

THE REVIEW of JAZZ & BLUES: CREATIVE IMPROVISED MUSIC

Interviews With:

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Lorenzini
and
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Ivo Perelman

Interview

Taken & Transcribed by Bob Rusch

CADENCE: You first came to my attention when your first recording came out (K2B2 Records) in 1989. I assume that was your first recording.

IVO PERELMAN: Yes.

CAD: You're from Brazil?

I.P.: Sao Paulo.

CAD: Born there?

I.P.: January 12, 1961, in Sao Paulo. I came to this country in 1981, March. I came here because I wanted to study music, seriously, in Boston. I spent some time in Berklee in Boston.

CAD: Graduate?

I.P.: No. I took a few courses and a year later I moved, temporarily, to Montreal where I played Bossa Nova guitar in the clubs while continuing to study the saxophone, which I had started [in 1981] one year earlier. When I came to this country I decided to become a saxophonist. I had been playing the guitar, I had studied the clarinet, and I had an alto saxophone for some time, but I never really got down to seriously practicing, making it a goal.

CAD: The tenor certainly seems your instrument. You fully embrace it.

I.P.: Oh yeah, well, it is. I was searching for an instrument up till then. I tried the cello, which I loved and which I think has the qualities of the tenor. But I couldn't really project, find a way with that. I tried the trombone a little and the piano — my mother's a piano player — and the alto and the clarinet. But the day I put the mouthpiece of the tenor in my mouth I felt I had met my instrument. I had found my instrument. It was like an extension of my body. The alto was a little too small, the tenor was just right. I felt right, this is it!

CAD: Were you into Jazz at that point?



Ivo Perelman by Hillary Ryan



Ivo Perelman by Hillary Ryan

I.P.: I was beginning to discover Jazz at that point via Stan Getz, Charlie Byrd, the Bossa Nova connection for obvious reasons. At the same time there was Victor Assis Brasil, the great alto [sax] man because he was there, I saw him perform. It was my first contact with Jazz.

CAD: How 'bout Paul Winter?

I.P.: That's correct, that's correct. I had one of his records. I couldn't really relate, I didn't know what to do with this. I was really into Victor and Stan Getz.

CAD: I assume you came to Berklee with Jazz on your mind.

I.P.: Oh, most definitely. It was a shock. 'Course, it was cold and the first snow I ever saw was then, and Boston is Boston.

CAD: It's very nice.

I.P.: It's very nice, but whatever it was was a shock. It was a great year 'cause I got in touch with what the United States was and it's a whole different mentality. For the first time I was surrounded by musicians who were devoted to their craft. And my love for

the saxophone was highly confirmed. Living and jamming with other musicians was very healthy. I could play the saxophone but I had so much need to do something, I would play with everybody. I got some harmony and ear training things, but mainly it was an existential benefit rather than musical. It was my intro to the life I'm leading now.

CAD: But you only stayed a year.

I.P.: I took selected courses. I wanted to play more than anything else and I was not playing that much. And I wanted attention from the teacher and although they

had that at Berklee, it was not one-to-one. I wanted a relationship with a teacher that was more than student-teacher. I wanted it more meaningful, deeper.

CAD: Many people make "connections" at Berklee...

I.P.: I didn't get any of that. Maybe it was too early in my development as a musician.

CAD: So you left for Montreal?

I.P.: I went to Montreal for a year and played guitar and got more into my saxophone playing. Then I went to Los Angeles and studied at the Dick Grove School of Music and took composing and arranging in 1984. I was playing some general business stuff: casuals, lounges, stuff like that. But the arranging thing at the school was very demanding and I had to devote myself to it. I was writing charts every week for a year for a full orchestra.

CAD: You also studied architecture in Brazil?

I.P.: Yes.

CAD: Do you relate music to this? Does

architecture still interest you?

I.P.: Not really. I did it because I thought there was a parallel I could benefit from. I wasn't sure I could have a career in music at the time, mainly because I was looking for my instrument. Once I started music I realized I had no feelings for architecture whatsoever.

CAD: You stayed on the West Coast till around '90?

I.P.: Yeah. I met Marty Krystall, which led to my first recording on K2B2. That was the main thing. In the meantime I spent a year in Rome playing Jazz gigs in '86. I played a lot of gigs in Rome, Milan. It was a very good thing for me 'cause I was playing gigs nightly.

CAD: But no recordings?

I.P.: No, no. I did one recording for a Brazilian pop artist for a small label. I can't remember any of the names, unfortunately. It wasn't Jazz, it was a pop thing.

In '87 I went back to Los Angeles and stayed there till '89 when I came to New York.

