



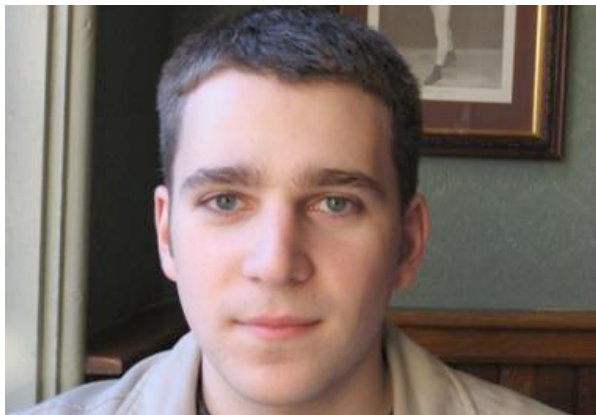
**Music Notes: Acid Testa**

Thursday, January 10, 2008

**New Haven's progressive jazz scene is home bass for Carl Testa.**

By Bill Carbone

In both his music and life, Carl Testa navigates superimposed layers. I've learned this about him as a fan and as an occasional bandmate of his. Testa performs on the upright bass, bass clarinet and his laptop with the waveform manipulation software SuperCollider. He transitions effortlessly from European festival dates with Anthony Braxton's celebrated 12+1tet and quartet, duo performances at a New Haven bookstore with his vocalizing wife Anne Rhodes, his duties as the after-school music director at Amistad Academy and a glamorous data-entry temp-job. Composed for two guitars and bass clarinet above a foundation of manipulated crackling fire and outdoor sounds, Testa's latest composition "Trio (Static)" is similarly multivalent.



Promotional Photo

Carl Testa: ace of bass.

Testa explains his concept for the piece in a recent phone interview. "I wrote three pages of music for each instrument. The idea is that they could be individually played, but I also wanted to be able to overlap them and have a specific sound harmonically." To accomplish this he created a series of cues that direct the instrumentalists to perform a specific section or to improvise within a particular framework of timbre and tonality.

"The three pages are written in three keys. I was interested in considering bimodal tonality, and it turned out that what I wanted was simple. The three keys are a fifth away from each other and what that sounds like is the transition phases in classical music, like when a sonata is going to modulate. But what I do is stay in those transition spaces." Testa continues, laughing, "I thought I was trying to do something new, but when I found the sound I realized that it had been being done for a few hundred years!"

A Chicago native, Testa studied improvised music as a teen at the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians School of Music. He then came to Wesleyan University where he studied composition with Anthony Braxton, Ron Kuivila, Alvin Lucier and others.

Now located in New Haven, Testa has developed a method of composition and band-leading that incorporates elements of jazz, modern classical, electronic and even pop music yet rarely resembles any of them. Listening to Testa's work, one is drawn immediately to the soundscapes he creates vis-à-vis unusual combinations of instruments and elements such as timbre, tempo and pitch with non-pitched sounds. For instance, in several compositions for his Clarinet Trio project (in which I play drums), Testa's combination of the clarinets' woody long tones with sizzling and popping electronic textures and frantic percussive elements is more likely to evoke an oxymoronic metaphor like "gentle hurricane" than an idiomatic genre name.

- ▶ Next Article
- ◀ Previous Article

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01/10/2008

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"I wish I had a poetic name for my music like Anthony [Braxton, who refers to his latest compositions as Ghost Trance Music]," Testa says lightheartedly. "I like that idea, but I usually just say 'creative music' or 'jazz and improvised music.' The music I'm doing now is probably not jazz, but I would think that the impetus of jazz is still there; the spirit and the broad approach."

Testa's "Trio (Static)" premieres Saturday Jan. 12 at 8 p.m. at the monthly Uncertainty Music Series he curates at Neverending Books (810 State St., New Haven). He'll be accompanied by guitarists Jeff Cedrone and Bob Gorry, who will also perform a solo set.

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carl is fab, bill is great too

Posted by ron ebrecht on 1.9.08 at 13.50

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