

# **VEIN feat. Dave Liebman**

**Michael Arbenz** piano **Thomas Lähns** bass **Florian Arbenz** drums  
**feat. Dave Liebman** sax

Since VEIN was founded, the trio has regularly joined forces with guest musicians in horizon-expanding and ground breaking projects.

They have now come together again, forming an equally exciting and unconventional quartet with Dave Liebman, the great saxophonist with whom VEIN have been performing since 2009.

This is the meeting point for four musicians who go way back, knowing precisely that they make a great musical match.

Just as the trio has created an almost symbiotic interplay – by bringing together its background, its stupendous musical togetherness and its concept of maximum equality for all members – it never fails to find an incredibly inspiring addition in Dave Liebman:

Liebman, with his distinctive and modern style that is always respectful of tradition, is one of the most important saxophonists of today's jazz scene. He masterfully moves through the groove-heavy, lyrical, rhythmically and harmonically complex and open pieces and passages of the quartet's repertoire, which mainly consists of their own compositions.

And last but not least, to his younger fellow musicians, Dave Liebman is the embodiment of a piece of jazz history: Since the 60s, he has been performing with all the jazz greats and that is precisely what he incorporates in his style and what has become a fundamental aspect for VEIN: the spirit of this music.

So this collaboration is based on the utmost mutual respect; another reason why this quartet works so well together.

# **VEIN Feat. Dave Liebman**

## ***Jazz Talks***

**"I love playing with the VEIN trio. They can go in many directions as you can hear on this CD, always executed in a personal and singular manner."**



Little did twin brothers Florian and Michael Arbenz know when they formed their New Jazz Trio in the '90s that they would one day be collaborating with a jazz master on the level of saxophonist Dave Liebman. Both accomplished players -- Florian on drums and Michael on piano -- had formed their working trio in Basel, Switzerland with bassist Thomas Lähns, finally documenting their highly interactive chemistry on 2006's *VEIN-VEIN*. By then, the group had already set its sights on something beyond the status quo. As Michael explained, "Concerning jazz, we all three wanted to learn in a traditional way, which means by playing with the great players of an older generation. We understood that jazz is all about feeling and unexplainable things, and the best way to get these things is to be on stage with the real guys. Unfortunately, it was not possible to do that as sidemen, so we started inviting great musicians to come over to Europe to play with us."

That led to rewarding collaborations with American alto saxophonist Greg Osby and American expatriate trombonist Glenn Ferris before finally hooking up with Liebman, the sax great who himself had apprenticed with such jazz legends as Miles Davis and Elvin Jones during the '70s, recorded countless albums as a leader and now co-leads the Saxophone Summit with Joe Lovano and Ravi Coltrane (who replaced the late Michael Brecker in the lineup of this John Coltrane-inspired ensemble). "By 2009, we felt that we need some new input, and Dave Liebman was our first choice," recalls Michael. "He is a perfect link to the jazz tradition and also a great inspiration in terms of how to expand to new directions and try out new things. And of course, he is an incredible player and musician in every sense."

Arbenz first contacted Liebman via email. "Fortunately, he is very open to playing with younger musicians and he also is often in Europe," explains Michael. "So we first played a little tour and it worked so well that we decided to continue. I remember our first gig was a private concert in Switzerland and we pushed each other so hard that we all were exhausted after the first tune."

Their potent chemistry was first documented on the live 2012 recording *Lemuria*. And now the four kindred spirits take it up a notch on this superb studio recording, *Jazz Talks*, which is VEIN's ninth recording overall. Michael explains the title: "If you know Lieb, he is talking all day about music and telling stories about musicians. This album captures very well the atmosphere of being on the road with him."

The album title also speaks to the very conversational nature of the music. While having one foot planted firmly in old school swing, it strides boldly with the other into the unknown. As Michael explains, "We had a vision of a certain mood: To have a balance between an intellectually satisfying music, virtuosity, but also poetry, feeling and energy."

