

PRESS REVIEWS

Translations by Susannah Pabot

DER STANDARD vom 4.9.2009 / Andreas Felber

Sitting on fences

Crossing musical borders: A portrait of Jazz Werkstatt Wien co-founder Daniel Riegler

Vienna – “In retrospect, I’m glad it took so long. I think the CD came out well partially because we’ve been playing some of the pieces for years and because we’re familiar with the material. You can make a CD quickly these days; for just that reason you’ve got to be precise,” comments Daniel Riegler on the double CD *Creatures and other stuff* (Jazz Werkstatt/Lotus) from his large ensemble, Studio Dan - one of the most exciting groups to come out of the Jazz Werkstatt Wien (a successful collective of young Viennese bandleaders which has spawned emulators in Graz, Bern and Berlin since their coming-out in 2005).

Behind Studio Dan lurks a 20-piece sound machine that maneuvers between all genres with ease. There are rifflike big band themes, colorful, pulsing chamber-musical structures and sharply cut patchworks à la John Zorn as well as sound improvisations in the spirit of John Cage, altogether an impressive compositional visiting card: “The music of Studio Dan is a mirror of my musical socialisation.”

The 32-year-old completed a course of study in classical and jazz trombone in Graz and Vienna and has practical experience in both improvisational ensembles and the likes of the Klangforum Wien. The compositions of Giacinto Scelsis (the source of notated improvisation and as such for Riegler a bridge between the two worlds) have also influenced Studio Dan’s music, he says. The ensemble’s name, by the way, is inspired by another great genre-buster: Frank Zappa, specifically his 1979 album *Studio Tan*.

“In my opinion Zappa didn’t settle on a specific sound or style. The consistence with which he refused to settle is unique, especially since his music never really drifts into simple eclecticism or crossover,” says Riegler. He also sees a connection between his own ensemble and the Vienna Art Orchestra, a group that has mutated into a jazz chamber orchestra in its latest incarnation: “The musicians are more versatile and better educated. After all, for simple economic reasons it’s almost impossible these days to focus on only one thing, like jazz or classical music. And there are less and less people who want that.”

Kleine Zeitung, 14 September 2009 / Otmar Klammer

Coherent and passionate

In the program margin of the the jazz and chamber orchestra Studio Dan’s 2-day concert series in Graz’s Theater am Ortweinplatz was the presentation of their brand new double album. The 18-piece, colorful musical crowd led by trombonist Daniel Riegler has succeeded with their Zappaesquely complex “Creatures and other stuff” in producing a excitingly coherent opus out of New Music, jazz, electronica and individual extravagance. An exciting and eclectic work of art.

SWR / Reinhard Kager

CD review in NOW Jazz Magazine/SWR

No less multistylistic is the Austrian group “Studio Dan”. If the pendulum swings more often in the direction of new, composed music – after all, members of the “Klangforum Wien” are playing alongside affiliates of the “JazzWerkstatt Wien” musicians’ pool in this 20-piece ensemble.

www.kulturwoche.at / Manfred Horak

CD review: Creatures & other stuff

The simplest riffs often lead directly off the edge of a cliff and from there it can go somewhere completely different. No, it's not Frank Zappa, it's the JazzWerkstatt Wien, united in Studio Dan and presenting the double CD "Creatures & Other Stuff".

