

ARTE Quartett

The ARTE Quartett was founded in 1995 by the four Saxophonists Beat Hofstetter, Sascha Armbruster, Andrea Formenti and Beat Kappeler. The musicians have a classical background yet they are stylistically open-minded, a fact that is shown by their intense cooperation with musicians and composers of various styles. The ARTE Quartett is mainly committed to contemporary music and its various aspects. Since the foundation of the quartet, ARTE has personally cooperated with many composers, which has permitted the group to be involved in the developing process of composing. ARTE has premiered a great number of commissions. Part of the concept is a clearly structured and well reasoned programming as well as working repeatedly on larger projects. During the last years ARTE's projects have included concerts with Urs Leimgruber, Nadir Vassena, Hans Feigenwinter, Terry Riley, Michael Riessler, Tim Berne, Fred Frith, Nick Didkovsky, Pierre Favre, Lucas Niggli and Andreas Schaerer. The quartet tours regularly and plays on various festivals and concert series and has recorded a wide number of new pieces with various national broadcast companies. In the last few years the quartet has added more and more electronic to its own compositions and arrangements and presently the four musicians play also electric wind instruments (EWI) and commission new pieces. The projects with windcontroller are played with the same players under the name of EW-4.

Beat Hofstetter soprano sax

Born in Laufen (Switzerland). Performance and education studies for Saxophone and Conducting at the Conservatory in Basel, Northwestern University in Chicago (master of music) and "Hochschule für Musik" in Karlsruhe (Germany). Conducting various ensembles and orchestras. Winner of various grants and competitions in Switzerland. Teaching at Hochschule für Musik in Basel and Musikhochschule Lucerne.

Sascha Armbruster alto sax

Born in Lahr (Germany). Performance studies for Saxophone in Basel with Iwan Roth and Marcus Weiss. «Premier Prix à l'unanimité» at the Conservatoire Supérieur National de Paris with Claude Delangle. Winner of various competitions. Performing regularly as a chamber musician and with various orchestras throughout Europe. Teaching at the Musikhochschule Lucerne.

Andrea Formenti tenor sax

Born in Balerna (Switzerland). Teachers and Soloist Diploma in the class of Iwan Roth at the Conservatory in Basel. Winner of various grants and competitions. Performing member in the «Ensemble Oggi Musica» in Lugano.

Beat Kappeler baritone sax

Born in Reinach (Switzerland). Diploma for Saxophone in the class of Iwan Roth at the Conservatory in Basel. Concert Diploma for Saxophone at the Musikhochschule Zürich in the class of Marcus Weiss. Studies in electronic music. Performances with various chamber ensembles and orchestras. Beat Kappeler teaches Saxophone at different musicschools and highschoools in Kanton Baselland

Biography: ARTE Quartett

Beginnings, Progress, Projects, Vision

Beginnings

Saxophone players Beat Hofstetter, Sascha Armbruster, Andrea Formenti and Beat Kappeler founded the ARTE Quartett in 1995. The word «Saxophone» purposefully does not appear in the ensembles' name: the name should sound as open minded as the music the quartet wants to play. An ensemble with its own vision and profile is flourishing. Starting on «safe ground», the quartet has been building up a broad common repertory representing different times and styles. The group regularly receives rave press reviews acknowledging great virtuosity and praising their stunning precision in playing together. From the beginning the quartet has experimented with different instrumentations including having all four players playing on differently voiced instruments. With a focus on thematic concert programs the quartet is breaking ground with new, original arrangements for its group: «The intelligent, tricky and humorous arrangements of the Arte Quartett will soon be part of the standard repertoire for Saxophone quartets.» (29.4.1997, BaslerZeitung)

Working together with composers

As a result of rehearsing extensively in Paris, contact to many young slovakian composers living there has been established. This has led to a number of new works being written specifically with ARTE in mind. An early example of this creative work with composers would be the 30 minute piece «Four pages from my Atlas» by Jozef Baan (1995). Since then ARTE has premiered over sixty contemporary compositions and continue to work intensively with many internationally based composers. This aspect of the oeuvre of the ARTE Quartett can be

heard on the portrait CD «CH-Musik» which was released on the label Grammont in 2005. As previously mentioned the CD provides many great examples of the combination of differently voiced Saxophones in quartet.

Improvisation and collaboration with Urs Leimgruber

Having achieved a very homogeneous sound the next step of ARTE's development was almost obvious: in looking to expand the possibilities in interpretation, the harmony of orchestrated ensemble playing should juxtapose the expressivity of individual players. The step into free improvisation is a natural conclusion. A long and rewarding collaboration with saxophonist and sound researcher Urs Leimgruber has resulted in various compositions for the ARTE Quartett, combining different notation systems with conceptual and free improvisation. Common playing techniques interlock with experimental sounds. Through this collaboration, in which the composer himself also appears as a performer, ARTE achieves a new set of sounds and new stylistic possibilities, which can be heard on the CD «Xylem» with Urs Leimgruber and the ARTE Quartett.

Concert series «ARTE+»

An important step for the quartet has been the founding of a new local concert series «ARTE+». This concert series has enabled the quartet to conceptualize many new projects which have been successfully further translated to various venues at home and abroad. Producing its own projects has given ARTE an artistic liberty in choosing composers and performers for new collaborations. In consequence new projects arise, for example «Gang», a jazz chamber music work by and with composer and performer Hans Feigenwinter and «Splasheon» by the American French resident composer Duncan Youngerman which elaborates a precise polyrhythmic music where different grooves, articulations and complex patterns are constantly overlapping.

