



# HIGHLIGHTS

VIENNA ART ORCHESTRA / LIVE IN VIENNA 1989



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Institutions... what do we think of when we hear that word?

Of the Internal Revenue service, the Federal Courts, Günter Grass, Château Margaux, the Queen, the Académie Française, the Vatikan, Helmut Zilk. The word "institution" implies authority, power, rigidity, the unalterable, that which resists change. And above all, it implies an acceptance which is broader than what we would consider consistent with art.

Institutions must be reliable and therefore must not be allowed to change easily. Institutions represent security. For these reasons, I am reluctant to call the Vienna Art Orchestra an institution, although by now, after 15 years of existence, it has in the widest sense already become one. At the very least, it could be called an anti-institution.

The title "Highlights 1977-1990" seems to place this collection among the countless anthologies in the category "The Best of...", implying that the "best" of the group or individual is already past. Far from being an anthology, these "Highlights", with the exception of two cuts, are musical highpoints from a single concert. They were taped live, as is much of today's stunning European jazz, during a concert on 20. May 1989, in Vienna's Messepalast. And the VAO is anything but a stagnant or hermetically-sealed "body of sound". It's like a structure in a state of flux; a formation like a flowing river. I stand on the river bank and look into the "blue" Danube but I am actually seeing new and different waters flowing by all the time.

We have Mathias Rüegg to thank for creating the VAO and for seeing that it adds up to far more than the sum of its remarkable parts. It is a unity rich in diversity. Five years ago, on the 10th anniversary of this Viennese wonder, Rüegg wrote: "Every year we play a new program - or even two - because repetition is tedious".

The "Highlights" isn't a collection of repeats, but rather a new look at old compositions. Improvised music, like that of the VAO, has always sprung from the great open spaces, free from slavish repetition, in the solo arrangements as well as in the written segments. In Jazz, we have learned that - far from being obstacles to spontaneity - continuity and development are its prerequisites.

"Imagination requires memory in order to grasp the present", said Friedrich Dürrenmatt (who since, perhaps mistakenly, has become something, of an institution himself). "Without memory, the present would be a meaningless event, rising out of nothing and sinking into nothing". The past is present in various ways in the music of the VAO... in the continued involvement of some of its players (the make-up of the orchestra has evolved gradually over time like the structure of a living organism) as well as in the reworking of old compositions. The components of a program don't have to be all new, composed just yesterday, for the program to qualify as new. The novelty lies in the detail, in the essence of improvisation, in the overall flow.

The 14 tracks on these two CD's offer a cross-section of the VAO's music, still very current, as it was in 1989 (in the case of one title, 1990). It is clear from listening to these pieces that they have grown organically. This, too, shows how the music "lives". The music's range - from helter-skelter intellectual curiosities ("The Opener is Bizarre") to wide emotional landscapes ("Blue for Two"); from "European" art forms to American "Trivial Power" - gives it the kind of richness always inherent in the band's "unwritten" program. This is an ensemble that loves big shows and knows how to pull them off (for the soloists especially). The VAO music is overwhelming, brilliant, festive. It is authoritative, beyond all question, like Ellington's big bands' (just to pay brief tribute to this great forerunner).

In old Swiss farming communities, in the rural inns where time seems to stand still, a print depicting the stages of man's life, popular in former times, often hangs. It shows the life stages rising and falling symmetrically, from cradle to grave and infancy to old age, with the man of forty at the top. The two-line caption underneath reads: "At forty comes the pause/To consider what is coming and what has passed by". In the fifteenth year of the VAO, Mathias Rüegg, is turning 40, but there's no sign of his taking a pause. The VAO's output is more varied than ever. It doesn't hurt, however, to take stock of one's life half-way through, to assess one's achievements. That, I think, is the reason for "Highlights". Not the main one, perhaps, but a reason nonetheless.

Peter Rüedi, March 1992

Translation by Karin and Roger Kaminker

All tunes recorded live may 20. 1989 at messepalast (festival of vienna)  
by jürg peterhans, except innocence of clichés\*, recorded september 1989  
and blue loop play\*\* recorded november 1990 both live in vienna.

\* from the CD - Innocence of clichés

\*\* from the CD - Chapter II

### Disc 1 and Disc 2 / 1- 6:

lauren newton	voice
hannes kottek	trumpet
bumi fian	trumpet
herbert joos	flugelhorn
wolfgang puschnig	reeds
harry sokal	reeds
roman schwaller	tenorsax
christian radovan	trombone
jon sass	tuba
uli scherer	keyboards
heiri kaenzig	basses
wolfgang reisinger	drums
mathias rüegg	leader

### Disc 2 / 7:

alexandra naumann	voice
rudi berger	violin
hannes kottek	trumpet
bumi fian	trumpet
herbert joos	trumpet, flugelhorn
klaus dickbauer	reeds
harry sokal	reeds
florian bramböck	reeds
joseph bowie	trombone
gabriele rosenberg	trombone
christian radovan	trombone
uli scherer	keyboards
heiri känzig	bass
thomas alkier	drums
mathias rüegg	leader

All titles composed and arranged by mathias rüegg / SUIISA  
except "his majesty's blues" composed by Adolaidey Bhumibol and  
"blue loop play" composed and arranged by Uli Scherer/AKM,  
lyrics by Gertrude Stein.

"blue for two", "a liberate proposal", "haluk", "his majesty's blues", "lady delay",  
"polish contrasts" & "charly's trauma" - published by TUHTAH Publishing SUIISA  
and released on hatART CD's

"The opener is bizarre", "two little animals" & "k wie ikeda" - published by Burkhard  
Hennen Publishing, Gema

"poschiavo", "innocence of clichés", "blue loop play" - published by ANTENNA.

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AKG and Bösendorfer.

Linernotes by Peter Rüedi

Coverart by Herbert Joos

Foto by Wolfgang Plenk

Sound by Erich Dorfinger

This program was performed live (May 1989) in Frankfurt, Amstetten (A),  
Le Mans, Rouen, Amiens, Angouleme, Köln, Regensburg, Lausanne, Stainach (A),  
Vienna and Jerusalem.

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### CD 1

- |          |                              |       |
|----------|------------------------------|-------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>the opener is bizarre</b> | 9.51  |
| <b>2</b> | <b>blue for two</b>          | 6.09  |
| <b>3</b> | <b>two little animals</b>    | 11.16 |
| <b>4</b> | <b>poschiavo</b>             | 7.01  |
| <b>5</b> | <b>a liberate proposal</b>   | 4.56  |
| <b>6</b> | <b>haluk</b>                 | 13.58 |
| <b>7</b> | <b>perpetuum mobile</b>      | 10.21 |

### CD 2

- |          |                             |       |
|----------|-----------------------------|-------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>k wie ikeda</b>          | 15.29 |
| <b>2</b> | <b>his majesty's blues</b>  | 5.45  |
| <b>3</b> | <b>lady delay</b>           | 9.45  |
| <b>4</b> | <b>polish contrasts</b>     | 7.34  |
| <b>5</b> | <b>innocence of clichés</b> | 8.32  |
| <b>6</b> | <b>charly's trauma</b>      | 2.36  |
| <b>7</b> | <b>blue loop play</b>       | 8.08  |