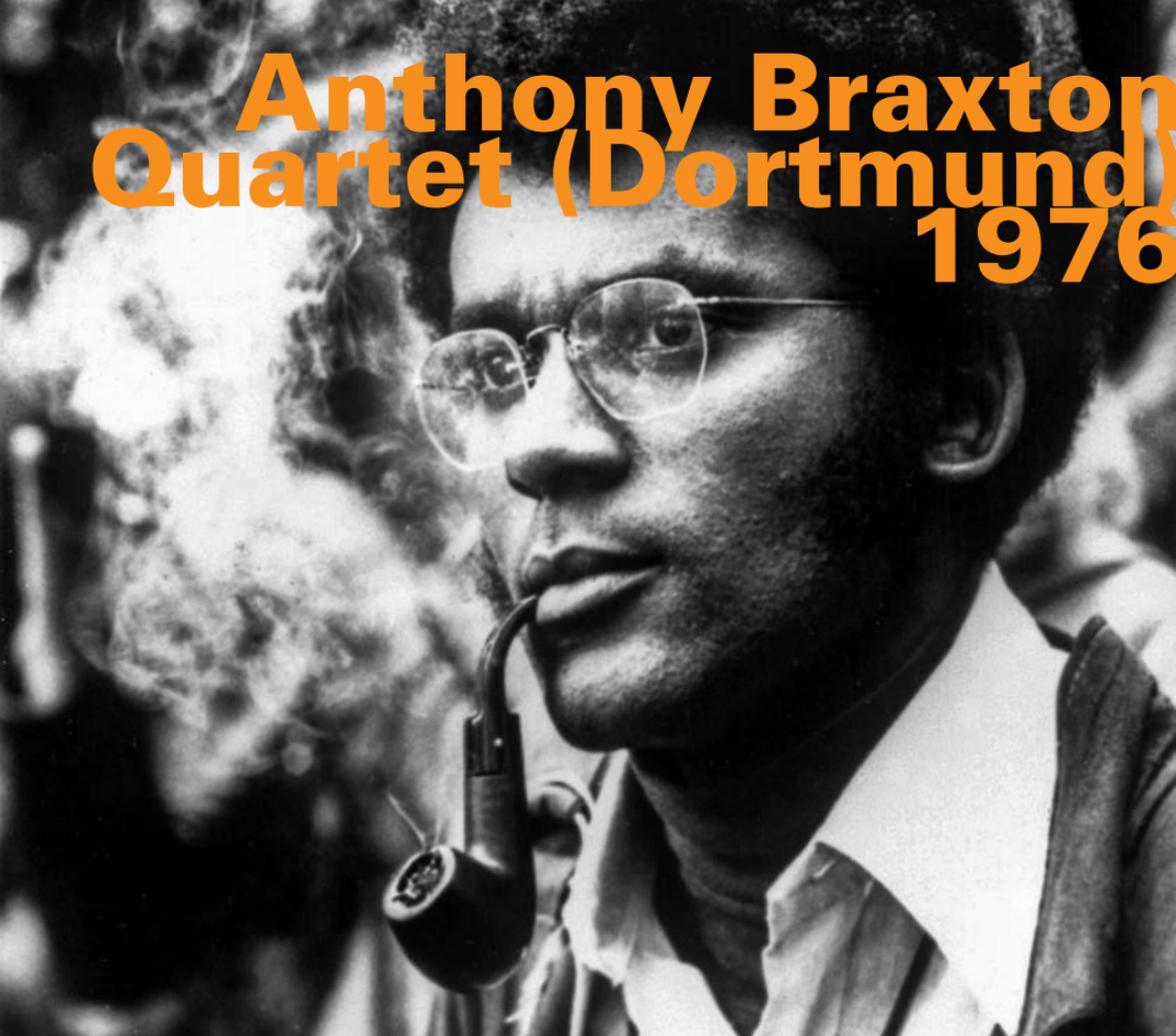


**Anthony Braxton
Quartet (Dortmund)
1976**



Quartet (Dortmund) 1976

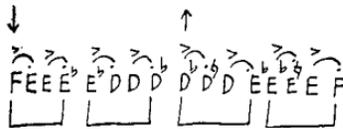
“Everything must go forward”

“It was at the first Dortmund Jazz Festival in Germany on October 31, 1976 that this group hit a magic peak. We spent the rest of that evening exhilarated by the performance and depressed by the absence of a recording facility.”

