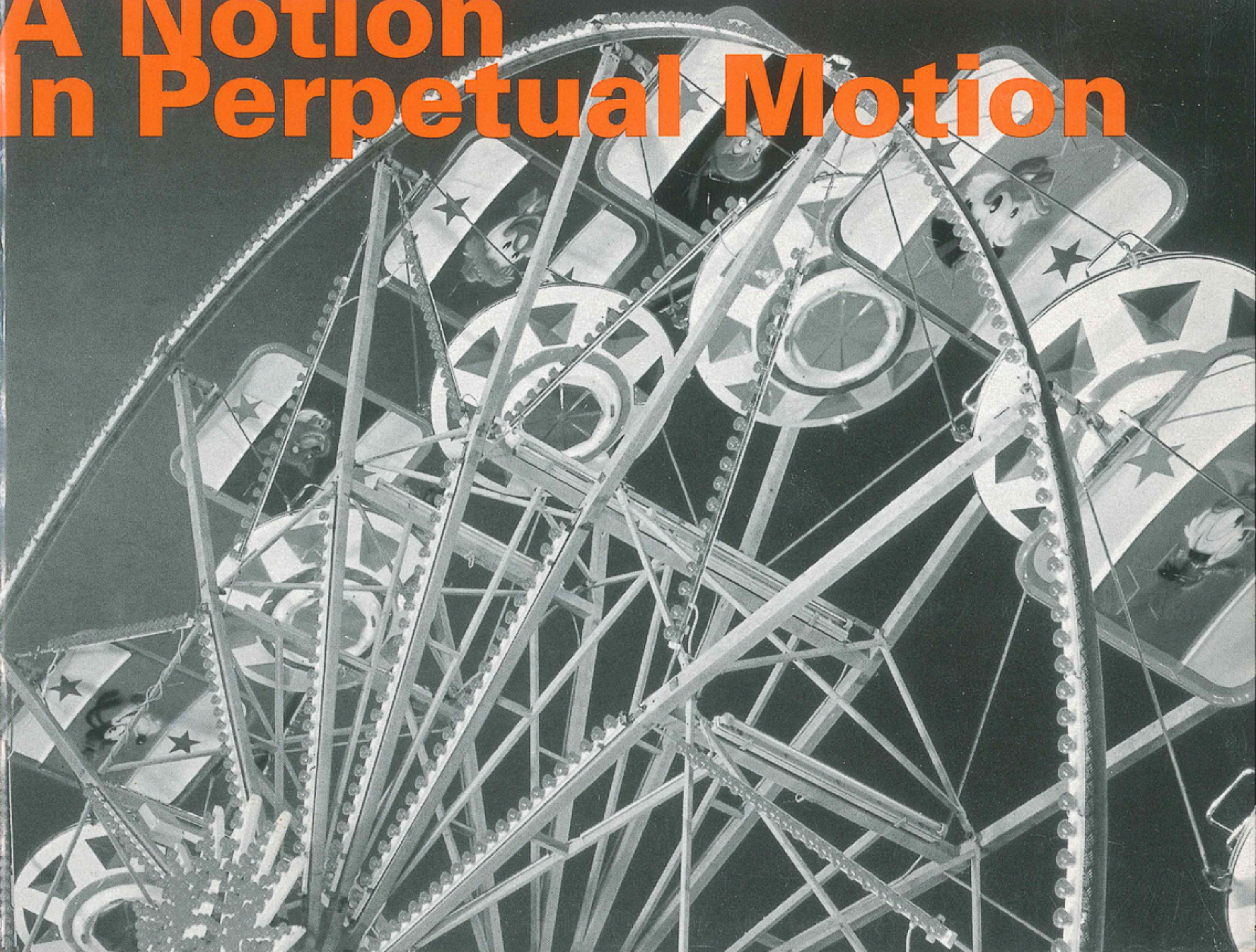


Vienna Art Orchestra A Notion In Perpetual Motion



A Notion In Perpetual Motion

very art form, the past is in a life-and-death struggle with the present (and therefore, implicitly, the future). The tension that results is of such an immediacy and all-pervasive power that we recognize those rare individuals who are able to escape its pull as innovators. The rest are controlled, to some degree or other, by it. The most derivative artists are so inundated with the past that they are doomed to repeat it; their art falls behind by standing still. The most successful artists find ways to use the tension as a creative impulse.

Europe provided a meaningful and prescient direction for jazz in the '80s by way of a remarkable body of large ensembles, led by composer/arrangers with a personal vision. Each was influenced in their own way by varying aspects of the jazz tradition, as well as Europe's classical legacy and the avant-garde; folk musics of their native locale; popular entertainment of the music hall/cabaret; and other areas of contemporary culture and politics. The degree to which they embraced the past – and the choices of which traditions to use and which to reject – formed their identity. During its heyday, the decade of the '80s, no orchestra rode this wave of energy between the past and the present with more flair and fantasy than the Vienna Art Orchestra. The reason was Mathias Rüegg.

