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Su Rossy Girod

Three Trios





Su Rossy Girod – Three Trios

A short conversation between the musicians

Nat Su: I remember how we met back in 1989 at Berklee College in Boston, USA.

Jorge Rossy: ...we played in a Horace Silver ensemble.

Nat Su: ...I think we happened to be in the same ensemble that played the music of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet. You were actually on trumpet! Shortly afterwards, I found out, that you also played drums. At the time, I was deeply involved with the music of Lennie Tristano and his student entourage, foremost Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh. One day you approached me and said you had a regular session with a piano player, Mike Kanan, and that I should meet him, since Mike was also in that Tristano space.

Jorge Rossy: We started playing together in sessions then and haven't stopped yet...

Nat Su: Right, and later we formed a band, the International Hashva Orchestra with Mark Turner on tenor and Joe Martin on bass.

Dominique Girod: This was when I first heard Jorge playing! A little later Nat introduced me to Jorge and the three of us started playing regularly as a trio.

Jorge Rossy: When I started teaching in Basel 5 days a month, I would always try to escape to Zurich one evening to have a session with you guys. In those sessions, Nat would play alto sax, piano and drums and I would play piano and drums. You, Dominique did not seem to have a problem with that. It was all very “unprofessional” - we never thought of getting gigs, we just wanted to enjoy playing for a couple of hours and then have some duck in an Asian restaurant close to the studio.

Nat Su: It all just grew out of having fun together. I have always been interested in the piano, since as a horn player I deal only with one note at a time. But I always wanted to explore, as well as I could, the different aspects of the music I like; not just the melodic, but also the harmonic and rhythmic aspects. So, the piano and the drums became magnets of interest to take those perspectives. (I tried the bass for a second but being left-handed, it did not go anywhere, so I gave up). So, the fun aspect during our sessions led to what we do now.

Dominique Girod: Actually, I always wanted to play the kazoo in this band as well, but you both wouldn't let me. So, I stayed with the bass.

-laughter-

Jorge Rossy: After a few years, I started getting into vibes and eventually I brought a vibes to the studio where we played. Your drumming was always very good and just kept getting better and better! I really enjoyed it a lot. I tried to convince you to come out of the closet as a drummer and start doing gigs and recording!

Nat Su: For a long time my mind-set on the drums was really just tied to the private “fun” aspect.

Jorge Rossy: You resisted for years and I never really understood why... for me all these concepts of instrumental or professional identity are getting more meaningless every day!

Nat Su: When you started encouraging me to play was when I felt like taking a shift in perspective. When a musician of his mastery of the drums encourages you, it has to be taken seriously on an existential level (meaning: how often does that happen in a given lifetime) so I actually started practicing. I will never forget my first and only drum “lesson” with you in Spain, which I forced on you. I asked you about the brushes, what to do with them, how to handle them. The lesson lasted all of one minute, and was a great Zen experience, because it consisted of a single short sentence from you: “Try to get a good sound and don't hurt yourself”.

-laughter-

Nat Su: I've been trying to unpack that wisdom ever since. It is a very humbling experience to accompany a master drummer who happens to be playing the vibes. But your support is so encouraging that over time, I am starting to feel more confident and really motivated to live up to the challenge of comping for two masters of their instruments.

Dominique Girod: You both are musicians I admire and trust one hundred percent. For me on bass, it's very interesting to see and hear how different musical spectral colors emerge in the different instrumental constellations. Also, to follow Nat's passion and development on drums. But regardless of the instrument, it's always the same three personalities that conceive the overall musical expression.

Jorge Rossy: When I play, I focus on enjoying the experience, providing what seems appropriate from whatever instrument I am playing, staying calm and trying to enjoy how things unfold. As soon as I get overexcited, have too many ideas or try to control things, the music just dies.

Nat Su: From the perspective of the saxophone, the sax/bass/drums format gives me more melodic space, since the harmony manifests itself only through the two-part counterpoint of sax and bass. Dominique's bass lines are so strong, clear and logical (he knows his J.S. Bach) that I can be the elephant in the room without being able to break anything; he is right there with the torch should I stray into the dark. With vibes/sax/bass I get more harmonic information, but your comping is so subtle that it hints, but never imposes. I don't, when playing, perceive it as a loss of melodic freedom, but a gain in melodic responsibility since I have two spontaneous inputs to react to. The fact that Dominique sticks to the bass gives the whole undertaking an anchor, even when the waters get choppy.

Dominique Girod: Listening to each other respectfully and letting everyone have their say is a characteristic of jazz and improvisation in general. And the world and our society need nothing more than that at the present time! Also, flat hierarchies for instance!

Jorge Rossy: As a musician, I feel a moral responsibility to perform the sound of real democracy on stage every time I have a chance. Musicians are in a privileged position to inspire everyone, showing how democracy works in real time. Democratic ways of decision making are in fact most efficient to solve all kinds of problems for any community or collective organization. Also, making sure that all constructive ideas are being heard and intelligent consensus is reached is a natural consequence of being a well-educated adult with a sense of responsibility and a meaningful social and private life. A good jazz band embodies this in every performance and the audience perceive it as "magic".

