

GÜNTER BABY SOMMER

DEDICATIONS - HÖRMUSIK IV

Günter Baby Sommer Drums, Percussion, Voice

All compositions by Günter Baby Sommer. Recorded January 10, 11, 12, 2013 by Kulturradio vom rbb (Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg). Mixed and mastered May 13, 14, 2013 by rbb. Sound engineer: Peter Schladebach. Sound supervisor: Wolfgang Hoff. ProTools-Operator: Uli Hieber. Technician: Hitoshi Rösner. Mastering: Monika Steffens. Radio producer: Ulf Drechsel, rbb (Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg). Cover art: Kornelios Grammenos. Photos: Tobias Sommer
Produced and published by Intakt Records, Patrik Landolt

Intakt CD 224

Günter Baby Sommer, one of the architects of European jazz drumming, presents his Solo masterpiece. The nine songs on the album tell stories and draw the listener into this exhilarating wonderworld of rhythms. Tubular bells, hang, gongs, xylophone and an array of unusual percussion instruments plus his voice, transform his carefully chosen drum set into a percussive orchestra of rare intensity. Günter Baby Sommer, who lives in Dresden, East Germany, has dedicated this album to the great drummers of jazz: from Baby Dodds, from whom Sommer got his nickname, to Philly Joe Jones, Ed Blackwell, Max Roach, Pierre Favre, Han Bennink and Paul Lovens. From the first beat of the album you enter the world of swing, bebop, drive and pulse. This is a breathtaking adventure in sound and an exciting guide through the art of jazz drumming.

I first heard Louis Armstrong's Hot Seven, with Johnny Dodds on clarinet and Baby Dodds on drums, nearly sixty years ago. A little later I heard Art Blakey and his Jazz Messengers, in between the many percussion artists of the swing era, such as Sid Catlett, Sam Woodyard, Gene Krupa, Zutty Singleton, Buddy Rich and Jo Jones. This music was played on 'Willis Conover, Voice of America, Jazz Hour' each night, broadcast via shortwave radio to my remote 'valley of the clueless' in Radebeul, near Dresden. One thing was soon clear: it was the revolutionaries which appealed to me! Max Roach, Art Blakey, Danny Richmond with Mingus, and Ed Blackwell with Ornette Coleman. There were political agendas behind this music, which related to my own revolutionary attitude to the GDR system.

In the late 1960s and into the early 1970s I was quick to ally myself with the Europeans, my cultural socialisation being what it was. Here in Europe, and in my little GDR, our problems were at home, could be named and dealt with creatively. With profound respect I now look back at the old masters, who led and inspired me to become a jazz musician myself, with their creativity and their agenda.

And I listen to my European colleagues, intrigued and full of admiration, because they still motivate me to follow my own route.

Günter Baby Sommer, 2013

Linernotes by Oliver Schwerdt, Leipzig

Günter Baby Sommer. Dedications – Hörmusik IV

We just reached the fiftieth anniversary free jazz. Now, in 2013, we've reached Günter Sommer's seventieth. He's older than free jazz. All his dedications are biographically correct.

In 1979, a whole decade after Pierre Favre became the first European to pioneer the art of unaccompanied solo jazz percussion in public, Sommer named his first solo composition Hörmusik ('listening music'). Jazz became established as an aural art form to be heard seated, freed from its traditional requirement to animate, visually as well as aurally, and ensure an enjoyable dance. I was born around the same time as Hörmusik. The sounds of the Saxon percussionist's seventieth birthday are being heard throughout the world now. On the table with the other presents is my monograph on the contemporary, artistic aspects of Sommer's playing and his expansion of percussion, open for all to read. Luckily we can now hear him ourselves, positioning himself explicitly on the subject of his evolution. The stories he tells us are musical. And we get to hear Sommer talking in his own words at last.

His first words are for Warren 'Baby' Dodds, in whose memory Günter Sommer was given his own stage name. Tied to the jazz tradition, he uses a conventional drum kit for his Baby dedication, but still expands it with a wood block set, as well as drums and cymbals. Baby Sommer has never been to New Orleans, but he names the snare he plays for Dodds – manufactured in Dresden – after the birthplace of jazz. The historic formula for this rhythm sequence, produced both here and there, appeals to me: four bars of 4/4. (Didn't boogie also appeal to Mondrian because it was quadratic?)

In the solo music documented in the late 1980s Baby Sommer developed extensive verbal communication formulae for his percussion playing. One of the most famous, transcribed as 'Rrrrrt...', can be heard here in the form of an exhilarating upward grace-note. The other, 'Hui...', sounds

too short at first. But this moves beyond signal-like interjections. Instead a dynamic co-operation between his flexible voice and sensitive drumming is established. Dedicated to Philly Joe Jones, who was famous for his use of jazz brushes, the brush drumming soon moves to the snare and whips up the tempo; I estimated that the hi-hat had reached Allegro Vivace.

