BRT Jazz Orkest under Etienne Verschueren (and later Bob Porter), the BRT Philharmonic Orchestra, The Act Big Band under Michel Herr, the West Deutsche Rundfunk Big Band, the Philharmonic Orchestra of Flanders, Dirk Van Esbroeck, Claude Maurane, Raymond van het Groenewoud, Johan Verminnen (7 years), Claude Nougaro, Clouseau... you name it, Johan Vandendriessche was there! He even played the saxophone at the Purple Cucumber concert on April 30th 1995, alongside, amongst others, The Zucchini Rocking Teenage Combo, Robert Martin, Jake Newman, Andy Jacobson, Andy Treacey, Danny De Cort, the BRTN Philharmonic Orchestra and Bart Maris, whom he befriended there, and after which he introduced this versatile trumpeter to Marc Moulin to take part in his *'Top Secret'* project. Johan Vandendriessche once also had a trio in which he was on drums and Mimi Verderame on guitar.

Pardon? You'd like to meet him in person? Get his autograph? No problem. Simply enrol at the Gent Conservatoire and take organology, harmony, jazz or pop history classes and he will sign your reports, since he will have been your lecturer.

You can also meet him through Jive Talk, his own Rhythm'n'Jazz quartet, but chances are you recently saw him perform with his trio The Demagogue Reacts, with himself, Hammond organist Paul Flush and ethno-musicologist/percussionist Frank Michiels. Johan Vandendriessche not only plays the bass clarinet, flute, soprano, alto and tenor sax in it, but also drums in combination with congas, udu drums, a Korg Wavedrum, bells, a didgeridoo improvised from a banal PVC tube, and a dozen other percussion instruments. Frank Michiels plays the band's sampler, while Paul Flush conjures up a motley variety of sounds from his Hammond to complement the various melodies which subtly come bubbling up.

*'Action-Reaction'* (Lyrae Records) is the title of the trio's recently released CD, whose 'Take the B-Train' refers to the Hammond B3-model.

Hence this chat with multi-instrumentalist Johan Vandendriessche.

Johan Vandendriessche: 'Years ago, Paul left everything behind in Edinburgh to settle here in Wakkerzeel with his wife and child. When he came to visit me, I showed him my Hammond organ. You must know that Paul, ever since becoming a professional musician in 1967, has virtually played on Hammond only. Only later did he start performing as a pianist more. It is at my place that he became interested in Hammond again and got himself a new one.'

Hammond organs, even more so than pianos, can be regarded as orchestras in their own right.



## Hammond and jazz

Johan Vandendriessche: 'I sometimes wonder whether this type of organ is really an instrument, since the electro-magnetic appliance's keys are in fact switches whose volume you operate with your right foot. The sound is the result of additive synthesis. Electronic instruments are, however, classified under the 'instruments' denominator. On the other hand, I do consider Hammond organs one of the most complete existing instruments. Over the years, I have thrown out all my synthesizers, but I've kept my Hammond.

The drawback of having a foot bass on the Hammond B3 or A100, is that all too often they do get used as a maximum strength orchestra, which makes for overcharged, not to say bombastic sounding music. Many organists want to use the instrument's full potential, preferably all at once - as if they were suffering from some acute type of *horror vacui*! In modern Hammond music, which Paul Flush tends to concentrate on, you go in quest of those superfluously filled voids until all that is left is a dialogue between two hands. Just listen to Larry Young or Dan Wall's refined playing, where you will hear this continuous Q&A-ing between both hands. There's emotion for you. That's Bach! Joey Di Francesco too, who at first sight plays bass solely with his feet, actually doubles it up with his left hand. Many Hammond players consider the myth of the foot bass of paramount importance. They reckon they have come across this in organists such as Jimmy Smith, Jimmy McGriff or Eddy Louiss, while most real jazz organists do not use a foot bass at all and only play left-hand bass. Why else would they all insist on a Hammond B3 or A100 on stage? Because their registers do allow for left-hand bass, unlike rock organs like the L100 or C3 Hammond models, which economize on sound generators from within the idea that, since there is a bass player anyway, the left hand will be free and playing chords as well. To play a flowing bass line you ideally need two feet and can no longer operate the volume pedal with your right foot. Yet I do hear a remarkably flowing bass line in most great jazz organists - which speaks volumes, no?'

Anyone who 'jazzifies' popular music, tends to expose himself to contempt and criticism, while jazz, in fact, came about in exactly the same fashion. Johan Vandendriessche: 'What hugely annoys me, is the fact that so many so-called jazz buffs and musicians used to be true reactionaries themselves. They so idolized the golden calf of swing jazz that they started off blackening what they termed the infiltration of rock, funk, hip-hop and the like in a genre which they themselves wanted to keep as pure as possible. Until they suddenly realized that their big jazz idols and models had started experimenting with the very things they had termed odious and, by definition, anti-jazz. So what did they do? They about-turned and now claim to be rock, funk, hip-hop or techno specialists. Some even go on tour with DJs or rappers. I won't mention any names, of course.'

## Pierre Van Dormael

For more than twenty years, guitarist Pierre Van Dormael (° Uccle 1952) has been composing trendsetting, improvised music. His Faider Reunion (1980-'81) developed so-called 'cyclic' music by superimposing various bar lengths onto each other. That way repetitive music - after Steve Reich - is expanded into global non-repetition, inspired by nature and Henri Bergson's philosophy.