Nat Su: In improvised music, trust is everything. No trust equals a shaky outcome at best, otherwise failure, just as in whatever enterprise of collaborative human endeavor. Which is why I will always hesitate, if not outright resist, to put the terms „democracy“ and „trust“ into the same sentence. These words are not friends, and therefore should not be confused. Then there is the question of agency: who is an agent? When and where? I am an agent when, for example, I decide to brush my

teeth. But when I play music, can I humble myself to let the music be the agent, and I am its facilitator? If not, why do I play music? Decades ago, I fell in love with and decided to make friends with music, because she is a great existential partner. Why should I fight her for agency? I trust her; she was there before me, and she will be there after me. She sees what I don't see. Once I grasp that (I am not there yet), I can start to relax. My present task is to get to that realization (On the Zen-ladder, I think you, Jorge got there, and – total disclosure – I envy you for that).

Jorge Rossy: I guess I fooled you! I wish I was there too!

-laughter-

Jorge Rossy: Seriously now, the admiration is mutual and playing with you both means a lot to me.

About the musicians

Nat Su is the son of a pastor from Cameroon and a Swiss mother. He attended the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz and the Berklee College of Music in Boston. Su has been active as a professional jazz musician since 1987, being particularly influenced by Lee Konitz. He has played with Franco Ambrosetti, Urs Voerkele, Irène Schweizer, Lee Konitz, Jürg Grau, Jack Walrath, among others, and performs with his own "Nat Su Trio" (with Marc Abrams and Dieter Ulrich) and "Nat Su Quartet" (with bassist Stephan Kurmann, drummer Norbert Pfammatter and pianist Roberto Tarenzi). He also led the quintet "The International Hashva Orchestra" (with drummer Jorge Rossy, pianist Mike Kanan, tenor saxophonist Mark Turner and bassist Joe Martin), with whom he recorded for TCB Records ("The International Hashva Orchestra", 1995, "All's Well" 1999). In the mid-2000s, he spent some time in New York to take private lessons with David Liebman. His CD "Volatile", on which he plays his own compositions with his quartet, was released by TCB in 2007. Su teaches saxophone, improvisation and ensemble, as well as jazz harmony at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, and has written a book on jazz harmony. He lives in Zurich.

Jorge Rossy is internationally recognized as one of the most influential drummers of his generation. His sideman work includes over 200 recordings with renowned jazz musicians such as Brad Mehldau, Ethan Iverson, Kevin Hays, Albert Sanz, Mark Turner, Chris Cheek, Seamus Blake, Joshua Redman, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Jakob Bro, Enrico Pieranunzi and Steve Swallow, among many others. Jorge has also toured with some jazz greats including Charlie Haden, Wayne Shorter, Lee Konitz, Carla Bley, and Joe Lovano. Besides his work as a drummer, Jorge has a distinctive voice on the vibes, marimba and piano, and a unique sound as a composer and band leader. Since his first CD under his own name, Jorge Rossy Trio Wicca (Fresh Sound), recorded in 2006, Jorge has recorded over 30 albums as a band leader or co-leader, to critical acclaim from publications such as Jazz Times, Downbeat, Jazz Around, and All About Jazz. In 2015, Jorge recorded Stay There (Pirouet), his debut recording as a vibes and marimba player, leading a truly stellar band. Since then, Jorge has toured and recorded with different configurations of his band the Jordi Rossy Vibes Quintet and several co-led projects, including Passport Quartet, Rossy & Kanan Quartet, Beck/Landolf/Rossy, Fox + Chris Cheek and Rossy & Vercher Quintet «Filantropía», among others. His second vibes quintet album Beyond Sunday (Jazz&People) came out in 2018 and his first vibes trio album, Puerta, was released on ECM in November 2021.

Dominique Girod was born in Winterthur in 1975. From 1993 to 1996 Dominique Girod studied jazz and classical double bass with J.-F. Jenny-Clark at the Ecole Normale and at the American School of Modern Music in Paris, followed by classical double bass with Andreas Cincera at the Zurich Conservatory, graduating in 1999. From 2000 he studied composition with Michaël Jarrell and electronic music and theory with Gerald Bennett, graduating in 2007 from the Zurich University of the Arts. Girod has performed as a double bass player in numerous concerts, tours and CD productions in the field of jazz and new music, including with Nat Su (Straymonk and Su/Rossy/Girod Trio), Chris Wiesendanger, Christoph Gallio (Day & Taxi, Roadworks), Dieter Ulrich, Daniel Schenker, Matthias Spillmann, Reto Suhner, Chris Cheek, Michael J. Stevens, Miles Griffith, Bennie Golson, Jorge Rossy, Albert Sanz, the Ensemble for New Music Zurich, Wolfgang Muthspiel Large Ensemble, Sarah Chaksad Songlines and Large Ensemble and with the band "Grünes Blatt", founded by Dominique and Irina Ungureanu. He has written works for various ensembles and has received commissions from the Ensemble for New Music Zurich, Mondrian Ensemble, Vokal Ensemble Zurich, and the Ensemble Werktag. In 2013, his first music theater "l'Homme qui rit" and in 2018 his second "Orpheus" was premiered by the Freie Oper Zürich at the Fabriktheater der Roten Fabrik Zürich and Gare du Nord Basel. From 2003 to 2004 he was a fellow of the Landis & Gyr Studio for Composition in London. 2014 he was awarded the Recognition Prize for Composition by the municipality of Zollikon and in 2015 the „Werkjahr“ for composition by the City of Zurich. Since 2001, Dominique Girod teaches double bass and theory at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).



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