



BIONDINI - GODARD - NIGGLI

MAVI

Luciano Biondini Accordion

Michel Godard Tuba, Serpent, E-Bass

Lucas Niggli Drums

Recorded May 23, 24, 2013, by Willy Strehler at Klangdach, except track 8 and 9, which are recorded live at Jazzfestival Schaffhausen, May 22, 2013, by Martin Pearson for SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen. Mixed and mastered July 8, 9, 2013, by Willy Strehler at Studio Klangdach. Cover art and graphic design: Jonas Schoder. Photos: Ces van de Ven. Liner notes: Manfred Papst.

Intakt CD 226

The earth – seen from space

Mavi is the title of the Biondini-Godard-Niggli trio's new CD. It refers to a clear blue, the colour seen when looking at the earth from outer space. And it says a lot about the sounds it offers us. We hear music which seems to emanate from the spheres while remaining wholly worldly, emotional and sensual.

The trio formed by Luciano Biondini, Michel Godard and Lucas Niggli is unusual in various senses. Firstly the musicians' nationalities: Biondini (born 1971) comes from Spoleto in the Italian province of Perugia, Michel Godard (born 1960) comes from Héricourt near Belfort in the Franche-Comté in France, and Lucas Niggli (born 1968) is Swiss, a native of the Zürich Oberland who spent the first seven years of his life in Cameroon, where his parents worked in international development. So this is a meeting of various cultures and languages. In the rehearsal space, the studio and on stage the three musicians communicate mostly in Italian spiced with words of French; only when it comes to differences of opinion do they switch to English.

A further particularity of the trio is its instrumental makeup. Biondini plays the accordion, Niggli the drums and all manner of percussion instruments; Michel Godard plays the tuba and the serpent – an ancient, serpentine wind instrument with a mouthpiece like a brass instrument but side holes like a woodwind instrument. Sometimes Godard also takes up the bass guitar. Thanks to this highly individual and fascinating instrumental arsenal the trio has a truly spectral palette of sounds at their disposal.

The beauty of the continually shimmering and shining sounds is only one aspect however. The other is the musicians' virtuosity, their melodic, harmonic and rhythmic invention, their ability to play together with empathy, their light-footed, intelligent approach to complex musical forms.

The latter is probably the explanation why although all three have dedicated themselves to jazz they do not have this background, or not solely. Biondini studied classical accordion from the age of ten and won many prizes for his intricate playing before turning to jazz in 1994. Michel Godard also had a classical training. He began playing with the Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra in 1988 and has worked with countless other groups. He also performs as a soloist and teaches masterclasses. Lucas Niggli was a budding drummer even as a child, but also took piano and singing lessons, discovered modern electronic music at an early age and has since made his mark as a composer and band leader with various line-ups including Steamboat Switzerland, Black Lotos, Zoom, and Big Zoom.

As is to be expected with jazz, between them Biondini, Godard and Niggli have collaborated with much of the jazz who's who. This is not the place to list every name. Their paths have often crossed however; in 2003 Biondini and Godard recorded the stunning album *Tubatubatu* (Enja) with Dave Barger on tuba and Kenwood Dennard on drums, and Niggli has also met the other two in a variety of contexts. They formed this trio in 2010. In spring 2011 they delivered a brilliant debut



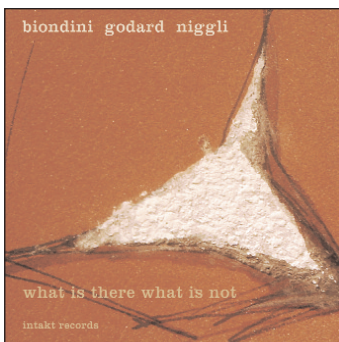
CD, *What Is There What Is Not* (Intakt), in which they played compositions of their own along with a Bach reinterpretation and John Coltrane's 'Naima'. In the mean time they have evolved into a working band during their many live appearances, delivering surprises with each concert. The new CD *Mavi* builds on the concept behind the first and takes it further. Most of the compositions are contributed by Biondini and Godard. The baroque era makes an appearance this time with an enchanting interpretation of George Frederic Handel's aria 'La cia ch'io pianga'. Handel loved this melody and used it in various forms in his works *Almira*, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* and *Rinaldo*. The contemporary cover on this album is 'Unrequited' by Brad Mehldau.

The music was partly recorded live, partly mixed in the studio. On 22 May 2013 the trio gave a stirring concert on the opening evening of the Schaffhausen Jazz Festival. Niggli's poetic solo 'Black Eyes' and Godard's succeeding composition 'A Trace of Grace' – undoubted highpoints of the album – are both taken from this concert. Both the musicians and the public sensed that something had gone exceptionally well there. The trio went straight to Willy Strehler's Klangdach studio in Guntershausen the next morning and spent two days there. It was not initially easy to transfer the euphoric atmosphere and the communicative intensity of the performance into this new situation. But the band succeeded even tually in bringing the energy as well as the concentration with them and managed to perform as a live band in the studio. There was almost no editing, no reworking after the event. The music pulsates and breathes, the magnificent title track in particular.

The music of Biondini, Godard and Niggli thrives on its poetry, the beauty of its sounds, the depth of its ideas, and also on its tension. This is generated by the weave between composition and improvisation. By no means everything is written down. In the case of the Handel reinterpretation it was only the bass line. Mostly it is so-called lead sheets which form the point of departure. Then it is time for interplay, which we experience here in all its joyous intensity. The musicians function as partners with an equal say, form an equilateral triangle, listen to each other, play ideas to each other, pick them up, change them: soon dreamy, then high-spirited, but always intelligent and respectful of the composition. Which is how they succeed in making that connection between form and freedom which constitutes the core of jazz. We see the earth, clear and blue.

Manfred Papst · Translation: Steph Morris

Biondini-Godard-Niggli on Intakt Records



BIONDINI - GODARD - NIGGLI **WHAT IS THERE WHAT IS NOT**

Luciano Biondini Accordion
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Intakt CD 185