Baby knows exactly what Pierre Favre first used to revitalise jazz percussion in Europe. And on this note, with six gongs and a tam-tam he launches into his soundscape greeting. Instrumentally he creates Swiss-Saxon harmony; beats from the Bern hills resound in melodious dialogue with concert tom-toms from Leipzig. Here too Baby introduces some vocalising; beginning on one of the first beats, we later hear it formed into the actual name.

Art Blakey has now arrived in Europe. A steamship brought him over the ocean. For Philly it was a pair of brushes, for Art it's two kettledrums. Old European fourths announce this aristocrat. Sommer plays him a heartfelt greeting on his ocarina, made of Meissen porcelain. Baby's theatrical abilities are immediately clear; having struck the heraldic timpani and played the Levantine charmer he then does Roland Kirk on a visit to the GDR. Instead of a Stritch or Manzello, Baby Sommer blows the shawm, typically played in the East German workers' and peasants' state. Now Baby positions himself as Blakey. This is hard bop, well measured and knocked out with force.

Just as he has honoured his Swiss colleague, Baby plays for his West German counterpart, Paul Lovens. The drum kit is now removed from its conventional seated playing position. Down on the ground now, Baby beats a 'scrap-yard' into life. Larger kitchen utensils and a pot with smaller kitchen cutlery, one of the film canisters Baby plays: anyone who was in Warsaw in 1974, say, will recognise its predecessor in the form of a baking tray as used by Lovens. To me the kitchen utensils are not the only reference to Paul, however; there is the bow Baby uses to play the metal percussion instruments. The Paul story is also doubly loaded with a text by the other Günter. Baby borrowed both the kitchen utensils and the bow from Paul to use with the Nobel prize-winning storyteller Grass; now he has brought them back from Grass to Lovens.

Rustling Rattling egg shakers shift around now. With balls attached to drumsticks, Baby manages to beat a rattling sound from his drums. Rising above the drums, with their real skins, he moulds his onomatopoeic singing into a definite name once more. Han was photographed with a xylophone in the early days. Here Baby strikes the melodic wood to pay the Dutchman an African tribute. Baby passes on words first coined for his own world music to Han.

With Ed Blackwell jazz moved away from New Orleans. He is the one who recorded the album which gave free jazz its name – with Ornette in New York. Baby drums one drum after another; once again history is revealed to me; all the nominal birth of free jazz needed from the drummer, alongside such drums, was the cymbals – nice and firmly fixed in place.

Günter Sommer holds Max Roach in great esteem, a musician who used the titles of his albums to address African-Americans' desire for freedom, from the late 1950s onwards, before this developed into a musical style. I have been witnessing his concertante experiments in Max-style dedication for years. Baby has now succeeded in creating a sense of empowerment and solidarity. True to his underlying political attitude, which in jazz-history terms has its roots with Roach, Sommer borrows a motif from his own musical memorial to the Greek victims of German soldiers, quoting it here with chimes to celebrate Max and complement the fighting spirit of his snare-drum art.

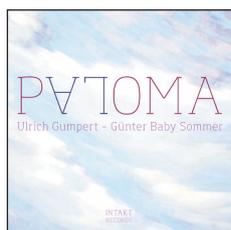
No other jazz drummer has produced music for so many writers, so often and so wonderfully. Now at last we get to hear Sommer announcing himself with his own speaking voice, and for the first time one of the poets he has performed with has produced a text exclusively for Baby. A writer from the 'Kettlitzist' group, a new Leipzig school of contemporary literature, tells a tale, and lets Baby tell his. Having served literature for so long, it now returns the favour with a jubilant toast to him. After the dance of words on the wooden slit drums, Baby dances for joy with his whole body, and his percussion instruments join his birthday party. They all celebrate together. And Intakt Records invites everyone else to be there too.

As free jazz enters Günter Baby Sommer's youthful old age, it develops into a truly euphoric groove.

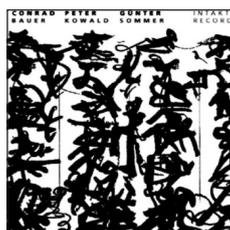
Günter Baby Sommer bei Intakt Records



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SONGS FOR KOMMEMO
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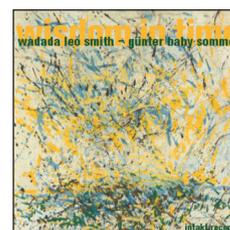
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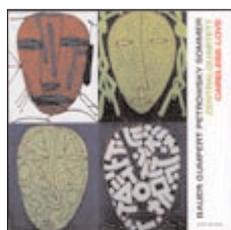
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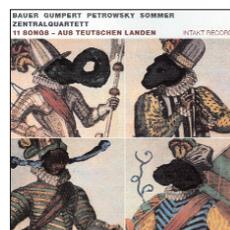
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