



*Pech Onderweg*  
Misha Mengelberg (BVHaast-ICP)  
by Duck Baker

There is no doubt that Misha Mengelberg was an excellent, even a great, jazz pianist. He was already close to that when he recorded with Eric Dolphy at the end of the latter's career and he certainly was there by the mid '60s, when he was leading a quartet with alto saxophonist Piet Noordijk and drummer Han Bennink. But Mengelberg, like Bennink, was a musical maverick rarely content as a performer to play 'just' jazz and this is reflected on the solo record *Pech Onderweg*, recorded 40 years ago and recently reissued on vinyl. He mixes in elements of almost every piano style you can name: classical music, boogie-woogie, ragtime, schmaltzy pop music and occasional percussive banging and vocalizing that sounds drunken, if not deranged.

The first of the "Pech Onderweg" pieces is a montage during which the pianist evokes many of the elements cited above, in stream-of-consciousness fashion (the title translates along the lines of "troubles coming on the road"). During "Pech Onderweg 2", Mengelberg introduces passages of boogie-woogie that transmogrify into insistent banging discords repeated long enough to be nearly annoying, then in a flash he's back playing the insistent boogie figures. This may sound like a merely clever device, but Mengelberg brings it off so well it succeeds in being much more.

Listening to "Banana Suite", which takes up much of Side B, one wonders whether Charles Ives would have sounded like Mengelberg had he been born 60 years later and been Dutch. Yes, Mengelberg is edgier, as was the world he lived in, but, like Ives, found many things he could revere, even as he lampooned a lot of them. We hear something a bit different on "Wie Jeuk Heeft, Als Moet Men" though; this is an early version of a song the ICP Orchestra would perform many times in later years, called, "De Sprong, O Romantiek der Hazen", but the solo version involves a gentler approach, similar to that employed by Monk on pop songs like "There's Danger in Your Eyes, Cherie". This is sentimentality that is wise to the world, evincing a vulnerability that's the more open for not being naïve and it may be the high point of this rewarding recital.

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*Globe Unity: 50 Years*  
Alexander von Schlippenbach  
Globe Unity Orchestra (Intakt)  
*So Far*  
Rudi Mahall/Alexander von Schlippenbach  
(Relative Pitch)  
*Interweaving*  
Alexander von Schlippenbach/  
Dag Magnus Narvesen (Not Two)  
by Andrey Henkin

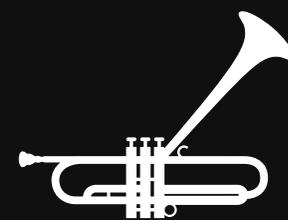
German pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach adores Thelonious Monk, regularly playing his music and even devoting entire projects to it. Yet it can be argued that Schlippenbach now inhabits the same firmament as his idol, especially since, in his 80th year, his career is already 20 years longer and with far more varied collaborations.

One of the reasons for Schlippenbach's fame is his Globe Unity Orchestra (GUO), among the first free improvising large ensembles with a membership of most of the continent's most significant players. The band was formed for the 1966 Berliner Jazztagen and, 50 years later, almost to the day, Schlippenbach brought the group back to Jazzfest Berlin to celebrate its gold anniversary with a single 44-minute piece. Two original members in trumpeter Manfred Schoof and saxophonist Gerd Dudek are still on board, as are longtime participants Evan Parker (tenor saxophone) and Paul Lovens (drums). As befits the group's name, the 18-piece group is filled out by musicians from various generations and seven countries (England, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland and the U.S., with such names as Tomasz Stanko, Paul Lytton and Wolter Wierbos). What makes the GUO so significant—and as is evident from this remarkably detailed recording—is how the individual players' voices are maintained while contributing to the whole, myriad small-group outcroppings providing variety and creating marvelous textural moments. There are full-band squalls a-plenty to be sure yet also focus born of a concept a half-century (and counting) in the making.

One of Schlippenbach's more recent partners of note in the new millennium has been bass clarinetist Rudi Mahall (a member of GUO). And while the latter has recorded his own duets with the former's wife Aki Takase, *So Far* is their first recorded foray as a duo. The album is 11 improvisations, totaling 50 minutes of relaxed interplay and constructive dialogue. Mahall has always been an impish player and he draws out the sprightliness in Schlippenbach. And despite some moments of bleating atonality, *So Far* is as straightforward a jazz date as one will get from these two, pithiness paired with melodicism, as on the closing deconstruction of Monk: "Apostrophy".

Schlippenbach continues to form new partnerships. *Interweaving* pairs him with Norwegian drummer Dag Magnus Narvesen, whose is 45 years his junior. The two first worked together when Schlippenbach was a guest of Norway's Kitchen Ensemble (one of many descendants of GUO) in 2013 and the precedent for this project is Schlippenbach's longtime duo with Swedish drummer Sven-Åke Johansson. This is a highly percussive Schlippenbach in tandem with Narvesen's skittering accompaniment, or ethereal and sparse over mysterious clangs and pings. Either way, the pianist still crafts cohesive statements, melodic cells connecting firmly to each other while the drummer is tightly restrained in his responses, whether via density or dynamics. Monk makes another appearance to close the album with "Evidence". They say love is the international language; Schlippenbach and Narvesen prove it is actually free improvisation.

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