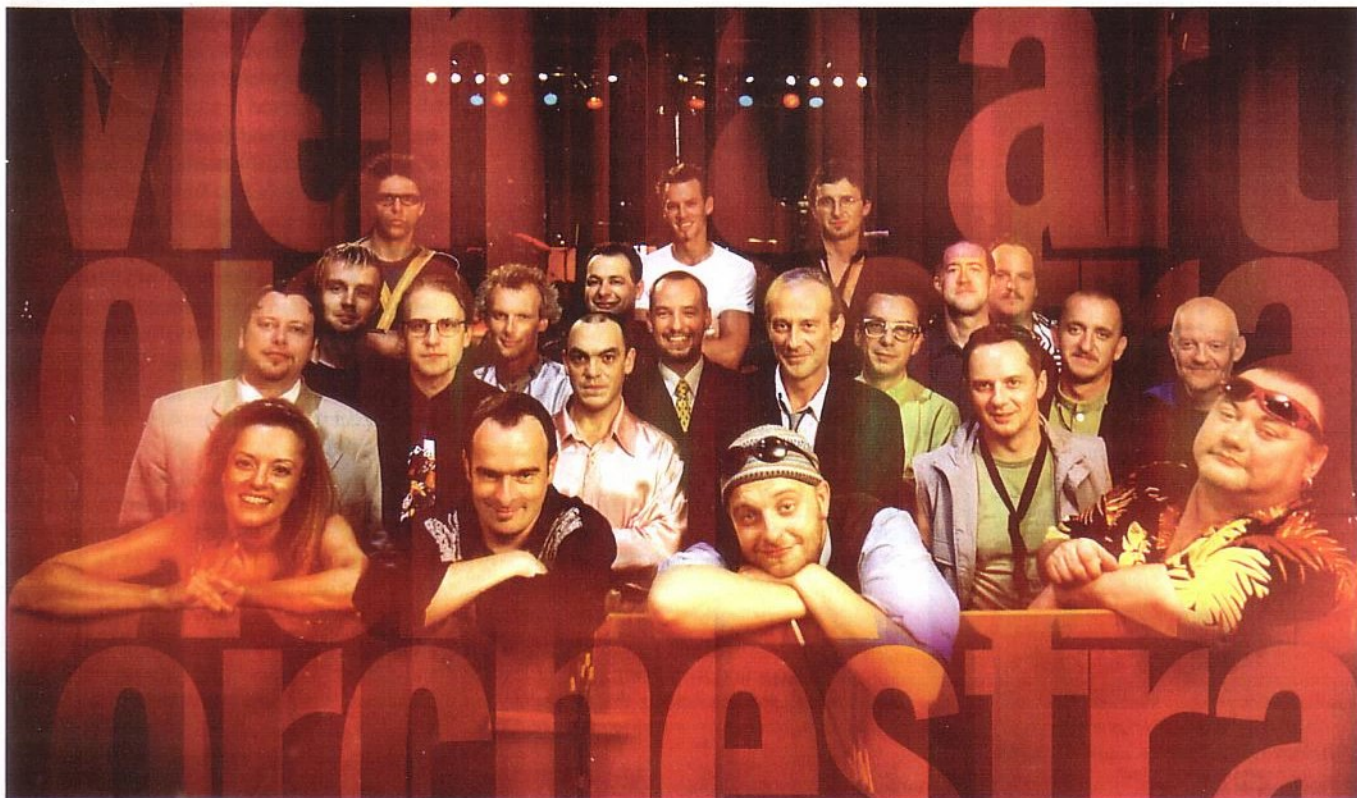




Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

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Vienna Art Orchestra *Swing & Affairs*

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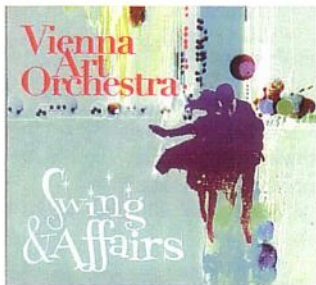
★★★½

When Vienna Art Orchestra's records on HatHut first hit these shores in the '80s, they were extremely exciting. The title of their album *From No Time To Rag Time* encapsulated what

was potent in their concept, which consisted of constructing interstylistic bridges, integrating classical music and all sorts of jazz into a vibrant mix.

Nearly 25 years later, that's quite a commonplace practice, especially in Europe. There are many bands in Austria alone that cover the genre interzones, not to mention Switzerland and Germany. Indeed, the German-speaking world has made something of a specialty of such projects.

Vienna Art Orchestra's head start has given it some advantages, many of them plainly audible on this project, which consists of re-recordings of favorite pieces from the band's recent song-



book and last few records. Leader Matthias Rüegg has an enormously fluid and expressive band on his hands, and as a conductor he's got a flair for juxtaposing big, bold orchestrations against more sparse improvisations. The band, in this case, includes members

from all over the world, a sort of United Nations idea not unlike George Gruntz's orchestras.

The soloists are solid, in places quite inventive, not at all phoning it in. The trombone section, in particular, is wonderful. But the program on *Swing & Affairs* is too easy. It's straight down the middle crowd-pleasing festival fare — more pronounced because of the "best of" quality of this production — and a quarter century down the pike that's grown predictable and not particularly stimulating. The group works its way through "'Round Midnight," on which Herwig Gradischnig plays a perfectly heartfelt baritone solo, but somehow it's all so safe.

Forays into Satie and Strauss or a trip on

"Take The 'A' Train," once the surprises that powered VAO's proceedings, now seem de rigueur. Rüegg's originals — six of them here — take interesting turns, and in a way they're more engaging than versions of Eric Dolphy, Charles Mingus or Mongo Santamaria songs. Mauro Negri takes a thrilling clarinet solo on the punchy "Off Beat Berlin On The Beat." But Rüegg is also prone to a kind of cutesiness — "When Vienna Doesn't Waltz" — that seems to have supplanted the more subtle genre investigations of yore.

—John Corbett

Swing & Affairs: Hobo Ho; Grosseienne No. 1; Straight Up And Down; 'Round Midnight; Incubi Et Succubi; Der Wegweiser; When Vienna Doesn't Waltz; The Ballad Of Sad Young Men; Persischer Marsch; Afro Blue; Lisboa Reverie; Off Beat Berlin On The Beat; Tango From Obango; Take The "A" Train; Niente Era Mio. (70:01)

Personnel: Matthias Rüegg, conductor; Tobais Weidinger, Matthieu Michel, Thomas Gansch, Jürg Engels, trumpet; Adrian Mears, Robert Bachner, Georgui Kornazov, trombone; Ed Partyka, bass trombone, tuba; Mauro Negri, Joris Roelofs, clarinet and alto saxophone; Hark Sokal, tenor and soprano saxophone, flute; Andy Scherrer, tenor saxophone; Herwig Gradischnig, bass clarinet, baritone and tenor saxophone; Martin Koller, guitar; Georg Breinschmid, bass; Mario Gonzi, drums; Anna Lauvergnac, voice.

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