



PAT METHENY
THE ORCHESTRION TOUR

**JAZZ
NIGHTS**
2010

„Pat Metheny: The Orchestrion Tour“: Das ist gewiss die sonderbarste Überschrift, unter der jemals eine Tournee des bedeutendsten Jazzgitarristen unserer Zeit angekündigt wurde. Wir kennen Musik von ihm in allerlei Kombinationen – mit der Pat Metheny Group, im Trio, im Duett mit Charlie Haden oder Ornette Coleman, bei Joni Mitchell, ja, selbst mit Orchesterbegleitung – und immer wieder solo. Jeder, der Pat Metheny schon einmal im Konzert erlebt hat, weiß, dass sich dieser anscheinend ewig jungenhaft wirkende Musiker im quergestreiften Matrosen-Sweatshirt gerne auch mal alleine vorn an die Bühnenkante setzt und unvermittelt auf der akustischen Gitarre loszuklappen beginnt, als säßen wir alle ums Lagerfeuer. In solchen Augenblicken öffnet sich über jedem Konzertsaal dieser Welt in der Decke ein imaginäres Loch, durch das der weite Himmel von Missouri sein Sehnsuchtslicht hinabgießt. Die Musik versetzt uns in jene Jahre, in denen Pat Metheny hinter dem elterlichen Haus in Lee's Summit mit seiner Gitarre im Garten saß, Läufe und Akkordprogressionen übte und offene Stimmungen und Voicings ausprobierte. Stundenlang, bis ihm die Augen zufielen.

Pat-Metheny-Fans wissen natürlich, dass in der Brust dieses Landeis aus dem Heartland of America auch das Herz eines brillanten Jazzmusikers schlägt – und das eines Sound-Futuristen. Auf seinem heiß geliebten Gitarrensynthesizer produziert Metheny neben virtuosen und ausgiebigen Soli auch orchestral aufgefächerte Klänge. Aber Orchestrion? Ein Orchestrion ist das blanke Gegenteil des Solospiels – und zugleich dessen Apotheose. Im 19. Jahrhundert entwickelten ein paar Tüftler im Schwarzwald und in Sachsen monströse mechanische Musikinstrumente, die den Bläserklang eines ganzen Orchesters wiedergeben konnten. Die Ungetüme standen in Hotelhallen und anderen großen Sälen, sie wurden erst per Kurbel-Antrieb in Gang gesetzt, später mit Motorkraft, und was sie spielen sollten, gaben ihnen Lochkarten vor. Im frühen 20. Jahrhundert gelang es den Instrumentenerfindern sogar, eine oder mehrere Geigen einzubauen, die mechanisch gestrichen wurden. Die Erfindung der Schallplatte war dann des Orchestrions rascher Tod.

Was Pat Metheny bewog, diese schöne Leich' aus dem Friedhof überlebter Instrumente zu neuem Leben zu erwecken, liegt auf der Hand. Er hat doch schon mit allen Musikern zusammengespield, deren Stimme im Jazz etwas gilt. Warum da nicht einmal ein musikalisches Universum erschaffen, in dem alle Stimmen – seine eigenen sind? Methenys Orchestrion enthält neben Bass, Gitarre, Marimba und Percussion noch etwa 20 weitere mechanische Instrumente. Gebaut hat es ein kleiner Handwerksbetrieb in den USA. Die Kontrolle über die Musik liegt vollständig in Methenys Händen. Von der E-Gitarre aus steuert er Software und mehrere Computer, die wiederum befehligen ein paar Roboter, und die spielen die Instrumente dann genau so, wie Metheny es will. Auf der Bühne steht auch ein Klavier, das sich, entsprechend programmiert, selbst spielt, und eine Flaschenorgel, deren Sound dem der Pfeifenorgel ähnelt. Noch weiß keiner, wie das alles klingen wird, was Metheny da von neun Assistenten (!) auf die Bühne wuchten, einrichten und überwachen lässt, aber schon jetzt kann man sagen: So etwas gab es noch nie.

Seien wir also gespannt auf einen scheinbar unendlich vervielfachten Metheny-Sound in allen Klangfarben des Regenbogens. So, als würde Beethoven alle Instrumente in seinen Sinfonien selber spielen, ohne Dirigenten, ohne Orchestermusiker, ohne interpretatorischen



Eigensinn. Megaloman? Vielleicht. Aber Pat Metheny ist ein Perfektionist, und das heißt bei einem Jazzmusiker, dass er bei aller Kontrolle unbedingt Freiräume für Improvisation behalten, das Spontane aus der Performance also keineswegs ganz tilgen wird. Technologisch wagt sich Metheny hier auf absolutes Neuland vor, und Schaulustigen verspricht er exquisites Futter für die Augen.