Tim Berne – a new stylistic language

The «ARTE+» concerts have allowed the quartet to start a widely acknowledged collaboration with Saxophonist and composer Tim Berne from New York whose music confronts ARTE with a new stylistic musical language. The quartet encourages composers to maintain their own idiomatic expression as well as taking advantage of the various technical possibilities which the quartet offers. The quartet «Repulsion» is a good example of a combination of the composers' personal idiom and the wide range of sounds of the quartet. The composition «Quicksand» features Berne and guitarist Marc Ducret as improvisers and demands more expressive and harsher playing by the quartet. Both works can be heard on the CD «The sevens».

Terry Riley leaves his traces

In music history the American composer Terry Riley is regarded as one of the fathers and founders of minimal music. His composition «IN C» is performed world wide, and Riley is performing as soloist all over the planet. His musical ideas as well as his personal charisma have left its traces with us during a long and lasting collaboration. What Terry Riley and the ARTE Quartett may have in common can possibly be described as curiosity and an open heart for experimentation and new musical experiences. The compositions Riley wrote for the quartet show this very clearly. Riley sings and plays the piano in «Uncle Jard». Influences of jazz and Indian music can be heard. In «Assassin Rêverie» for Saxophone quartet, ARTE begins with an almost harmless ballad which develops into a wild conceptually improvised furioso, which is accompanied by tape. On the new CD «Assassin Rêverie» the two compositions are complemented by an ARTE version of «Tread on the Trail», authorized by Riley.

Into new areas with Pierre Favre

In the year 2000 ARTE approached the percussionist and composer Pierre Favre for a new project, combining improvisation and composition. Favre proposed inviting Michel Godard (Tuba/Serpent) to join the project. The group works with Favre's compositions, creating new transitions and inserting improvisation. Journalist Peter Ruedi writes in his review about the CD «Saxophones»: «a masterpiece of dramaturgy, a confrontation of choral passages, solo cadenzas and improvised interludes ». This collaboration was to be continued in several concerts with the «Pierre Favre Grand Ensemble» and the CD «Le Voyage» .

Conceptual improvisation with Fred Frith

The projects with multi instrumentalist, improviser and composer Fred Frith work in a similar setting, even if Frith's compositions are somewhat edgier than those of Favre. Improvisations are conceptually shaped in advance by Frith. In the first project «Big Picture» a composition by Frith, the ARTE Quartett appears with Urs Leimgruber and Fred Frith.

Involving electronics

A new dimension is added by involving different kinds of electronics: With «e_a sonata» Urs Leimgruber composes a new piece, which features Guenther Mueller adding live-electronics in different ways. Commissioned by the BBC Tim Berne launched the project «SciFri&ARTE» with Tim Berne, Marc Ducret, Tom Rainey, Craig Taborn and ARTE. David Torn adds live-electronics. The composition «Ice Cream Time» by Nick Didkovsky features Tom Dimuzio's live-electronics and the new composition by Fred Frith, «urban<still» adds electronic parts throughout the piece.

Through these cooperations ARTE is inspired to add electronics to its own projects. Using electronics, self built instruments and the whole family of Saxophones – Sopranino to Contrabass – ARTE combines

contemporary playing techniques with archaic sounds in its program «UR»

Rhythmical bruises

In 2006 the drummer Lucas Niggli composes a program for the four saxophone players and his own Ensemble Zoom with Philipp Schaufelberger on guitar and Nils Wogram on trombone. This suite «Crashcruise» is played many times and can be heard on a CD with the same name on the label «Intakt». Fierceness next to elegy, density combined with peacefulness, severity going into elation and complexity combined with intensive interplay can be detected in this complex musical work.

«Worldmusic»

Alongside these projects ARTE also arranges and performs pieces for quartet influenced by «Worldmusic». Libanese oud player Rabih Abou-Khalil composes a whole program for the ARTE Quartet, in which he performs together with Michel Godard, Jarrod Cagwin and ARTE. «...a thrilling start off the festival, precise and played from seven inspired musicians. The four Saxophone players acted as congenial partners in the interplay with the experienced trio». Ruedi Ankli, MZ, 21.09.2010
On the CD «Different worlds» on the label Marsyas the ARTE Quartet plays its own arrangements of the music of John Zorn, Rabih Abou Khalil and themes of swiss folk music.

Voices

Singer and composer Andreas Schaerer combines in his works influences of contemporary jazz, classical music, improvisations and acrobatic singing. Fascinated by his versatile and almost instrumental like singing, the ARTE Quartett commissions him a composition. In his project «Perpetual Delirium» he composes a concert program in which he performs with bass player Wolfgang Zwiauer and ARTE Quartett. The program is played often and is received very well by the audience. A CD of it was released on the label BMC.
The singers «Basler Madrigalisten» ask the ARTE Quartett to participate in their project «Die Faszination der 12 Sybillen». Composer Franz Rechsteiner juxtaposes his composition «Sybillen» to «Prophetiae Sibyllarum» by Orlando di Lasso.

New and old

Presently the ARTE Quartett focuses on concerts and interdisciplinary projects with windcontrollers. The four players work with composers and specialists in electronic music to investigate the different possibilities of windcontrollers. Not only sound but also light can be triggered and in combination with the software Max MSP audio-visual works can be invented.

In the project «lu ftstr om» digital information shall be transformed to new sounds and images. A new kind of electronic chamber music is emerging. The projects with windcontroller are played with the same players under the name of EW-4.

On the other hand the ARTE Quartet is concentrating on the Work of Johann Sebastian Bach's «The Art of the fugue». ARTE has asked the young author and playwright Philipp Heule, to write and perform texts as an own counterpoint to Bach's masterpiece. An enigmatic work is not to be explained but rather illuminated by a different perspective.