



**Christoph Erb
Jim Baker
Frank Rosaly
... don't buy him
a parrot ...**

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Hackers and civil libertarians line up to listen to Richard Stallman. The MIT-trained programmer and activist is respected in some quarters for his under-recognized GNU/Linux operating system, which is the foundation for the electronic fabric that binds and mediates humanity in the digital age. He is feared in others for his insistence upon revealing the greedy, controlling creepiness hiding behind the curtain of proprietary software. But if you want to have Stallman come and speak, you have to deal with his highly specific requirements. Do not expect him to take a break. Do not ask him to eat breakfast. Do not take it personally when he pulls out a laptop at dinner. Do not put him in a hot hotel room; a private residence with a friendly parrot is preferable. But whatever you do, don't buy him a parrot.

When bass clarinet and tenor saxophone player Christoph Erb, pianist Jim Baker, and drummer Frank Rosaly named the record under consideration, they left out Stallman's name and fashioned a more universal, less self-preoccupied admonition — Don't Buy Him A Parrot. Why not, you ask? For a start, consider the parrot. After chickens and turkeys, no family of bird has been more thoroughly exploited by mankind. Locked into cages while their natural habitats are cleared for dubious agricultural adventures and taunted with crackers, the poor creatures need a break, while the humans could certainly use a bit of karmic balance restoration. So leave those parrots alone.

If altruism and spiritual restoration aren't sufficient to motivate you, consider this: if the recipient happens to be an improvising musician, the acquisition of a parrot might interfere with his creative progress. To improvise is to aspire to find that which is endlessly renewable, or at least to find new meaning in the material you revisit. But what does a parrot do? It mimics; it repeats whatever words or environmental sounds it has heard without thought or comprehension. Give him a parrot for company, and your musician will only hear what he already knows squawked back at him, possibly by rote or maybe scrambled without comprehension. If you must buy a musician a bird, consider getting a magpie.

While magpies have been characterized as thieves drawn to shiny things, scientific observation does not support such slander. While it's true that they will appropriate many objects in order to eat and build their nests, they are not unduly moved by glitter. In fact they are highly intelligent creatures, unique among non-mammals in their capacity to recognize themselves in a mirror. They are also social, cooperative, and known for their penchant for gathering around their fallen fellows and making a loud collective clamor — a sort of avian jazz funeral. A magpie won't repeat your song back to you, but will instead regale you with loud and varied cries in its own tongue. If you want to learn how to survive, find your own voice, and fit it into a larger improvised discourse, you could do worse than to study magpies.

In 2011, Erb left his homeland of Switzerland to find some birds of like feather, and found his flock during a four month-long residency in Chicago. Many musicians come through Chicago for a night, and others might arrange a residency of up to a week. While they leave duly impressed by the city's depth and variety of musical opportunity, they still don't know the half of it, anymore than the proverbial blind man knows the whole elephant. Playing with a few Chicagoans means not even knowing how much you're missing, any more than you'll know the essentials of other bastions of improvisation by playing with a few Parisians, Londoners, Berliners, or New Yorkers. There are North side and South side, straight-ahead and free, rock and noise, and Afro-conscious and European-oriented dimensions to be explored. There are a myriad sporadic and ad hoc assemblages that will make you hear familiar players with new ears. There are venues and alliances that endure for years, others that are here and gone in no time. And there are musicians who move through it all collecting experiences, like magpies collecting detritus and nutrition. The four months that Erb spent in Chicago weren't enough to experience everything the city has to offer. But that was enough time to establish relationships with a cross-section of the city's improvisational community, and figure out who was most compatible with his egalitarian approach to total improvisation.