Dennoch ist es ein kluger Schachzug, bei dieser JAZZNIGHTS-Tournee durch die schönsten Konzerthäuser des Landes nicht allein aufs Orchestrion zu setzen. Metheny ahnt vielleicht das Risiko, sein Publikum durch die schiere Menge der Klänge zu erschöpfen. Womöglich fürchtet er selbst die Manegenluft des allzu Zirzensischen. Als Gegengabe bietet er deshalb am selben Abend auch Gitarrenmusik solo an, unverstellt von der anzunehmenden Wucht des computertechnisch Möglichen. In der Intimität der sechs, zwölf oder wie viel auch immer Saiten, die seine Sonderanfertigungen aus den besten Gitarrenwerkstätten der Erde haben, wird aus dem Bändiger der 25 mechanischen Instrumente dann buchstäblich im Handumdrehen wieder der begnadete Geschichtenerzähler, der uns mit diskret verstärkten akustischen Klängen Raum und Zeit und Technik vergessen lässt. Und wo hätte es das je gegeben: dass Beethoven die Neunte spielt und dann noch, sagen wir, die Sonate „Les Adieux“ oder Opus 111.

Coming from Pat Metheny in 2010

THE ORCHESTRION PROJECT

I have been very lucky over the years to have many opportunities to explore a wide range of ideas as a musician. **The quest to find new ways of thinking about things and the process of trying to come up with a personal perspective on music has been a major priority along the way**, almost from the very beginning.

The Orchestrion Project is a leap into new territory. This project represents a recently developed conceptual direction for me that involves the merging of an idea from the late 19th and early 20th-centuries with the technologies of today to create an open-ended platform for musical invention and performance.

“Orchestronics” is the term that I am using to describe a new performance method to present music alone onstage using acoustic and acoustoelectric musical instruments that are mechanically controlled using the power of modern technology.

In early 2010 a new recording will be released on Nonesuch. It will be a “solo” record in that I am the only musician—but a CD that in some ways recontextualizes the term.

Some background. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, as player pianos emerged (pianos played mechanically by moving rolls of paper through a mechanism that physically moved the keys), the next logical step was to apply that same principle to a range of orchestral instruments, often including percussion and mallet instruments. **These large instrument arrays were called Orchestrions.**

For a number of years now, I have been gathering the forces of a group of talented and innovative inventors and technicians from around the country to construct a large palette of acoustic sound-producing devices that I can organize as a new kind of Orchestrion.

The principle instruments have been designed and built for me by the incredibly talented Eric Singer, who is a major innovator in this area of engineering.



A small number of musicians have been doing things like this in recent years as the mechanics of it all has evolved. And naturally, in many ways, it has been as much about the technology as the musical result. My only goal here, however, is a musical one.

Now nearly 10 years into the new century it feels like time to try to create something particularly connected to the reality of this unique period in time.

The issue of context is crucial to this project. As much as I have and will continue to enjoy playing in traditional formats (solo, duets, trios, quartets and quintets, various large ensembles, the Pat Metheny Group, however one might place that in this spectrum), **the urge to investigate what might be possible in this relatively unexplored corner of potential has been building.**

One of the inspiring hallmarks of the jazz tradition through the decades has been the way that the for players and composers. This pursuit of change and the way that innovators in jazz have reconciled the roots of the form with the new possibilities of their own time has been an inspiration and a major defining element for me in the music's evolution at every key point along the way. From new combinations of instruments and new performance techniques to technological shifts in the instruments themselves that were deployed first in jazz settings (the drum set, the use of the saxophone, the modification and adaptation of European classical instruments, the electric guitar, etc.) to large ensemble presentation and composition (big bands, etc.), jazz musicians have often been the ones trying new things, looking for new sounds. This quest, in tandem with the generation of deep and soulful content, has made the story of jazz a fascinating journey.