A few years ago, in notes for the CD release of the VAO's *Suite For The Green Eighties*, I invoked the name of Ellington as a model for Rüegg's methods. This was not meant to compare Rüegg's achievements with those of Ellington, the maestro's, nor to suggest that their musics sounded similar. Nor am I doing so now, and yet I think that the idea of Ellington as a precedent is a positive force in the manner in which Rüegg has grappled with his own artistic/creative tension, and that echoes of Ellington permeate this program too, perhaps even moreso than the previous disc.

Specific examples are easy to cite, but difficult to interpret. For one thing, the Ellington band survived on the road, and we are fortunate to have so many thrilling samples of even an average night's work of theirs available to us on discs. Here, we hear the VAO recorded live, and notice how, as Ellington featured his soloists in particularly favorable, specific settings, Rüegg showcases Roman Schwaller and Herbert Joos. "Romana" and the arrangement of "H.M. Blues" (note the Ducal touches in backgrounds and ensemble colors) are designed à la "Concerto For Cootie" or "Boy Meets Horn," among the many concerto-like, spotlight pieces Duke



concocted for his sidemen. Trumpeter Joos himself seems to honor the precedent with a Rex Stewart-ish

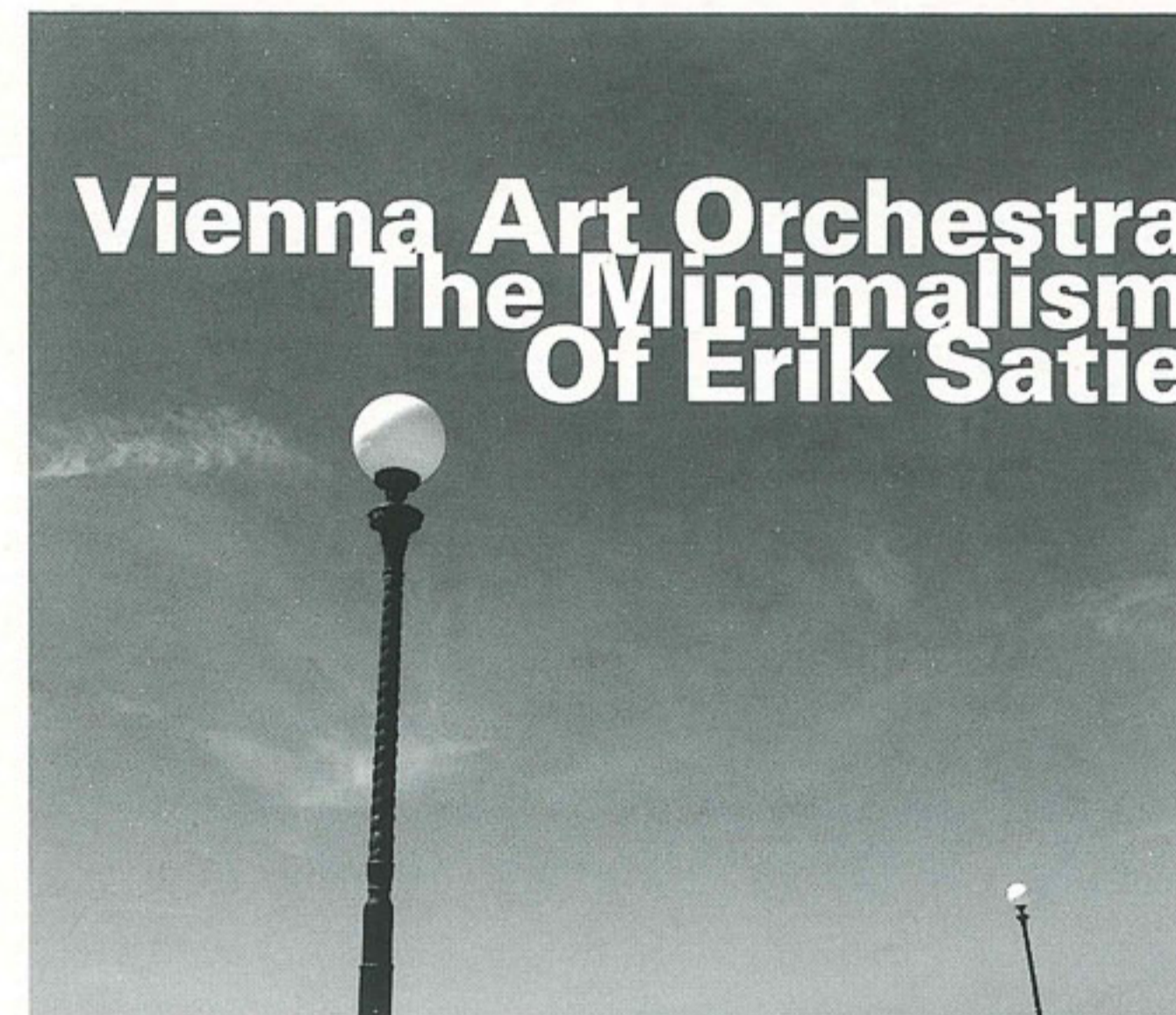
performance of slurs and half-valved sounds; then, the addition of Hannes Kotttek's ultra-high register trumpet creates a Cootie-and-Cat (Anderson)-style conclusion. Kotttek performs a similar role on "Woodworms In The Roots." (This latter title is curiously ironic. Woodworm, to reverse the word, is a rather bitter plant found in Europe. If woodworms exist (I can't find them in my dictionary) they sound destructive, destroying the roots (foundation) of whatever plant this may be. But "roots" has also a musical connotation, and after the "woody" marimba introduction, subsequent developments take on an exotic, "Caravan"-like tinge. Are these the (traditional) roots being undermined?)