Michael Cuscuna’s 1977 liner-notes to *The Montreux/Berlin Concerts* were mistaken in one respect. The Dortmund concert had been recorded, by WDR Cologne, although it was not until many years later that a chance remark by a friend in Germany, who had just heard the set on the radio, alerted Anthony Braxton to the fact that a tape of the concert must exist. Its first appearance on CD, in 1991, confirmed that Michael Cuscuna’s initial contention was 100% accurate: at Dortmund, this group really did “hit a magic peak”.

The Braxton/Lewis/Holland/Alt-schul line-up lasted for barely six months. They played their first concert together in Boston in May 1976 and their last in Berlin on November 4. That we now have recordings of this group’s last two concerts is an incredible piece of luck. For me, the special attraction of the Dortmund concert is its air of celebration. There’s a palpable sense of fun to this music, attributable in part (I suspect) to the presence of George Lewis, who had just replaced trumpeter Kenny Wheeler in the quartet. The empathy between the two Chicagoans fairly fizzes from the speakers: Lewis romps through these tunes with a snorting, rumbustious glee that elicits a brilliantly bravura and playful response from Braxton.

The concert begins with *Composition 40F*, one of Braxton’s most popular quartet pieces. It’s been recorded several times, one of my favourites being the London 1985 version, where it’s played at a madcap hurtle, like a Keystone Kops car chase! The Dortmund *40F* is less pacy but no less delightful, as Lewis’s gruff trombone and Braxton’s slinky clarinet step out along the chromatic phrases that make up most of its written material. Though it follows a fairly complex A B A (C1) (C2) D form, the real kick of the piece comes right in the opening figure, repeated four times in section A:



You can see why Braxton calls this his “half-step” piece! Sections B and C1 are variations on A and, while C2 introduces new figures (played by clarinet and trombone), D returns to the “half-step” principle of A, now extending it over a 56-pitch “phrase pattern” that see-saws gaily between its chief pitches, C and Gb.

Once section D has been played, the quartet move into the “extended space” of the music, using the chromatic phrase patterns as basic language materials for improvisation. All four players tease out the lines – sometimes scampering, sometimes delving into nook and cranny – with the leader switching to thickly-purring contrabass clarinet.

A bass solo signals a realignment and the group move straight into *Composition 23J*, another popular piece which turns up also on *The Montreux/Berlin Concerts* (played by the 1975 Montreux quartet, with Kenny Wheeler). Of the Montreux *23J*, Michael Cuscuna wrote that it prompted “one of Braxton’s most exciting alto solos to date”. The Dortmund version is no less explosive, the alto twisting and turning like a dervish dancer as it rises to a crescendo of shrieking intensity.

Braxton describes *23J* in his *Composition Notes* as an “extended line structure” specifically designed to provide a

functionalism – regardless of period - from dixieland to the present”.

What this means is that “a given version of *Composition 23J* is open to the moment and/or the needs of its interpreters – which is to say, the tradition of Trans African functionalism has always been open to the moment (and, as such, functioning as a living and breathing music that is relevant to the challenges of the moment)”. The barnstorming solos by Braxton, George Lewis and Barry Altschul show them meeting those challenges with flying colours.

Composition 40(O) is a Kelvin repetition structure. Braxton has three categories of repetition structure, named Kelvin, Cobalt and Kaufman, each of which centres on a specific facet of repetition. In the Kelvin series, the musicians are given a particular rhythmic phrase which can be utilised in various ways to generate improvisation. *40(O)* comprises a single, long statement of “69 notes in six different phrase groupings (in a time field of 24½ beats)” which, explains Braxton, “establishes a rhythm contour and focus for participation”. He also notes that *40(O)* “can be stretched in every imaginable direction”, a point underlined by a comparison of this version with the one from the 1985 Birmingham concert on Leo Records. Whereas the latter is a frenetic, two-minute zap through the notation, the Dortmund *40(O)* is both less manic and leads, via Barry Altschul’s birdcalls, into a fabulous barnyard of improv as Lewis and Braxton (swapping soprano for contra-bass saxophone) run through a dialogue of honks, grunts, quacks and howls, with Dave Holland tight on their tails.