Van Dormael further explored this cyclic music with the duo *Etoiles* (1982), the Van Dormael Orchestra (1983) and the *Suite Normande* trio (1984). He has also composed for dance projects (*Verified*), as well as present-day music (*Ciel bleu et mouvements à différentes hauteurs du paysage*), in 3 different tempos and the tonality of birds.

Meanwhile, in 1981, Van Dormael recorded '*L'Etendue des Extrêmes*', his manifesto on the theory of symmetrical tensions in Afro-American music. He further expanded on this theme in '*A Lover's Question*' (together with David Linx and James Baldwin, to whom the work was dedicated), with the Natural Logic quartet (with Steve Coleman, Bob Stewart and David Linx, 1987) and with Nasa Na (with Fabrizio Cassol, Michel Hatzigeorgiou and Stéphane Galland, 1989-'92).

Pierre Van Dormael lived in Senegal from 1994 tot 1997, to study the principles of African rhythmic polyphony and to develop a theory which he has called 'Rhythmic Harmony', based on the symmetry of tensions in time.

In 1997 he released the CD '*Djigui*' with Soriba Kouyaté and Otti Van der Werf, and in 2001 he made the album '*Vivaces*', in wich he links all the above principles to a further development of harmony.

Pierre Van Dormael ended up opting for jazz for three fundamental reasons :

'First of all, because I love to improvise. When, as a child, I played Bach on my violin, I'd start altering the melody from the third bar, however beautiful the original was. Second reason : as opposed to most other 'new' 20th-century styles, jazz never detached itself, not from the tonality behind the masterpieces of European music, and not from the simplicity of popular pieces - based on emotions, love and life itself - either. And finally: adaptations of African and European traditions to an American social context have yielded changes in the way music works. These changes would never have taken place in Africa or Europe. Jazz, in other words, is a new kind of music that offers us the solution for a growing tonality, which the Europeans were barely able to find. To me, jazz is a means to organize, be creative and have the freedom to express life - not something from the past.'

Pierre Van Dormael says the following about his own approach to music: 'I have always tried to understand how things function, how music works. It took me a while to take things apart, and a lot longer to put them together again. Whilst analysing and playing all sorts of styles, I learnt that what may be quality in one style, is a shortcoming in another.

My music is not based on rules or idioms, but on principles. In Miles I found a hint to the secret of black American music after the Civil War, in Duke Ellington the way to make it accessible to a white public, in Charlie Parker how you to obtain three melody lines together on *one* instrument, in John Coltrane how to approach tonality mathematically, in Joe Zawinul how to get a plectrum effect with fingers on strings, in Yousef Yancy how to make yourguitar sound like a trumpet and Steve Coleman confirmed what my musical quests had shown me ('*L'Etendue des Extrêmes*', 1981). He also gave me phrasing tips, showed me new developments in rhythm (he himself took the cyclic idea from my music), West-African rhythms, hip-hop and the microtones of those days. There is so much we haven't heard yet.'

## **Roger Vanhaverbeke**

(see History)

## **Kurt Van Herck**

Kurt Van Herck was born in 1965 in Westmeerbeek. He studied solfeggio and saxophone at the Heist-op-den-Berg academy from 1975 to 1979, after which he did his secondary education in the arts.

A chance discovery of a number of albums by, amongst others, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Dewey Redman, Ornette Coleman and Bill Evans had already pushed him in the arms of jazz.

From 1978, he attended the summer training courses at Dworp, where his teacher was John Ruocco. In the Antwerp Jazz Studio, he got piano lessons from pianist Dennis Luxion. For classes from Larry Schneider, he went all the way to San Francisco. Greg Bedolato, Jeff and John Clayton and Steve Houben are also amongst his masters.

At fifteen, Kurt Van Herck, Erwin Vann and Dré Pallemmaerts, two pals from secondary school, founded their first jazz band. Five years later, when he became a member of Jack van Poll's quartet and by the same token a fully-fledged professional musician. A string of jobs and offers followed as of 1986: member of the Serge Lazarevtich Quartet (cf. CD '*London Baby*', Igloo), a tour with Michel Herr, member of the Nathalie Lories Quartet (cf. CD '*Nymphéas*', Igloo), entrance into Félix Simtaine's Act Big Band (cf. CD '*Extrêmes*', Igloo), stand-ins in the then BRT Big Band, co-operation with Kris Defoort's Basement Party, recruitment at the Brussels Jazz Orchestra...

Meanwhile, he had also started playing with the likes of Jacques Pelzer, Toots Thielemans, Jean-Louis Rassinfosse, Daniel Romeo, Pierre Van Dormael, Michel Hatzigeorgiou, David Linx, Bruno Castellucci and Diederik Wissels, as well as Viktor Lazlo, Khadja Nin and Axelle Red and various great names from abroad, such as Joe Lovano, Slide Hampton, David Liebman, Calvin Owens, George Mraz, Antonio Hart and Danilo Perez.

In 1997 Kurt Van Herck received a *Django d'Or*. In the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series, he can be heard on the CDs of the Brussels Jazz Orchestra ('*The Music of Bert Joris*') and Nathalie Lories ('*Tombouctou*').