Recorded in just one afternoon in Basel with the revered jazz elder, *Jazz Talks* straddles that rarefied ground between inside and out, at the crossroads of where structure meets improvisation. While some pieces remain tied to the jazz tradition ("All the Things You Are," "Autumn Leaves," "April in Paris" and "You and the Night and the Music"), Arbenz's originals like the evocative "Clear Light" and "Black Tortoise" or exhilarating burners like "Waking with a Start" and "Stories of a Century" stake out new musical territory. Three pure improvisations -- the various "Small Talk" pieces interspersed throughout the album -- pair Liebman in provocative/expressive duo settings with each of the band members of the VEIN trio.

"This is the meeting point for four musicians who go way back, knowing precisely that they make a great musical match," says Michael of *Jazz Talks*. "We started the band with a kind of anti-concept -- to be as colorful and flexible as possible and not to limit our band sound with any strong concept," he explains. "This in reaction to a lot of younger jazz bands with a very strong and limiting concept. Unlike a lot of young European bands, which neglect or just don't have the information of jazz history, VEIN respects this tradition a lot and expands it with influences like classical contemporary music. Lieb is a perfect link to this tradition as well as to the curiosity to expand it."

That commitment to a collective search is apparent from the first notes of *Jazz Talks* as they open with a probing extrapolation on "All The Things You Are," perhaps the most frequently played standard in jazz history. With Liebman alluding to the familiar melody on soprano sax and Michael shading him in contrapuntal fashion on piano, Florian sets a freewheeling tone with his loosely swinging brushwork underscoring the proceedings. At the 1:30 mark, Florian switches to sticks and by the 2:00 mark they're off and swinging in vibrant fashion with Michael comping insistently behind Liebman's full-toned soprano flights. The piece neatly resolves as it began, in wide-open rubato fashion. In this one tune, over the course of 3:30, the flexible and highly interactive quartet has laid out its entire agenda for *Jazz Talks*. As Michael explains, "We played 'All the Things You Are' on some gigs together before and that tune fits really well with the floating way of our playing. And we decided to play it here as a kind of collective improvisation."

Liebman's lone composition here, "Negative Space" (title track of his 2008 Verve album), opens with some starkly dissonant arpeggios and pianistic flourishes from Arbenz before the saxophonist finally enters at the 2:47 mark on soprano, playing a forlorn melody that Michael promptly doubles. Rhythm tandem enters at the 3:00 mark and provides gently interactive accompaniment throughout the course of this engaging number that gradually builds to peaks of passionate blowing by the acclaimed saxophonist.

The first "Small Talk" improv piece pairs Liebman on tenor sax with bassist Lähns in an animated conversation. Michael's angular, odd-metered "Stories of a Century" is fueled by his brother's slamming backbeats and features some typically unfettered blowing by Liebman on soprano sax. Florian is also showcased on a dynamic drum solo near the end of this edgy, M-BASE-ish number.

Michael's "Black Tortoise" is the other side of the dynamic coin from the forcefully funky "Stories of the Century." A serene, darkly beautiful number underscored by Florian's gentle touch on cymbals and snare, it features Liebman's old school full-bodied approach to tenor playing, drawing a direct connection to past tenor masters like Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins. The trio's playing in the middle section of this Arbenz original is also a prime example of their interactive instincts as a unit and also features a resounding bass solo by Lähns. Michael's Monkish head to "Jammin' in the Childrens Corner" is played in tight unisons by the whole band before Liebman breaks loose for another liberated solo flight on soprano in a dynamic breakdown with drummer Arbenz. The second "Small Talk" improv has the sax master playing tenor in an intimate dialogue with Michael's piano.

Liebman switches to soprano on a radical re-imagining of another oft-covered jazz standard, "Autumn Leaves." After exploring the harmony in rubato fashion from the outset, the quartet eventually kicks into all-out swing mode by the two-minute mark. Lähns' forcefully swinging bass solo at the three-minute mark is beautifully underscored by the Arbenz brothers' empathetic playing on piano and drums.

Michael follows with an envelope-pushing piano solo that purposefully avoids the well-worn path by exploring alternate routes. Each of the four individuals in this special edition quartet imparts his unique personality on this familiar piece in some way, helping to put a new suit of clothes on an old chestnut.