Six years on, Erb's still at it. His Veto label has issued fourteen Chicago-centric recordings. They include a solo record he made there, encounters with veterans such as Michael Zerang and Fred Lonberg-Holm who have been on the scene for decades, and sessions with newer but still seasoned musicians like Tomeka Reid, Keefe Jackson, and Jason Adasiewicz. *Don't Buy Him A Parrot* is his first Chicago recording for another label, and his first with this particular combination of musicians, but not his first time playing with either Baker or Rosaly. The drummer participated in Erb's first Chicago recording session with Lonberg-Holm and Jason Roebke, which yielded the CD *Sack*, and Baker appears on two discs, *Erb/Baker/Zerang* and the duo session *Bottervagl*.

Baker has been ubiquitous in Chicago for over thirty years, playing with Fred Anderson, David Boykin, Nicole Mitchell, Avreeayl Ra, Edward Wilkerson Jr., Michael Zerang, Fred Lonberg-Holm, Joshua Abrams, Jason Roebke, and Ken Vandermark, as well as in pop and country settings with the likes of Nicholas Tremulis and Janet Beveridge Bean. He is a member of Extraordinary Popular Delusions, a total improv combo with Mars Williams, Steve Hunt, and Brian Sandstrom that has played every week for the past ten years. Baker moves easily between scenes, but none can claim to own him. And he's a hard player to pin down, partly because whether he plays ARP synthesizer, grand piano, or some electric keyboard, he stands ready to deliver whatever provocation or support the moment requires. Rosaly, on the other hand, has spent a fair bit of time away from Chicago, working with Bobby Bradford, Jorrit Dijkstra, Ingebrigt Haker-Flaten, and the Scorch Trio. Still, prior to his recent departure move to Europe he contributed to some of the city's most exciting jazz ensembles — the Rempis Percussion Quartet, Nick Mazzarella Trio — as well as with the rock trio Health & Beauty and singer-songwriters Ryley Walker and Steve Dawson. As a leader, he's celebrated his Puerto Rican heritage in Todos De Pie, the sounds of the scrapyard in Cicada Music, and the songbook of Prince Lasha and Sonny Simmons in Green And Gold. As a player, Rosaly combines intuitive responsiveness with a compositional instinct that guides him as he varies from stinging spray to tidal sound-surges.

Given the breadth of their experiences, Erb, Baker, and Rosaly make a fine assembly of magpies. When they first played together at the 2013 Umbrella Festival, they sought out a balanced collective voice. This session took place a few months later, and despite being only the trio's second encounter — or maybe because of it — the players sound fully present in the moment, assertive in exchange, and attentive to the flux of density and flow. They are corvids in congress, their formations ever changing as they shift positions on the fly. And they do it, for the span of this session anyway, without reliance on electricity, let alone electronics. Stallman might reserve the right to pull out his laptop at dinner, negating the luster of candlelight with the glow of his screen, but this trio stands ready to regale you if the lights go out."

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Bill Meyer

Christoph Erb
Jim Baker
Frank Rosaly
... don't buy him a parrot ...

Christoph Erb *tenor saxophone & bass clarinet*
Jim Baker *piano*
Frank Rosaly *drums*

1. **...don't buy him a parrot...** 10:09
ISRC CH 131.1701510
2. **(parrot, figuring...)** 9:59
ISRC CH 131.1701511
3. **for canaries, career opportunities in the mining industry** 12:04
ISRC CH 131.1701512
4. **„It isn't hard to follow a man who carries a bird cage with him wherever he goes...“** 8:39
ISRC CH 131.1701513

Total Time DDD ²¹Bit 40:55

All compositions by Christoph Erb, Jim Baker & Frank Rosaly; TUHTAH Publishing Suisa.

The piano was tuned to fix the musical concept of the three musicians.

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Copenhagen Live 1964
hatLOGY 665

Anthony Braxton Quintet
(Basel) 1977
hatLOGY 676

Albert Ayler Quartet
European Radio Studio
Recordings 1964
hatLOGY 678

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Of Saints, Part 1
hatLOGY 707

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Sintering
hatLOGY 723

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Invisible Touch
At Taktlos Zürich
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