### **A bit more chauvinism, please**

Kurt Van Herck : 'It may sound funny, but the fact that my mother adored the saxophone, was decisive in my choice of instrument. The local brass band just happened to have a spare soprano sax, so off I went. I must have been nine or so. I enrolled at the music academy of Heist-op-den-Berg, where I took solfeggio and alto sax. The first few years, I only played alto sax.

I came upon jazz purely by coincidence, amongst others by listening to jazz records, which automatically also put me in contact with Juul Anthonissen. He told me I should go to the Dworp summer training courses. Meanwhile I had met Erwin Vann and Dré Pallemmaerts at school in Antwerp. I regularly performed with them, from which I learned a lot in an initial phase. I learned a lot in dance halls too, where I was able to perfect my saxophone technique. I gradually moved to tenor sax, whose sound I find much more penetrating and fascinating. The real idea was to gather as much information as possible on tenor sax to apply it on alto sax later, like Gary Bartz, whom I found a fantastic saxophone player. I haven't got round to it yet, though, because I'm having too much fun on tenor.

When I was twenty, I could start in Jack van Poll's quartet. You must bear in mind that there were a lot fewer jazz musicians at the time, which made it easier to get a job. Today, we have a lot more excellent musicians, which is a good thing, of course. Expectations will increase and here too, like in America, this will spark some kind of competitive spirit - certainly when musicians start realizing there simply isn't enough room for everybody. That's when you should be able to bank on other countries. When push comes to shove, however, you feel how un-European our thinking has remained. As long as myriad Belgian journalists continue to depict us as 'average, because Belgian', we will continue to lack credibility in our own country. As a result, we will keep going round in circles in our little backyards. In that respect, Middelheim is one of our most honest jazz festivals, with a bill divided equally between musicians from Belgium and abroad.

The French are overly chauvinistic, and we're not chauvinistic enough. Large chunks of our audiences still worship all things American. You know when Juul Anthonissen's *Hnita Hoeve* (Hnita Farm) in Heist-op-den-Berg draws crowds? : when he's got Americans coming. What

we need is a change of mentality. Otherwise, situations like with Toots, Philip Catherine, David Linx, Bert Joris or Philippe Aerts will remain unavoidable. On a more positive note, I guess we could look at it as an incentive to be even *more* inventive with our music.

That the Americans have such enormous technical skill should not come as a surprise, considering how hard they have to fight not to be overlooked or pushed aside. I experienced it myself in New York: the first time I took part in a jam, with Dré Pallemmaerts, I could see from the corner of my eye how seven tenorists were waiting in line. And this was only some banal restaurant. Unless you can do impressive solos, you don't stand a chance. We're lucky in that sense, even though I would advise any young musician to go and have a look. It's an education.

Another major difference between Europe and the States lies in the repertoire. Standards and bebop culture are much more engrained there, which is understandable, since they are part of their own tradition. Here, we have many other cultures to go back to, which automatically spawns other types of jazz, like that on ECM, to name but one label. That's what makes our jazz landscape much more fragmented - and therefore rich.'

## Fred Van Hove

Fred Van Hove was born in Antwerp in 1937, but is basically born again and again through his (free) improvised music. His hellish (heavenly?) work schedule does occasionally include a holiday, though, which doesn't make getting hold of him for a chat any easier. Piano, accordion, imposing church organ, each of them forms an enthusiastic mouthpiece for life. 'I couldn't *not* play. I *want* to play music. Existing means expressing yourself and communicating, which I do with sounds.' Fred was Cultural Ambassador of Flanders in 1996-'97. He still is: in August 2002 he played at the Beirut festival with trombonist Johannes Bauer, even though the Flemish Government, having first advertised in the papers that it would cover travel expenses, suddenly changed its mind...

'Why place ads, if you're going to come up with restrictions and priorities afterwards!' Fred has always been a - justified - revolutionary, also when in 1972, the (then) BRT, forked out hugely discrepant fees to American and Belgian musicians at Jazz Middelheim (see chapter on WIM in the history section). The first *Free Music Festival* was consequently held in the Antwerp bar *De Muze*.

Father Van Hove was a professional musician with a large jazz record collection. Parker's Dial version of 'Lover Man' moved Fred, but didn't exactly make him a jazz fanatic. He did, however, form a small jazz band with a few friends. 'But I never really felt at home in this music, whose evolution I followed closely : Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, whom I heard in Comblain in 1965.' Meanwhile... 'What did disturb me in jazz, was its traditional order, its strict thematic structure and the neatly determined chord developments in the harmonies. There had to be another way.' There was, and he found it when he gradually started replacing pianist Paul Dumont in the Mike Zinzen Quartet at the *Mok*. 'I occasionally played a solo from the standard bebop repertoire, in modes as opposed to chordally. Younger musicians, such as saxophonist Kris Wanders and the late drummer Jan Van de Ven joined us. Together, we stuck to the chosen, new path, which yielded a fantastic discovery for its time, something I had always wanted to do. There I was, inside a music with unhampered improvisation potential, a music that flowed along with my ideas as opposed to according to the traditional scheme. It must have been 1967.'

Wouldn't you know it?... 'In the countries around us, a number of musicians evolved in the same direction : Dutchmen like Willem Breuker, Han Bennink and Misha Mengelberg; Brits

like Evan Parker and Paul Rutherford; Germans like Peter Brötzmann and Peter Kowald; and a Swiss musician like Irene Schweizer.'