40(O), like *40F* and *23J*, is available in several recorded versions. However, the only other recording of *Composition 6C* is by this same quartet at Berlin, where it was played by Michael Cuscuna as “one of the pinnacles of collective jazz history”. For me, the Dortmund *6C* is as well-played and possibly even more fun! Braxton remarks in his *Composition Notes* that “The attractiveness of this work no doubt springs from its thematic focus – because *Composition 6C* was composed to be a circus march type of music.” Dating from 1967, it is, I think, the earliest of a grand collection of Braxton marches that also includes *Compositions 40E, 40I, 40Q, 45* and the joyfully majestic *58* for creative orchestra.

Composition 6C, says Braxton, breaks down into “two regions”: “(1) the bass vamp with percussion interspersed section, over which the first part of the theme is played, and (2) the remaining phrase at the end (which is written in a 9/4 measure). Both of these sections can be used as a principal focus for solo extension or open improvisation.” He also notes that “Since the middle-seventies, *Composition 6C* has provided an ideal vehicle for ‘collage’ improvisation” – and there are times when this Dortmund *6C* sounds like a parade-ground mêlée, as the quartet (but especially Braxton and Lewis) throw out marching riffs in glorious profusion, pausing only – at one moment – to blow extravagant kisses at one another.

The composition, dedicated to his AACM colleague Leroy Jenkins, is, writes Braxton, related to “the dynamic activity that solidified in Chicago during the late sixties ... In this period the musicians of the AACM would move to investigate every area of creative music – from ragtime music to African ritual music. The thrust of this activity would see musicians bringing all types of materials into their ensembles – whether that material was perceived as so-called jazz or not.”

Composition 40B, dedicated to altoist Lou Donaldson, can definitely be perceived as jazz, however you call it. It is, in Braxton’s terms, “a post-bebop thematic structure that affirms the composite continuum of Trans African creativity”. In particular, Braxton pays tribute to Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus, emphasising that “The use of extended lines in the manner of *Composition 40B* can be traced to those individuals – as well as to

musicians like Charlie Parker, Lennie Tristano, Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy. *Composition 40B* was composed with respect to the implications of this lineage . . . [and] in the spirit of traditional bebop functionalism with the addition of extended options that give new flexibility for creative interpretation.”

The work follows an ABA form, the sections linked by a vamp figure which also opens the performance, and the chief thematic material “amounts to a 23-bar structure that gives the creative instrumentalist special demands and challenges for interpretation”. The first studio recording of *40B*, on the 1981 *Six Compositions: Quartet*, is fleet, concise and highlights how beautifully its parts interlock; at Dortmund, it ignites a firestorm of solo invention as bass, trombone, alto and percussion take it in turn to voice their approval of its reborn bebop.

Concluding his entry on *40(O)* in the *Composition Notes*, Braxton writes: “The challenge of the next cycle of creative music will call for both new and traditional solutions . . . It will be important to stay open to the widest possible informational and vibrational stance . . . Everything must go forward – including our perception of who we are.”

The Dortmund concert meets all of these criteria. There are the new solutions proposed by *40F* and *40(O)*, the traditional solutions taken up and extended by *23J* and *40B*, the openness to a wide stance in *6C*'s gallumphing circus march. If this music isn't “so-called jazz”, then, as Braxton has suggested, they're calling it wrong.

“**The problem with jazz ...** is that they're defining it in such a way that *you cannot do your best*. So there's something inherently wrong with how jazz has been defined . . . The situation now is designed so that jazz is framed in a little box and if you don't follow in someone else's footsteps, someone who is so-called ‘jazz’, then you're automatically excommunicated. But all the masters followed their own steps, so it's a contradiction in terms.”

Quite so. Think of the small groups whose music has played a vital part in the history of African American creative music, the groups who have taken the tradition forward by finding new solutions and refusing to be boxed in by existing definitions: Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven, Charlie Parker's mid-40s quintet with Miles Davis and Max Roach, the classic 60s quartets of Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, the early Cecil Taylor Unit. Anthony Braxton's quartets not only belong to that lineage but from the early 70s to the early 90s have proved its most illustrious representatives. Listen to such recordings as (for example) *At Moers Festival, Five Pieces 1975*, this Dortmund concert, *Performance (Quartet) 1979*, *Four Compositions (Quartet) 1983*, the 1985 UK concerts, *Willisau (Quartet) 1991* and *Quartet (Santa Cruz) 1993* (an entire mountain range of magic peaks!) and you'll be hearing one strand in the evolution of a master who *has* followed his own steps – with daring, imagination and great integrity. You will also be hearing one strand in the evolution of the creative music tradition itself. Because *everything must go forward*.

Condensed and slightly revised from the original CD notes, December 1990.