But let's stick with (or remain stuck to, if you like) Frank Zappa for a moment, who released the album "Studio Tan" in September 1978 (one of seven albums, some double, released by Zappa between March of 1978 and November of 1979, *ed.*). You could listen to the four songs contained on that album by way of preparation for the JazzWorkshoppers – and if so, you're better off afterwards going directly to Studio Dan's CD 2. There you hear Julia Purgina's magnificent "Dogfood", which creates a definitely Zappesque atmosphere and in which unimaginable realms of sound are opened up. The instrumentalists, 17 in all, apparently love to pack. Diverse musical styles are packed together here – and once packed, they stay that way. Nothing falls apart; everything is held together as if tied with invisible strings. If they zap back and forth between classic and jazz, as they do for instance in Philip Yaeger's wonderful "Many Light Passages", that zapping may have less to do with Zappa than with, simply put, great capability and curiosity. And, in Stefan Heckel's "Too Many Chefs In A Kitchen", too many cooks don't spoil the broth but add a great many different spices – up to and including folk music. Yes, we're in Austria, the land of great musical sons and daughters – though it sometimes feels like the land of the dwarves. Then again, that feeling pertains more to the sociopolitical component... incidentally, Daniel Riegler provides the soundtrack for this condition with the (by no means dwarfish) "Im Zwergenland". Exaggerated? Definitely, but that doesn't matter so much. It might get laid on a little thick sometimes, for instance in Riegler's "Opulent", but that could just as well be method. Whatever. "Creatures & Other Stuff" by Studio Dan makes a believer out of you with original escapades in sound, ranging from easily digestible Creatures to experimental Other Stuff.

Falter 37/09 / TS – Question of the Week

Just how conflict-laden is it, Herr Riegler?

The trombonist and composer Daniel Riegler is the centerpiece of the 17-piece jazz ensemble Studio Dan, currently finishing its project week in Graz. "In spite of the considerable number of musicians, I'd say our collaboration is more conflict-free than conflict-laden. That can be attributed partially to the fact that we're all on friendly terms with one another. The project week, including open rehearsals and concerts every evening, takes place this week in Vienna's Porgy & Bess; on the weekend we'll be presenting smaller projects from band members and also naturally our current release, 'Creatures & other stuff'." Studio Dan, Die Kleine Feine Band, Jule etc. can be seen on 11 and 12 September at 8pm in Graz's Theater am Ortweinplatz.

„Der Bund“ (CH), 23.02.2009 / by Tom Gsteiger

It works virtually without Swing

Odd sounds, furious improvisation, shifty grooves, intimate melodies and resounding fanfares: Vera Kappeler, Nicolas Masson and Daniel Riegler took care of the highlights of the second festival-edition of the Jazzwerkstatt Bern in the Progr-Turnhalle.

(...)

Improvising and conducting

(...)

For the concert – which left an even more enduring impression than this talent-mix rehearsal – the Viennese

composer, Daniel Riegler, was provided with a Swiss version of his Studio Dan ensemble. And not only the cast of Studio Dan – a combination of chamber music ensemble, jazz combo, rock band and experimental electronics – is exceptional. In part by using strictly designed entanglements, Riegler masters the art of creating fascinating musical progressions out of fragments that in fact do not fit together. As paradoxical as this may sound: his music, which oscillates between concrete and abstract sensuality, is at once highly heterogenous and at the same time seems to be cast in one pour. (...)

Kleine Zeitung, 16.11.2008 / by Otmar Klammer

In Frank Zappa's Footsteps

The native Grazer, Daniel Riegler, causes an uproar with his orchestra "Studio Dan", an ensemble of musicians from opposing stylistic backgrounds.

What is said, remains said: "I have never really liked Graz." Thus spoke the native-born Grazer, Daniel Riegler, knowing that we would not agree with his sentiment. Of course, that was not the reason why he relocated to Vienna as a youth. (I WOULD LEAVE THIS OUT IN ENGLISH: That would have been the icing on the cake! AND ADD: Oh, no) No, the real and truly mundane reason he left was to study the trombone under Rudi Josel. At that time Frank Zappa, who always played a "major role" in this young composer's musical view of the world, had unfortunately already been dead for some years. It was, however, still possible to listen to the records made by this US-anti-law-abiding citizen in Vienna. "Studio Tan", for example, a ground-breaking recording from 1978, after which Riegler was later to name his 17-head ensemble.