CAD: What attracted you to Los Angeles?

I.P.: The weather. It took me a long time to get used to the East Coast weather. Today, I must say, I like the four seasons. I finally got to the point where I can appreciate the change, but back then I didn't.

The problem with me was L.A. was really so spread out, and I would just stay at home and practice. You would have to travel miles to see where the action was.

CAD: So how did you connect with K2B2 Records?

I.P.: At the time I was thinking of getting my doubles together – flute, clarinet, sax – and go back to Brazil and work as a studio musician. I thought, maybe I should go back. I had not yet found, at the time, a creative environment for me to investigate what I had intuitively inside of me, the kind of music I'm doing today. So I called Marty Krystall to study flute with him. I took my horn one day and played and he encouraged me to go on and record. I wasn't really seriously thinking of recording but Marty had this K2B2 Record label and he helped me put it together, and the first record (*Ivo*) came about. It was great and helped me realize a dream. It was totally unusual for me 'cause I was a leader and I had no idea what was going to come out. I just had that need to ex-

press myself. The feeling I had after the first recording was I looked in the mirror for the first time, musically speaking. That's exactly how I felt.

CAD: For a debut of someone nobody had heard of, it was a strong debut.

I.P.: I was totally charged, completely open at that moment. I knew it was my chance to prove myself if I had anything meaningful to say in what I had chosen. I took it very seriously. It was only one day and all first takes.

CAD: Your next one came out on Enja.

I.P.: ... After I came to New York. That record started out with Bill Laswell producing it. We did two things, sent it to Enja, and they liked it. I did a couple of more things to complete the album.

CAD: That had some formidable talent on it: Don Pullen, Paul Bley.

I.P.: I'll tell you how Paul Bley got in on that. I went to the Knitting Factory one night and I sat by this man and we started talking. We had a wonderful conversation; it was very philosophical, intelligent. We talked for quite a long time and when we shook hands he told me he was Paul Bley. I said, "Paul Bley, the pianist?" So I gave him my record [K2B2]. Some time later I bumped into him on the street and he told me he enjoyed the album very much, and he encouraged me. Then one day I went to his Sweet Basil gig he was playing. It was the night before I was recording *Children of Ibeji* (Enja Records) and he asked what I was doing. So I told him I was putting down some tracks for Enja tomorrow. And he showed up, unexpectedly, sat at the piano and said, "Listen. Now, why don't we do something?" I said, "Yeah, I have this melody." He said, "No, I don't want to hear the melody, I'll hear it while we do it. I'll do it but one take, one time only." So I was very impressed by that. I listened very closely 'cause I knew it was my one shot and we did it.

CAD: After the second recording, did things get easier? Were you able to get more gigs?

I.P.: It caused some impact but it's not an easy business. You have to fight a lot for everything. And that's the way it should be. It's a slow process, internally too, it's very slow. The music grows inside at a very slow pace.

CAD: How do you – or do you – character-

ize the music you play?

I.P.: I can tell you it's very difficult to put to words what goes through one's mind and heart when you're playing. I've read and heard all different comments about what I do: Free, Bold, Latin, Gato, Albert Ayler...you name it.

CAD: There is a sense of Ayler and Gato [Barbieri] in your playing. Were they influences?

I.P.: Definitely not. My influence was John Coltrane who, for a number of years I listened to daily, almost religiously – his whole career; his alto playing in the Navy to his duets with Rashid Ali – and I desperately emulated his playing. I thought he was "it." One day I realized that the real content of his playing was that you had to live your own life and be who you are and that's all – everything else is of no consequence. So I dropped it.

Albert Ayler I never heard until I heard his name mentioned with mine. Actually, I remember I heard a thing he did and I didn't really like it. I wasn't ready for it. Today he's very interesting to me and I like him a lot. An incredible tenor player.

Alan Silva
Jeff Williams
Arthur Blythe
Dave Liebman
Maggie Nicols
Michael Weiss
Burton Greene
Peter Brotzmann
Abdullah Ibrahim
Matt Shipp Steve Lacy
Mat Maneri Jason Hwang
Richard Simon Khan Jamal
Tyrone Hill & Marshall Allen
Gregg Bendian Tom Varner
and more!

Gato Barberi, the same thing. I never had any special thing.

CAD: But being from Brazil you must have known about him?

I.P.: Of course. You see his records and stuff, but after people started comparing me I started investigating him more.

But before all that, in Brazil, I would listen to all these pop and Bossa Nova guys, singers, composers: Ivan Lins, Roberto Carlos. And the music I was studying: the Villa Lobos. They're in me. But on the saxophone, Jazz, it was Coltrane. And then one day my apartment was robbed and they stole all my CDs and everything. I don't listen to Coltrane anymore.