Arbenz's meditative "Clear Light" opens with Lähns arco bass ostinato and Michael plucking the strings inside his piano. Liebman enters on wood flute and the piece unfolds gently over the course of 4:25 with some beautiful exchanges along the way between Lähns' bowed overtones and Liebman's soaring soprano sax. The segue from that peaceful number to the frantic "Waking with a Start" is nothing less than startling. With Florian and Lähns laying down a swinging pulse, Michael and Liebman navigating through the chopsbusting head before Lieb launches into a heroic soprano solo over this kinetic groove. As the band drops out at the 3:30 mark, Lähns turns in another outstanding bass solo that never flags on the blazing tempo for even a single beat.

The third "Small Talk" improv piece has Florian on drums (playing with his fingers on the drum heads rather than sticks) melding with Liebman's soprano sax in a heightened dialogue. Liebman came up with the reharmonization on the Vernon Duke standard and Count Basie signature "April in Paris," which serves as another vehicle for Liebman's majestic tenor playing. The closing number, a buoyantly swinging take on the standard "You and the Night and the Music," is the best example here of the quartet operating in a more straight ahead jazz quartet VEIN. And dig how Liebman channels his inner Trane from the 4:25 mark on, blowing torrents of notes with uncanny abandon as Michael feeds him powerful McCoy Tyner-like chords to elevate the proceedings.

Says Michael of *Jazz Talks*: "This recording with Lieb was much less predictable than our last recording (2013's more composed *Vote for VEIN*). We couldn't rehearse, although we had played some of the tunes at gigs with him before. We wanted him to be able to feel free and express his personality. That's why we left much more space for interaction. The communication between the instruments is really important."

Michael's final thought on VEIN's esteemed collaborator on this exceptional outing: "He is the embodiment of a piece of jazz history. Since the '60s, he has been performing with all the jazz greats and that is precisely what he incorporates in his style and what has become a fundamental aspect for VEIN: the spirit of this music."

You can feel that authentic spirit on every track from *Jazz Talks*.

**-- Bill Milkowski**

**Bill Milkowski is a longstanding contributor to *Down Beat* and *Jazzthing* magazines. He is also the author of "JACO: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius" and co-author of "Here And Now: The Autobiography of Pat Martino" (both on Backbeat Books)**

## Press

The encounter between Dave Liebman and Vein must have been forged by a higher power under pressure by the sheer necessity of bringing to life their artistic existence. - *Ulrich Olshausen, Jazz 'n' More 11.2011*

...Liebman's dark and abstract "Climbing" is a tense affair, with his powerful tenor fueled by the superb rhythm section... It's a safe bet that future collaborations by David Liebman with Vein are in the works. - *Ken Dryden, The New York City Jazz Record, 2.2013*

This music is some of the finest that jazz connoisseurs have heard in a long time. ...with an outstanding Dave Liebman on saxophone... - *Die Redaktion 9.2012*

Vein: The trio sets a very big stage for Dave Liebman's small saxophone! - *Tagesanzeiger 9.2012*

...In line with their current CD "Lemuria - live", the music created at the "Unterfahrt" combined the roughness of jazzy freedom with the elegance of creative perfection. - *Ralf Dombrowski, Süddeutsche Zeitung 9.2012*

I have rarely heard jazz musicians of the younger generation play with such passion and drive!... very highly recommended! - *Wolfgang Giese, Rocktimes 10.2012*

Liebman and the Basel-based piano trio Vein share a sense of music that stands at the intersection of freedom and complexity and aims to create maximum energy without abandoning its subtlety. Their performance at the Jazzfestival Basel was received with enthusiasm by the audience and only leaves one thing to say: Here grows together what belongs together. - *Tom Gsteiger, Basler Zeitung, 4.2012*

Nice Work, get it! A trio with a thrilling creativity! - *Rolling Stone, 10.2011*

Unless you have another CD by Vein, I reckon you're unlikely to have anything else in your collection that's quite like this...It grooves, it's rubato, it's subtle, it's fun, it's ruminative, it's exultant; above all, it's constantly surprising. It's a treat. - *London Jazz News 4.2014*

...And they sounded like extraordinary ones; playing with an intense and intricate togetherness few bands can match.... - *Jazz Wise Magazine 4.2014*

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