In the symbolic year 1968, Van Hove recorded '*Requiem for Che Guevara, Martin Luther King, John F. and Robert Kennedy, Malcom X*' at the first (prestigious) *Berliner Jazztage*, with, amongst others, (of the above) Wanders, Breuker, Kowald and Bennink (MPS). The same label had released the first German free record: Gunther Hampel's '*Heartplants*' from January 1965.

Half a year before '*Requiem*', '*Machine Gun*' came out on Brötzmann. It was the key record of European free improvised music, and re-released later with a second version on Jost Gebers' label FMP (Free Music Production). 'Jost himself played bass and knew that world like the back of his hand. I was lucky enough to work in Germany a lot, where people hankered for new music. They appreciated it too, also in what was then still the East.' Fred was on all first five FMP LPs.

Then came Gent. 'Bass player Paul Van Gysegem organized the Avant Garde Festival at the impressive *Gravensteen* (castle). He asked me to play solo, which I had never done at a festival before.'

Jazz Middelheim solo followed in 1971. Mon Devoghelaere (a very broad-minded critic): 'I was ever so pleased to see that the very first record on his label was a solo of mine from 1972. It had an excellent sleeve design by Paul Ielegems: 2/3 blue sky, with the label's name *Vogel* (bird) in it in full flight, 1/3 red earth. On the horizon, you saw a black piano and a white chair. No title, just my name, in tiny print.' His second record got the logical title '*een tweede vogel*' (a second bird), this time in duo with Cel Overberghe (ts). Both records turn up again as part of a double CD with UMS in Chicago. On the second one, you hear the bells of the Antwerp Carolus Borromeus church, which mean a lot to Fred, as well as the sound of the metro works, in progress at the time. Bells, church, church organ.

'It all started one day with Maurice vande Vannet, who has died since. He ran *De Spiegel* (The Mirror) in Bruges and was a colourful personality. They had this organ at the conservatoire. 'Fat Maurice' invited three pianists - Alexander Schlippenbach, Misha Mengelberg and myself - to give an organ concert. I usually play in Germany, mainly in Protestant churches. The first recording was at the Sankt-Peter Kirche in Sinzig am Rhein in August 1979 (FMP), under the long title: '*Between 2 battles, the warrior has a well-deserved rest at the soft breast of his beloved lady and dreams of other despairs and victories*'. I no longer have the record... So we move forward in time.'

Steve Lacy? 'We played together for years, but for a first audible result you have to wait until the duo piece we recorded on '*Five Facings*' for FMP. I played with Steve the other day, at the Brussels *Café Central*. It was his farewell tour of Europe. He is going to be a professor at Boston university.'

One of the solid bases of free improvised music is the interaction between participants. It begins with two: Fred with Lacy, Michel Portal, Anthony Braxton, Paul Rutherford, Albert Mangelsdorff, Johannes Bauer, Konrad Bauer, Phil Wachsmann, the late Annick Nozati, Joëlle Léandre (recorded to be broadcast on *Radio France* in 2001), the fabulous concert with André Goudbeek at the Mechelen Jazz day in June 1999. There is also the piano duo with Christian Leroy, that later developed into the *Belgisch Pianokwartet*, the MLA/MLB/MLF (Musica Libera Antverpiae/Belgiae/Flandriae) formulas and then the nonet, with, last but not least, the WIM-Fanfare.

Recently, there have been the FIN Trio (Fred, drummer Ivo Vander Borgh and cellist Nikos Veliotis on WIMprozes), the quartet with saxophonist Luc Houtkamp, trumpeter Herb Robertson and Ivo (X-O), GratHovOx (reed player Frank Gratkowski, Fred and drummer Tony Oxley), (nuscope recordings, Dallas). Previously unpublished material of Brötzmann's

groups from *Fuck de Boere* has now also come out, as well as that other version of '*Machine Gun*' (also with UMS in Chicago).

A photo in the French *Jazz Magazine* shows Fred with the French soprano and alto sax Etienne Brunet, when his French organ CD (in Paris churches) on Saravah was voted *disque d'émotion* (emotion record). 'Cultural Ambassadors are privileged partners of the Flemish Government. Freely improvised in Fabulous Brussels and Far-away Lands.'

## **Erwin Vann**

This eternally young looking tenorist was born on December 17th 1963 in Antwerp and had done eight years of classical music before taking up jazz studies in 1980. John Ruocco, Bert Joris, Dennis Luxion and Maarten Weyler were his masters at the Antwerp Jazz Studio. In a next phase he attended various specialization courses and training courses in Belgium and abroad, amongst others with Richie Beirach, Joe Lovano, Steve Coleman, Dave Holland, Julian Priester, Kenny Wheeler and David Liebman.

Since 1985 Erwin Vann has regularly worked with Bob Porter and with the VRT as a soloist, composer, studio musician and a member of the then BRT Jazz Orchestra. He is a much wanted musician and has played with, amongst others, Toots Thielemans, Kenny Wheeler, Joe Lovano (on his CD '*Solid Steps*', JazzClub), Nguyen Lé, Aldo Romano, Simon Goubert, Michel Benita, Paolo Fresu, Maurane, Félix Simtaine's Act Big Band, Bruno Castellucci, the North Sea Jazz Tentet with Hein van de Geyn, Pirly Zurstrassen's H Septet, the Frank Vaganée Sextet, the Eric Van der Westen Octet, the Richard Rousselet's quintet, and with Wayne Shorter at North Sea Jazz 2002.