Sensational

As "Studio Dan" this group, which lives in that agravic space between contemporary jazz and new music, has for the past three years been causing a sensation in our country, particularly since this year when playing their way through Zappa's central Œuvre as Stage Band for the Viennese Jazz-establishment "Porgy&Bess". Riegler - who arranged Zappa's works specifically for his band and, as a composer, takes Frankie Boys kaleidoscopic cosmos as a starting point – does not, however, intend to appear as a "cover-band". His aim is rather, together with the widely varying musical personalities in his ensemble, to follow his vision of a "large orchestral plane with a very specific sound".

Collective new sound-play

Although Riegler is a founding member and one of the masterminds behind the Jazzwerkstatt Wien, this man with a clear voice is certainly not a jazz-musician in the classical sense. And knowing his "personal affinity for new music" - after all, if one studies Zappa, no path avoids Edgar Varèse - this very specific sound can no doubt be found somewhere in the vicinity of collectively improvised new sound-play. If there is a thread running through the distinct compositions of Daniel Riegler, then he would like this thread to be improvisation, and "often his starting point when composing is already improvisation". Truly zappaesque.

Jazzzeit November-December 2008 / Harald Justin

Studio Dan

Daniel Riegler's 17-headed ensemble celebrated its debut in the context of the first Jazzwerkstatt (2005). This "highly-interesting collective" will perform on numerous occasions throughout Austria toward the end of this year.

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He who has just become the father of a newborn daughter and - with the name of his other, even more musical project - honored not only his own, but also the name of one of Frank Zappa's albums, should not be considered unlucky. Daniel Riegler therefore not only has a “darling of fortune” and is a fortunate fellow himself, he also represents with his “Studio Dan” a stroke of luck for the local musical scene.

The co-founder of the JazzWerkstatt Wien has with Studio Dan – up until this coming Christmas acting as Stage Band at “Porgy & Bess” - created a 17-headed sound-body, which is in the process of effortlessly helping to carve out a new musical trend: the fusion of jazz, classical and new music achieved by spicing up the traditional jazz-ensemble with strings, oboe and bassoon is falling on amenable ears amongst the musically educated in our country. Such listeners take pleasure in following the sounds of Studio Dan when the ensemble goes on tour. (JUST)

From Porgy & Bess's program:

April 2008

I am to this day baffled by the fact that, as a mere 15-year-old, I managed to stumble over Frank Zappa's album “Absolutely Free”, his second, in a village CD-shop and – without even listening to it – to buy it. With the exception of the compulsory “Bobby Brown goes down”, which I must have heard in one or the other school-disco, I at that time knew nothing about Zappa's music or his person - and even less about the artistic phenomenon Frank Zappa. Fate must have been at play, for since that moment nothing else has ever moved or excited me as profoundly, nor perhaps held me as firmly in its grip. Zappa's utterly unprejudiced attitude toward all kinds of music, paired with his ever-present sense of humor, have opened my mind and soul to far-ranging musical approaches. The combination of all kinds of “easy listening” with every possible playful exploration of so-called “serious music” - without remaining at the surface of any one musical style-mix – possibly still remains a singular accomplishment, and has yet, in my opinion, to achieve the impact it deserves.

The inspiration for “Studio Dan” ultimately stems from my musical initiation-experience in the early 1990s. The ensemble's cast offers – both on a personal and a instrumental level – everything needed to create “boundless” music: in the background a tried and tested jazz- and groove rhythm-group, a taut brass section, as a link the sound-worlds of applied electronics and an expanded percussion section, and finally, in the forefront, the sophisticated chamber music options offered by string and woodwind players.

Today we shall play a “Tribute to Frank Zappa”, including music from all his creative periods. I will thereby (I hope!) not only satisfy a wish of my own, but also contribute to the dissemination of Zappa's pieces. The “Porgy & Bess” audience will, moreover, after our first concert in March be sworn into the spectrum of our stage-band-activity. (Daniel Riegler)