Such possibly wayward thoughts are provoked by Rüegg's compositional demeanor, as no music wears the same face for too long. This is the "newness" of Rüegg's art – the personal, evocative ways he weaves other influences and invocations through his music. Another lesson he learned from Ellington it to tailor his compositions to the particular strengths, in tone and temperament, of his musicians; the extent to which Rüegg's imagination carries this forward energizes and individualizes the music, with surprising timbres and textures at every curve. "Voices Without Words," for example, begins as a duet between Lauren Newton's uninhibited vocalism and Uli Scherer's percussive electronic keyboard, but before long segues into an intricate raga-like rhyth-

mic pattern. The twists and turns of "Life At The Dead Sea" are like trying to follow an out-of-date map, when the landscape is unfamiliar and the landmarks have changed over time.

Does the "perpetual motion" of the title refer to life on the road? Or the ongoing continuum of musical tradition, which in the hands of Rüegg can be honored and manipulated at the same time? Hard to say, since in the musical realm of Mathias Rüegg, meanings have multiple choices and anything is possible.

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Art Lange

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Lauren Newton *voice*
Hannes Kottek *trumpet & flugelhorn*
Karl "Bumi" Fian *trumpet & flugelhorn*
Herbert Joos *trumpet, flugelhorn & alphon*
Wolfgang Puschnig *alto sax, sopranino sax, piccolo & flute*
Harry Sokal *soprano sax, tenor sax & flute*
Roman Schwaller *tenor sax*
Christian Radovan *trombone*
John Sass *tuba*
Woody Schabata *marimba & vibes*
Uli Scherer *piano, Fender piano & Yamaha DX-7*
Heiri Kaenzig *bass*
Joris Dudli *drums & percussion*
Wolfgang Reisinger *drums & percussion*
Erich Dorfinger *sound*
Mathias Rüegg *leader, composer & arranger*

- 1 **Sighs From South-Carinthia** 11:01
ISRC 131.1001158
Wolfgang Puschnig – sopranino sax, alto sax
Uli Scherer – piano
- 2 **Woodworms In The Roots** 8:42
ISRC 131.1001159
Woody Schabata – marimba
Karl "Bumi" Fian – trumpet
Hannes Kottek – trumpet
- 3 **Voices Without Words** 5:25
ISRC 131.1001160
Lauren Newton – voice
- 4 **Life At The Dead Sea** 9:46
ISRC 131.1001161
Woody Schabata – vibes
Uli Scherer – piano
Christian Radovan – trombone
- 5 **Lady Delay** 9:27
ISRC 131.1001162
Lauren Newton – voice
Uli Scherer – piano

- 6 **Romana** 6:04
ISRC 131.1001163
Roman Schwaller – tenor sax
- 7 **A Natural Sound** 3:12
ISRC 131.1001163
Harry Sokal – soprano sax
- 8 **Round Midnight** 8:37
by Thelonious Monk
ISRC 131.1001164
Uli Scherer – piano
Herbert Joos – flugelhorn
- 9 **French Alphon** 8:53
ISRC 131.1001165
Herbert Joos – alphon
Christian Radovan – trombone
Harry Sokal – soprano sax
- 10 **H.M. Blues** 5:27
by Bhumibol Adulyadej
SRC 131.1001166
Herbert Joos – trumpet

Total Time DDD ²⁴Bit 76:40

All titles composed (except otherwise indicated) by Mathias Rüegg/Suisa; All compositions and arrangements by Mathias Rüegg published by Tuhtah Publishing/Suisa. Recorded live May 17 & 18, 1985 at Mühle Hunzigen, Rubigen/Switzerland; Digital two-track recording by Peter Pfister; Liner notes by Art Lange; Cover photo by Luca Buti; Graphic concept by fuhrer vienna; Produced by Werner X. Uehlinger.

Vienna Art Orchestra uses Electro-Voice sound-system and microphones. Herbert Joos plays J.B.S. instruments. Wolfgang Puschnig uses Vandoren mouth-pieces and reeds.

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File under: Jazz/Free Improvisation



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