Most of the quotations above are taken from Anthony Braxton's *Composition Notes, Book A* (re *6C*), *Book B* (re *23J*) and *Book C* (re *40B*, *40F* and *40(O)*). All five volumes of the *Composition Notes* are available from Frog Peak Music, Box 1052, Lebanon, New Hampshire 03766, USA.

Graham Lock's book *Forces in Motion*, his critically acclaimed account of the Braxton Quartet's 1985 UK tour, has recently been reissued in a new, expanded edition by Dover Publications.

Anthony Braxton

"It was at the first Dortmund Jazz Festival in Germany on October 31, 1976 that this group hit a magic peak." ... The Braxton/Lewis/Holland/Altschul line-up lasted for barely six months. They played their first concert together in Boston in May 1976 and their last in Berlin on November 4. ... For me, the special attraction of the Dortmund concert is its air of celebration. There's a palpable sense of fun to this music, attributable in part (I suspect) to the presence of George Lewis, who had just replaced trumpeter Kenny Wheeler in the quartet. The empathy between the two Chicagoans fairly fizzes from the speakers: Lewis romps through these tunes with a snorting, rumbustious glee that elicits a brilliantly bravura and playful response from Braxton.

Graham Lock

« Ce fut lors du premier festival de jazz de Dortmund en Allemagne, le 31 octobre 1976, que ce groupe fit éclater toute sa magie. » [...] Le line-up Braxton/Lewis/Holland/Altschul ne dura qu'à peine six mois. Ils jouèrent leur premier concert ensemble à Boston en mai 1976, et leur dernier à Berlin le 4 novembre. [...] Pour moi, ce qui fait l'attrait spécial de ce concert à Dortmund, c'est son ambiance festive. C'est une musique dont l'aspect ludique est palpable, imputable en partie (j'imagine) à la présence de George Lewis, qui venait juste de remplacer le trompettiste Kenny Wheeler dans le quartette. L'empathie entre les deux natifs de Chicago pétille à travers la surface des enceintes : tout en exubérance, Lewis batifole à travers les mélodies avec une allégresse grognarde, suscitant la brillante maestria et les réponses enjouées de Braxton.

Graham Lock, translated by Benjamin Mouliets

Anthony Braxton Quartet (Dortmund) 1976

Anthony Braxton *alto-, contrabass- & soprano saxophone; clarinet, Eb clarinet & contrabass clarinet*

George Lewis *trombone*

Dave Holland *bass*

Barry Altschul *drums & percussion*

1 **Composition 40 F**  26:10

Composition 23 J

ISRC CH 131.1901600



2 **Composition 40 (O)**  6:39

ISRC CH 131.1901601

3 **Composition 6 C**  9:47

ISRC CH 131.1901602

4 **Composition 40 B**  13:57

ISRC CH 131.1901603

Total Time ADD ²⁴Bit 56:37

All compositions by Anthony Braxton, published by Tuhtah Publishing/SUISA

Recorded live at Jazzfestival "Jazz Life" Dortmund on October 31, 1976 by WDR Köln. New CD-master September 2018 by Peter Pfister. Liner notes by Graham Lock. Cover photo by Hans Harzheim.

Graphic concept by fuhrer vienna. Executive production by Bernhard „Benne“ Vischer, Christian C. Dalucas & Werner X. Uehlinger.

Jazzfestival organized by Rolf Schulte-Bahrenberg.

Special thanks to: Gisela Fife-Schreiber and Ulrich Kurth of WDR & Rolf Schulte-Bahrenberg.

2018, 3rd edition remastered

Printed by Gantenbein AG, CH-4144 Arlesheim

www.hathut.com

File under: Jazz/Free Improvisation

WDR

hat
LOGY
outhere
MUSIC

Myra Melford Trio
Alive In The House
Of Saints

Part 1 : hatLOGY 707

Part 2 : hatLOGY 708

Ran Blake
Something To Live For
hatLOGY 711

Anthony Braxton
Quartet (Willisau) 1991
Studio : hatLOGY 2-735

Matthew Shipp
Invisible Touch
At Taktlos Zürich
hatLOGY 743

Samuel Blaser Trio
Taktlos Zürich 2017
hatLOGY 747



© & © 2019
for Outhere SA
1000 Brussels, Belgium
by Hat Hut Records Ltd.
Box 821, 4020 Basel,
Switzerland.
All rights reserved.
Made in Switzerland.