During an extensive training period in Banff (Canada) in 1988, where he got lessons from, amongst others, Steve Coleman, Dave Holland, Kenny Wheeler and Julian Priest, Erwin Vann met guitarist Pete McCann and bass player Lindsey Horner. Years later, he played with the latter for the first time, amongst others in New York, where he lived for a year and a half. The Inner Space Band, which he founded in 1990, also comprises Michel Hatzigeorgiou and Dré Pallemmaerts. The trio often performs with special guests such as Pete McCann, Marc Ducret, Jacques Piroton or Christoph Erbstösser.

Amongst the various prizes Erwin Vann has won, there is that of Best Soloist in the Brussels Jazz Rally of 1991, the Spes prize 1995 for his CD '*Worlds*', with guests such as Norma Winstone, Pete McCann, Kenny Wheeler, Adama Drame and Chris Joris (JAS Records) and that of Best Belgian Tenor Saxophonist in 1998 (VRT/RTBF jazz referendum amongst listeners).

'*Koyà*', Erwin Vann's solo saxophone project with electronic effects, is closest to his heart at the moment. He is also leader/composer of his quartet with Dré Pallemmaerts, Michel Hatzigeorgiou and Jozef Dumoulin and co-leader/composer of a duo-quartet with Peter Hertmans, Nic Thys and Billy Hart as well as of the Italian Dufay quartet.

### **The quest for the best subject**

Erwin Vann: My brother, who is thirteen years my senior, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. Assuming you could also learn jazz that way, I went and enquired at various schools, but soon realized there was no such thing as a 'jazz' department anywhere. So I settled for second best by enrolling at the music academy in my neighbourhood. I did compensate by going to concerts at the Middelheim Jazz Festival, though.

In the early Eighties I started my secondary education in the arts, which barely satisfied my hunger either. Everything I had learned during the 3rd and 4th year at 'normal' secondary school was dished up again (being so behind with music I was made to resit two years, you

see). I still didn't get any real jazz and, to make things worse, there was hardly any written music for tenor sax. So I did six-odd years of classical alto sax before really throwing myself into tenor, amongst others via jazz workshops in Dworp. I did learn to play the piano in a most fascinating manner, though, and met fantastic people like Dré Pallemmaerts and Kurt Van Herck, who were in my class.

Thank God jazz finally did make it into the arts departments of secondary school. I was definitely born a few years too early! My musical insight has also been greatly influenced by many birdwatching sessions as a member of a club and under my father's guidance, himself a keen birdwatcher.'

#### Discipline : the key to technical skill

Erwin Vann: 'Europeans differ dramatically from the Americans when it comes to discipline. I still remember how uncomfortable Joe Lovano felt when we were rehearsing for his concert at the *Monnaie* Theatre. We just stood around sipping coffee on the set. That was unheard of in the States, where they apparently take their breaks at agreed times. Kris Defoort told me that, one time, he arrived maybe five minutes late for a rehearsal and somebody else was already sitting at the piano. It's a dog eat dog world there. In that sense, it wouldn't be a bad idea if every musician spent some time in the States - especially New York.'

#### Ode to François Louis

Erwin Vann : 'Like virtually all saxophone players in Belgium and many others outside it, I owe a great deal of my sound to François Louis, the delightful instrument maker from around Liège, who mainly specializes in saxophone mouthpieces and everything that comes with them. The way in which he studies how sound waves travel, and respectfully channels them to optimize each musician's personal sound as naturally as possible is truly phenomenal. The man deserves to be pampered, even though he himself minimalizes what he does. Each François Louis mouthpiece is a true work of art, and I'm not exaggerating. I do hope that one day he will get the recognition he deserves - sooner rather than later. A good sales deal for his mouthpieces would be a step in the right direction.'

## Lieven Venken

Lieven Venken (° Genk, 1975) is a born drummer : 'My father being a professional violinist himself, and choir master with 4 choirs, it seemed logical that I would play the violin, even though I knew at 5 that I wanted to be a drummer. My cousin, himself a professional drummer, let me do my thing on his set of drums. 'You have to make up your own mind about what you want to play', he said, and he couldn't have been more right. I owe a lot to him and to the music teacher in Koersel, who became my percussion teacher when I was twelve/thirteen. She let me play on a set of drums on many occasions.

At the Lemmens Institute, where I took up classical percussion around 17, I was in a jazz band with Bart Van Caeneghem on electrical bass and Alano Guarin on piano. We performed every Wednesday and got together virtually every night to listen to music. We also rehearsed intensively. I learnt a great deal from the recordings, which we made ourselves, and our frequent performances.

In the jazz department, to which I switched after two years, Dré Pallemmaerts initially concentrated on the *ride cymbal* technique, the basis of jazz drumming. A set of drums is, in fact, best described as an orchestra where the drummer co-ordinates four timings (*and* can produce various timbres), plus decides which combinations of parts to harmonize.'

## Mimi Verderame

Mimi Verderame was born on July 3rd 1958 in Tilleur and grew up in a family of musicians. When he was six, he taught himself to play percussion and at nine, he played drums with *Les Rebelles du Rythme*, his father's dance orchestra. Five years later, he was already recording his music in a studio. Meanwhile, he had also started learning to play the guitar by strumming along with famous guitarists, and in 1975 he made his official debut on the jazz scene alongside Jacques Pelzer. Many great names would follow : Toots Thielemans, Philip Catherine, Michel Herr, Steve Houben, Charles Loos, Larry Schneider, John Ruocco, Dennis Luxion, Jacques Piroton, Claude Maurane, Isabelle Antenna, (Japan tour in 1985), Richard Rousselet, Eric Legnini, Gino Lattuca and others.