CAD: But it's in your head.

I.P.: Oh yeah.

CAD: Do you listen to other people today?

I.P.: Not really. I stopped listening a few years ago when my CDs were stolen. I don't listen the way I used to. I need that silence in my life because I'm actively practicing and performing.

CAD: Your recordings, with the exception of the pop date in Italy, are all as leader, never as sideman.

I.P.: Yeah. I think the recordings I made presented my work in a very precise way and maybe other leaders don't hear much of a sideman input from what I do. I've tried to be as strong and direct at what I do. It takes a special talent to be able to collaborate with other peoples' efforts. Maybe I lack that, or haven't had a chance to investigate that, or maybe I haven't pleased anybody else.

CAD: You mentioned Villa Lobos before and a number of improvisers have used his work, but you did a whole CD of his compositions (GM Records).

I.P.: Yes. That was a very special project.

I met George Schuller at a festival in Boston and we talked about doing something. I suggested Villa Lobos because I had studied his music as a guitarist and I thought it would be a nice thing, a good project. I enjoyed it very much.

CAD: And you also have a solo CD (*Blue Monk Variations*) on Cadence Jazz Records which, of course, I had something to do with but which should still be covered in this interview.

I.P.: This, for me, was one of the greatest rewards in music because it came in a most unusual way. I was at the studio

doing something else and the tuba player was late. I looked at the clock, started warming up and said, "Why don't you turn the machine on?" I had no real intention of doing a record; there was no red light on. But it's so nice. I listen to this recording so much; I surprised myself. If I had to do a solo recording I would have thought all about it and tried to come up with schemes and practice special things. Never would I do what I did, just blow.

CAD: You also have your own label, Ibeji.

I.P.: I had some offers to record but they were not really interesting. They were from companies that would do less than if I released it myself. I felt they wouldn't take care of my music. The way I felt, I might as well put it out myself.

CAD: Are you able to make a living as a musician?

I.P.: Well, right now things are getting better. I can see perseverance is number one, especially this kind of music 'cause nobody makes the kind of money they would like. Especially in the country that is so highly capitalized like the United States where art simply does not exist as art. The notion (of art) is tightly connected with moneymaking. It's the most developed capitalistic country in the world and art has a very secondary place in this economy-driven country.

CAD: And yet we attract so many artists.

I.P.: Exactly, paradoxically it does. Which may be the necessary counterbalance at the other pole.

CAD: Are you in the music for good?

I.P.: There's no turning back. I've reached too deep to simply neglect it or forget about it. I can't see a way to go on without going deeper and deeper.

CAD: Do you find it's an advantage or disadvantage coming from another country and working in the United States?

I.P.: Ultimately, it doesn't matter where you come from. If you have a clear vision of what you do artistically there are enough serious people that will support you and overlook your color or religion or your nationality. I'm talking ultimately, at the deepest level. If we are talking about other areas that might not be the case but with this medium, this kind of music, I don't think it matters.

CAD: Who were some of the musicians who went out of their way to help you when

you were starting?

I.P.: Geri Allen, William Parker... I have to be careful, there were many.

CAD: Any that rebuffed you?

I.P.: Not really.

CAD: Is there a recording you think best represents you?

I.P.: No. I'm still looking to the next project.

CAD: Are you happy with your recordings?

I.P.: I'm happy because I believe they represent my efforts at the time very faithfully. But there's so much to be done I feel I'm really tapping into the beginning of something.

CAD: You haven't worked with other horn players.

I.P.: I've been thinking about doing that. I think there is so much to explore with other instruments. I want to be very in touch with what I'm doing before I do a whole project with another horn player. Actually playing is a process for me that has no thought involved, it really becomes an organic experience. At the best level, when it happens it has nothing to do with all those scales I learned, the books I read. It comes from somewhere else, it comes from the beginning of times, the vastness of the universe, from everything but me. I'm a mere enabler. I'm enabling that music, that energy to pass through my bones. Otherwise, how can I explain this music. Can you explain it?

CAD: I don't worry about it, I just receive it.

I.P.: You have to have an intimate relationship with your instrument. There's a constant search you have to pursue. It's an ultimate act of love we are giving the listener. It comes from a daily effort every single day. It's such a pure process.

People don't realize when they listen that the guy might have traveled 4000 miles, didn't sleep for two days, had lousy food and he's put on the spot, and for forty minutes he has to give nothing but greatness to the public, the promoter, the record company. I'd like the public to realize there is a huge amount of love work before the first note they hear, and it's not always perfect or great.

The
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