



# THOMAS HEBERER

BY CLIFFORD ALLEN

In the often rowdy and eminently detailed ten-piece ensemble known as the Instant Composers Pool Orchestra (ICP), which counts both Dutch and American musicians among its members, situated between the ruddy antics of drummer Han Bennink and obstinate reserve of [former] pianist Misha Mengelberg, is a clarion-toned 'straight' man. Trumpeter Thomas Heberer brings calculated strength and methodical shredding of formalism into the ICP strategy, a daring aplomb serving him well in his own ensemble projects both in Europe and stateside.

Born in Schleswig in the North of Germany on Sep. 24th, 1965 Heberer began playing trumpet as an 11-year-old, later enrolling at the Cologne Conservatory where he studied under trumpeter Manfred Schoof, an architect of modern European jazz. As Heberer puts it, "with Manfred my communication was very close. He didn't talk about the trumpet as much as he did about what it means to be an artist and finding yourself. Jazz in schools was at a very early stage and I lived in Cologne, which was the only place where one could study at the conservatory level in Germany. There wasn't a strict curriculum and the teacher decided what you did." Heberer's early years on the German scene involved playing with pianist Achim Kaufmann and bassist Dieter Manderscheid, as well as a notable stint in the Berlin Contemporary Jazz Orchestra directed by pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach. The orchestra performed two of Mengelberg's pieces on their eponymous ECM LP and "Misha liked what I did with his pieces and asked if I would be interested in joining ICP. Of course I was very excited. He wrote me a letter and sent a bunch of trumpet parts in 1993, inviting me to a festival in Bremen. I have been a member of the group ever since."

In addition to orchestral work, Heberer taught at the conservatory in Frankfurt and led his own groups. By 1995 he'd started directing the stage band for a German variant on *The Tonight Show* theme, *Die Harald Schmidt Show*, which lasted through 2007 and allowed a stable income and visibility. But New York called and Heberer relocated in 2007, quickly becoming involved with fellow German expats of a slightly later generation, hooking up with drummer Joe Hertenstein and bassist Pascal Niggenkemper in HNH, a malleable trio that has released two discs on Clean Feed. He also formed Clarino with Niggenkemper and Belgian reedplayer Joachim Badenhorst and joined the quintet of Israeli tenor saxophonist Yoni Kretzmer.

Heberer's language, while rooted in a very pure sound, is also one that employs a healthy dose of extended technique. "I always have been interested in them and in recent years I have picked up a few that I feel a very strong affinity for. One thing I do is circular breathing, which is very challenging on the trumpet and I find it interesting because it makes you think in a different way." Removing the horn from his mouth, Heberer makes use of buzzing from the lips, which "came out of necessity. It's from the fact that in circular

breathing, sooner or later the blood going through my lips would cease to move and as a trumpeter you need that. I was looking for a way to continue the sound and at the same time remove the mouthpiece so that the blood would continue to circulate. The only way to do that would be to buzz from my lips, overcoming a weakness in circular breathing." Coming to Heberer's metallic arc as a new listener, this vocalized natter might unseat one's expectations of what a trumpet solo should sound like, but dryly expressive ululations fit perfectly within his pensive, rhythmically free swagger.

It would stand to reason that being associated with ICP, von Schlippenbach, Schoof and other doyens of European contemporary music, Heberer's compositional itch would be strong. In addition to solo works written for the choreography of Pina Bausch and his own solo LP *One* (NoBusiness, 2010), Heberer uses a group format he calls Cookbooks. "Over time I thought I could abandon the idea of conventional notation. I developed a language that is based on graphics and the source of it is the idea of instant memory. At a certain point we will freeze, mentally, what we are playing. Everybody memorizes their part, so it's an instant head based on specifics that I have given. Instead of having a continuous flow of improvisation we would go back to something we'd improvised a while ago and it would create this strange sensation of 'we have been here before.' There might be information only for one or two players. Repetitions and other specifics like a loop or unison playing are also represented. I've done some Morse Code systems where you attach two opposing forces to either dots or lines."

Ever busy on both sides of the Atlantic, recent projects include a trio with bassist Ken Filiano and Achim Kaufmann (*Interstices*, Nuscope, 2015) and work with bassist James Ilgenfritz and koto player Miya Masaoka. Heberer also joined the Nu Band, a long-running outfit credited to saxophonist Mark Whitecage, drummer Lou Grassi, bassist Joe Fonda and, until his death in 2014, trumpeter Roy Campbell, Jr. "I've been a member of the Nu Band since 2014 and literally joined the day after Roy's passing. They had a three-week European tour scheduled for February 2014 and they needed someone right away. I had worked with Lou and Joe before and I think their goal was to find a trumpeter who would be very different while bringing something fresh to the table." At 50, Heberer is solidly a force in this music, but he's also still learning: "relocating to NYC has really broadened my perspective. I fit in very well with older players because we have a lot of shared vocabulary and the difference, as far as I see it, is in the way that language was generated. They developed their thing mostly through osmosis while I developed my music through careful analysis. But I feel that only in recent years have I been able to catch up to the cats. When I joined the ICP I was sort of locked into the German way of playing; ICP and situations like it allowed me to loosen up and get a broader view." ❖

For more information, visit [thomasheberer.com](http://thomasheberer.com). Heberer is at HiArt Studio Mar. 1st, The Stone Mar. 20th with Angelica Sanchez and Cornelia Street Cafe Mar. 21st with Mostly Other People Do the Killing. See Calendar.

#### Recommended Listening:

- Thomas Heberer – *Chicago Breakdown: The Music of Jelly Roll Morton* (JazzHausMusik, 1989)
- ICP Orchestra – *Oh, My Dog* (ICP, 2001)
- Andreas Schmidt/Samuel Rohrer/Thomas Heberer – *Pieces For A Husky Puzzle* (Jazzwerkstatt, 2008)
- Thomas Heberer – *Clarino* (NoBusiness, 2010)
- Joe Hertenstein – *HNH* (Clean Feed, 2013)
- Nu Band – *The Cosmological Constant* (Not Two, 2014)

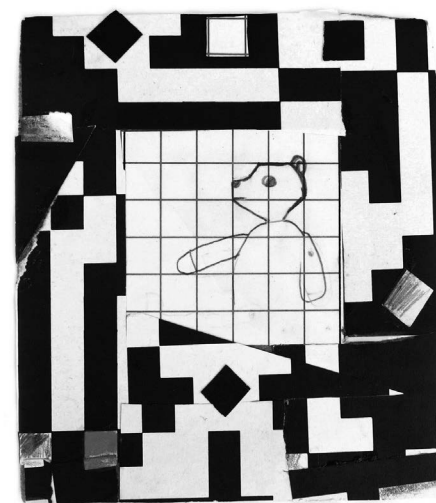
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## INSTANT COMPOSERS POOL



Restless in Pieces ICP

Restless in Pieces is the newest CD from Amsterdam's half-century-old ICP Orchestra. With new member Guus Janssen at the piano, guest vocalist Mattijs van de Woerd on two tracks, and the standard handful of stalwart Downbeat Critics Poll honorees on board, the band pinballs their way through an especially eclectic set of tunes including Monk and Nichols standards, a Charles Ives medley, and a pop song (!) written by Misha Mengelberg dating back to the late 1960s...the band the New York Times calls "scholars and physical comedians, critics and joy-spreaders", continuing to stretch and subvert musical forms into serious fun.

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