On '*Game Over*' (A Records), his third CD from 1999, we find the promising alto Rosario Giuliano, who won the 1997 Jazz Hoeilaart International Contest. A year later, he released the CD '*Nice Cap*' (Lyrae Records) with his septet Jazz Addiction Band.

## Peter Vermeersch

The disappearance of X-Legged Sally after eight years and six albums, much to the regret of a huge flock of fans, by no means got the founder/frontman of this exceptional speed-funk-punk-classico-jazz ensemble down. Architect Peter Vermeersch has, in fact, become even more productive : with A Group, for example, the project he started a few years ago with Pierre Vervloesem, the single-minded guitarist/composer with whom he had already produced all debut albums of dEUS, Mad Dog Loos and Nancy, and with whom he collaborated not so long ago on Josse De Pauw's theatre-productions *Weg* (Gone) and *Larf* (Larva).

Clarinet/tenor sax player/composer Peter Vermeersch has also written compositions and/or arrangements for, amongst others, *Rosas danst Rosas*, a choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker for which he and Thierry De Mey wrote the music. They did the same for Wim Vandekeybus' *What the Body Does Not Remember* and *The Weight of A Hand*, or *Maximalist!*, which he founded himself. As if that wasn't enough, Peter Vermeersch also wrote the music for Vandekeybus' *Immer Das Selbe Gelogen* and *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul all by himself*; he played an important part in the performances of, amongst others Radeis, Dito'Dito, Charlie Degotte, Willy Thomas and José Besprosvany; wrote pieces for the Arditti Quartet, the Duke Quartet and the *Ensemble Musique Nouvelle* and played with Union (where he met trombonist Jan De Backer), Fred Frith, Jazzwork from Berlin and the Simpletones. Let's not forget *The Soluble Fish* either: the opera project he realized with Ryszart Turbiasz and which premièred in February 1994, or the orchestral suite he composed in 1995 for *The Purple Cucumbe*, a Zappa tribute in the Antwerp *Singel*, and the arrangements of 20 Arno songs which he wrote for a wind ensemble performing at the Brussels *Botanique* in September 1997.

Peter Vermeersch has been very busy with Flat Earth Society for a few years now (nothing to do with Waleco, an American psychedelic rock band from the Sixties, that released an album with the same title), a big band with sixteen young musicians (excluding himself) and with which he has now made two CDs ('*Live at the Beursschouwburg*' and '*Bonk*').

The music varies from big band arrangements, ethno brass band tunes, pieces full of Arab rhythms and melodies, over crisp pop songs with a hint of jazz, to structured, chaotic *musique concrète* à la Varèse and Zappa. Two basic principles run through the project like a thread: quality and humour. Not one hurdle is avoided. On the latest CD, for example, we find two pieces by The Residents, one of the most trend-setting avant-garde rock bands of the Seventies, whose members managed to stay anonymous for years and whose pieces took



strange-sounding notes and anything but conventional rhythms to absurd heights, by consciously misusing instruments and electronics. What appealed to Peter Vermeersch was the challenge of having this rudimentary, tribal music, made with minimal means, performed by a well-oiled big band without ever compromising on roughness. Such challenges typify the way Peter Vermeersch deals with music. The bankruptcy of the record label on which Peter Vermeersch released most of his previous projects and the lack of interest from others, eventually made him start Zonk, a label that in a first instance only plans to release productions by Flat Earth Society itself and - by extension - its band members (Bart Maris, Anja Kowalski, Tom Wouters, David Bovée etc.).

Flat Earth Society was the house orchestra of *Brugge 2002, Cultural capital of Europe*.

Peter Vermeersch: 'Flat Earth Society's pieces are all composed from within the same principle, i.e. ready to be rehearsed, yet with enough room for contributions from the various band members, which automatically helps enrich the sound spectrum and enhances the spontaneity of the performance. We also want to deflate the clichéd image most people still have of the big band: nicely tucked away between Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Glenn Miller and possibly also Stan Kenton (most people give up with Gil Evans). We still get labelled as a big band, purely because of our strength, which mainly corresponds with that of such ensembles, but that's where the resemblance stops. We simply want to make the most of the potential of this type of orchestration and take it as far as we can. That you do occasionally find some Duke Ellington in what we do, is only logical: why deny the tradition to which we owe so much? A number of other big bands of the past did not match the picture the moral majority had of them either. Take Sun Ra, Charles Mingus or Carla Bley: big orchestrations in which each band member could be him/herself - which I find incredibly important. In what you could call 'polished' bands, on the other hand, every band member is replaceable, so to speak.'

## **Erik Vermeulen**

Erik Vermeulen was born in 1959 and took up the cello as a child, before definitively switching to piano. Aged 22, he started touring with his own trio, in which he was initially accompanied by double bass Hein van de Geyn (replaced later on by Philippe Aerts), and drummer Dré Pallemmaerts, replaced in 1990 by Félix Simtaine. After that, double bass player Sal La Rocca joined the trio, together with Jan de Haas, as you will hear on their latest CD '*Song of Minutes*' (W.E.R.F.).