In recent years, we have watched the form continue mostly along the lines of refinement (at best) and historical retrenchment and revisionism (at worst). For example, in my case I have enjoyed playing trio music year in and year out from the beginning of my career and the task of finding new ways of looking at many of the same issues that were of major importance to me early on has been an important journey that stands on its own and has been a trip worth taking. And the PMG mandate of engagement with the musical and technological potentials and realities of the times has been rewarding and valid as well—as I am sure it will continue to be in the (not too distant) future.

But in the meantime, I have found myself again craving for a context that is somehow intrinsically connected to this moment in time—to find something that could only be happening now, in 2010.

Let me continue by going backwards a bit.

As a little kid, every few summers we would go visit my grandparents in Manitowoc, Wisconsin - my mom's hometown. My grandfather (Delmar Bjorn Hansen) was a great musician, a brilliant trumpet player and singer whose love for great harmony was a strong early influence. Upon arrival at their family house, I would make a beeline to the basement, where one of the most fascinating objects I ever saw was kept: a 50-plus-year-old player piano, complete with boxes of piano rolls of all kinds of music. I would spend hours there with my cousins trying each roll, pumping until we were worn out by the pedals. The idea of an instrument like this, capable of playing just about anything mechanically, was totally mind-blowing to me. It was something utterly charming; on one hand it was old-fashioned but, at the same time, it was almost like science fiction.

Throughout the years, that early fascination has grown and I have studied the tradition of these kinds of instruments including the Orchestrions of the early 20th century that took this idea further. Using various other orchestral instruments mechanically tethered to the piano/piano roll mechanism to develop ensemble sounds, a miniature orchestra was possible.

But, considering the repertoire that was usually called upon when these instruments were played (Colin Nancarrow and George Antheil's work was largely sadly absent from the world in which I grew up, or at least from my grandfather's basement), **I would often find myself asking over the years, "What might happen if the potentials of these instruments were looked at**



now— particularly informed by the harmonic and melodic advances in jazz of the past 70 or 80 years? Could I form some kind of personal statement using instruments like these?"

Related to this interest was my total immersion in the general modern musical instrument technology (and later computers), which has been a major part of my life since I started playing music. (I often joke that my first musical act with an electric guitar was to "plug it in"—knobs and wires are the same to me as mouthpieces, bows, reeds and drumsticks are to other musicians.)

Parallel to the information revolution that has affected all of our lives, we have lived through a revolution in music technology that is almost overwhelming. Yet, at the same time, as much as I have been enthusiastic about the orchestrational potentials of synths and electric instruments in general, and even as those instruments have improved enormously and continue to develop, the whole idea of jamming a whole bunch of combined sounds into a single set of stereo speakers has never been as satisfying to me as a single instrument into a single discrete amplification system (electric guitar) or especially, the power of acoustic instruments and sound.

The energy of sounds mixing acoustically in the air is something that cannot be compared with anything else. Yet I have never seen any of these sound components as being mutually exclusive. In fact, the exciting thing for me has been the coalition possible using all kinds of available sounds and dynamic levels of all sorts—from the quietest of the quiet, to the loudest of the loud.

Ray Kurzweil, one of the most visionary thinkers in the world, was asked recently about his work in the area of artificial intelligence and I thought his response to a question that was essentially something to the effect of "Why do you do this?" was right on.

His reaction was to indicate the important ways throughout human history that new tools have allowed us to "extend our reach."

In my life as a player there has never been a substitute for musical depth, which is informed by the experiences of a lifetime and with the quest to invoke the spirit and soul that is core to what it is to be the kind of musician that I have aspired to become.

But many times along the way, the experience of a new challenge or the quest for a new way of looking at things—or a new tool—has allowed me (encouraged me? forced me?) to ask hard questions of myself as a musician.

This experience so far has provided me with a self-imposed challenge that has proven to be enormously difficult and time-consuming, but the early results have been absolutely exhilarating. I am excited to share this project with all of you. I am hopeful and confident that if nothing else, this will be something truly unique. It feels like progress to me and has gotten some notes out of me that I didn't know were there. That is always a good thing.

Pat Metheny - July 2009

Postscript –

I have realized by now that as much as I can describe this project, even the people closest to me have had no idea what I was talking about until they have actually heard the music and had an encounter with it all in action. **So, even having written all of the above, I know for sure that you still have to experience it yourself to really know what it is.**

Tourdaten: www.karsten-jahnke.de

TEL. TICKETSERVICE: 01805 - 62 62 80

(€ 0,14/Min aus dem dt. Festnetz, Mobilfunkpreise können abweichen)

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