From the age of twenty two, Erik Vermeulen also started playing with various small and large ensembles, amongst others with Erwin Vann, Frank Vaganée, Kurt Van Herck, Milkshake Banana, Peter Hertmans and the BRT Jazz Orkest.

Amongst the many artists from Belgium and abroad Erik Vermeulen has performed with, or still does perform, we find Clark Terry, Slide Hampton, Steve Grossman, Art Farmer, Jacques Pelzer, Richard Rousselet, Deborah Brown, Ali Ryerson, Joe Lovano, John Ruocco, Bert Joris, Phil Abraham, Bob Mover and David Schnitter.

Erik Vermeulen is currently the regular pianist of the Bart Defoort Quartet, the Stéphane Mercier Sextet, the Manu Hermia Quartet and saxophonist Bert Sluijs' quartet, with whom he recently released the duo CD '*Stones*' (Jazz'halo). He teaches piano at the Gent Conservatoire.

At the time of this interview, Erik Vermeulen's CD in the 'Finest in Belgian Jazz' series is still in progress. He has no idea what he will pick when the many practising and performing

sessions are over. Will it be largely improvised pieces, or will the CD consist almost entirely of compositions that have been fully admitted paper? He really has no idea.

Interviewing Erik Vermeulen is no sinecure. Like his piano playing, most dialogues with this tormented pianist are subject to eternal mood swings. It took endless patience and a number of stirring chats to come to the following patchwork of interesting reflections and musings.

### **Standards versus composition (improvising)**

Erik Vermeulen : ‘The two elements do not necessarily have to be diametrically opposed. Quite a few pieces, composed by jazz musicians to be improvised on, have acquired virtually the same status as the classic standards of, say Porter or Gershwin. I myself will never play a standard whose melody I experience as a cliché, having heard it performed myriad times. The easy option is to start considering, say, a piano improvisation in minor inspired on Miles Davis’ ‘Footprints’, a standard, even though Miles himself merely composed the piece as a ‘vehicle’ for projecting or interpreting a certain atmosphere he had in mind. The ‘form’, however, is indeed partly decided by the musicians whilst playing. When playing a piece - standard or jazz composition - I usually do so in function of the piece’s trumps. By which I am not saying that I use the same parameters or characteristics as leitmotiv every time I interpret the piece. In other words : the line between improvising and composing can be very thin. When I really improvise, I almost instinctively look for form and theme. In that sense, you could say I invent a composition for each mood of the day.

The standard and bebop culture also inspires me, as do the various ways in which the greats from history composed and/or played (or still play): Louis Armstrong, Art Tatum, Bud Powell, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Lenny Tristano, Thelonious Monk, Keith Jarrett, Joe Zawinul, Herbie Hancock... they all have a more or less recognizable style, which is part of the baggage, whether you like it or not.

Personally, I have always made an effort to improvise and compose, completely independently of the standards and existing compositions you often hear me play. An enormous variety of sources of inspiration crop up in my pieces: a Hungarian gypsy melody, a Beethoven sonata, something by Monk, you name it. I also discard a lot of scribblings, which is unavoidable. I have been improvising on my piano for hours every day for almost twenty years now. I start from a motley variety of angles: one day I refuse to think which direction I’ll be taking and play *from stepping stone to stepping stone*, the next I map out exactly what route I intend to follow, whereby all possible variations on a certain theme are tried out. Or I may work associatively and see what ideas linger. I may leave from a groove, say, but also take a melody or harmony as my starting point, or even construct an entire piece around an ostinato.

I do often ask myself, though, to what extent a random improvisation is indeed an improvisation, since anything you play is invariably the result of something you thought up before. To what extent can we truly call this improvisation?

It makes no sense, however, to keep forcing yourself to sound different purely for originality’s sake. Chances are that form will outweigh content in that case, unless you are one of the few geniuses in musical history, of course.’

### **Trio or autonomous rhythm section?**

Erik Vermeulen: ‘I do not consider the piano/bass/drums trio a rhythm section playing under someone else, but a carefully compiled, agile ensemble. One of the very reasons why I play in trio, is to show how relative the concept ‘rhythm section’ is. I never did like the role pattern in the age-old music hierarchy. All roles are perfectly interchangeable at any given time inside a song. The tenor sax must be able, in other words, to switch from lyricism to rhythm the

minute the drummer plays a certain melody, or the bass may well respond to the piano's heavy groove by playing melodically. That is the very essence of counterpoint.

The physical hierarchy between *notes*, on the other hand can never be erased: our ear invariably chooses the highest and lowest notes as the starting point of a structure for what's between them, whereby the lowest notes get given a dominant harmony role and the highest ones automatically get called 'melody'. If, in the ensemble, you do the highest and lowest notes, you never play a significant role.

The limited strength of a trio also allows each of the three members to make the most of his/her sound spectrum and to enlarge and respond to others sound-wise.

### **Acoustic or electrically amplified instruments?**

Erik Vermeulen : 'Like a lot of people from my generation, I spent a lot of time listening to the jazz rock of, say, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Mahavishnu, Jan Hammer, Georges Duke, Chick Corea and Weather Report - music that hugely attracted me. I often played a Fender Rhodes myself, in fact, and the instrument still fascinates me today. It is not because this Fender Rhodes is electrically amplified, that it doesn't produce its sound acoustically: via hammers hitting strips, which can be manually adjusted to boot. In the early Eighties I actually found one that had barely been played before. I literally wore the instrument to the bone playing all sorts of '70s music on it. It also enabled me to play in places where they didn't have a piano.'

## **Ernst Vranckx**

At 21, Ernst Vranckx decided to broaden his musical horizons by enrolling at the Antwerp Jazz Studio. After that, he went to the Brussels Conservatoire where, two years later, he obtained a first prize for jazz piano. The Association of Jazz Educators laurelled him in 1992 in Maastricht with a special citation for outstanding musicianship. Another two years later, he and his quartet were given the *Nicolas Dor* prize at the Liège Festival.

Outside his own quintet (with whom he released '*A Child's Blessing*' in 1998 and '*Songs and Dances*' in 2001, both on the W.E.R.F. label), Ernst Vranckx is currently an active member of The Chris Joris Experience. He has worked with John Ruocco, Kenny Wheeler and Bert Joris, amongst others. Ernst Vranckx has been lecturing piano and harmony and the Gent Conservatoire and the Antwerp Jazz Studio since 1993.

## **Jean Warland**

(see History)

## **Diederik Wissels**

Diederik Wissels (° Rotterdam in 1960) was already playing the piano at five and did guitar, flute and piano at the academy. At sixteen, he started taking piano lessons with Michel Herr and soon after he left for Boston, where he took classes with Kenny Drew and John Lewis, amongst others, at the Berklee College of Music. In 1982 he obtained a Professional Music degree and, back in Belgium, he immediately started working with Jacques Pelzer and Jean Linsman.

Still in 1982, he was awarded the first prize with the International Jan de Haas Quartet at the 4th edition of the Hoeilaart International Jazz Contest. Since then, this gifted composer/pianist

has worked with the likes of Toots Thielemans, Sahib Shihab, Joe Henderson, Mark Murphy, Chet Baker, Slide Hampton, Larry Schneider, Philip Catherine, Per Goldschmidt, Junior Cook, Steve Houben, Guy Cabay, Philippe Aerts, the former BRT Jazz Orkest and Isabelle Antenna.

In 2001, Diederik Wissels surprised friends and enemies with the CD '*Streams*' (Igloo), which he released with tenorist Bart Defoort, assisted by bass player Stefan Liestro and drummer Lieven Venken.

With vocalist David Linx, with whom he has embarked on many a succesful adventure in the course of the last twenty years, Diederik Wissels released '*Heartland*' (Emarcy) at the end of the same year. Apart from trumpeter/bugler Paolo Fresu, we also hear bass player Palle Danielsson and drummer Jon Christensen on it, alongside a string quartet consisting of Igor Semenov, Cécile Broché, Dominica Eyckmans and Jean-Paul Dessy.

Diederik Wissels also regularly performs with his Silent Song Sextet, with whom he currently works on Federico Mompou's repertoire.

Diederik Wissels : 'I met David Linx when I was about fourteen at the Hoeilaart academy. My band and I rehearsed on Jan de Haas' attic in those days and David occasionally stood in on drums. We spent, and still spend, hours exchanging ideas, which has yielded many a joint project and/or album.

At home, we listened to every possible genre, from a huge variety of cultures and eras. I was certainly never corseted into any musical direction and was always able to decide myself whether or not the music struck a chord, regardless of style. I didn't have a clue that what my father - not a bad jazz pianist himself - was playing was actually called 'jazz'. By trying to emulate him on piano as a child, I automatically became a jazz man, so to speak.

Only much later did I find out about era and genre classifications, even though I invariably steer clear of them in my compositions. I want to produce my own, recognizable sound - not some photocopy of what already exists - without making contrived efforts to do so. My music has to come about naturally to sound believable. Like Federico Mompou, whose music is impossible to pigeonhole, let alone trace back to his Spanish roots. His only goal was never to give up his own personality in his music. Because of its barely definable style, his work was never exactly popular. People have to be able to pigeonhole you, somehow, to appreciate you. I've had problems with that all my life. Now, more than ever, we should fight this mentality. What better discipline to do this in, than jazz music?'

## **Pirly Zurstrassen**

Pirly Zurstrassen was born on April 15th 1958 in Heusy (Verviers) and taught himself to play the piano. In 1977 he enrolled at the Verviers Conservatoire, after which he took improvisation classes and followed the Jazz Seminar at the Royal Conservatoire of Liège.

'*Gallinacée*' is the title of Zurstrassen's first album, released in 1984 with his quintet (Igloo). The next year, he wrote the soundtrack for the TV-series about the antics of *Quick & Flupke*. In 1987, he founded the H Septet (H as in 'hepta', Greek for seven), whose first album, '*H*' (Igloo), won a Sax prize. With '*Hautes Fagnes*' (Igloo) he won the André Grosjean prize in 1993.

Pirly Zurstrassen often plays duets too. He has been or still is involved in projects with, amongst others, Daniel Stokart, the Swiss vocalist Christine Schaller (now made into a trio with Garrett List) and the late Jean-Pierre Catoul (CD '*Septimana*', Carbon 7). Pirly Zurstrassen is also very active in drama.

Zurstrassen lectures at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire - since 1990 in the Francophone section and 1995 in the Flemish section. Pirly has been chairing *Les Lundis d'Hortense* for a while now.

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