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JAZZ

IVO PERELMAN

Saxman Laments Plight of Brazilian Children

Don't mention the name Albert Ayler to tenor saxophonist Ivo Perelman. Comparisons with the '60s avant-gardist have come far more frequently than the Brazilian-born Perelman would like to hear.

"There is a review of my new record ["Children of Ibeji"] coming out in Down Beat magazine soon,"

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says Perelman about his second album. "And it's a good review. I'm very happy with it. But the guy says I'm mimicking Albert Ayler. And I've been playing my way since long before I even knew who Ayler was!

"John Coltrane? Yes. I definitely tried to mimic Coltrane, but I realized right away that I would never be able to be a Coltrane, and that's when I started trying to find my own voice."

While Perelman's iconoclastic style—rich with grunts, growls, swoops of melody and disjunct rhythms—bears some similarity to that of Ayler, an acclaimed expressionist tenor saxophonist who was influential during the late '50s and '60s, the resemblance is only superficial. Like Ayler, he has been fascinated by the music of children; unlike Ayler, he has used that fascination as an expansive, developmental force rather than an inward-looking device for musical compression.

Perelman's new album is a far-reaching example of his capacity for building complex music out of simple elements. It also reflects his belief—not common in the jazz world—that artists have an obligation to deal with social issues.



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Saxophonist Ivo Perelman: "If I didn't think music could make a difference, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now."

"The reason I used children's music and folk melodies as the foundation for the different pieces was because I wanted to express my feelings about the street children in Brazil, and this felt like the best way to do it.

"There are millions of kids on the streets of cities like Rio and Sao Paulo, my hometown, going through hell—getting killed by police, shooting up drugs, doing prostitution. And if you add the parents who give birth to them, you have a sad picture of the social situation in Brazil today."

Social relevance in relationship to Brazil is hardly a new expression in the creative community, of course, given the attention paid to problems with the rain forest, air pollution, etc. Does Perelman feel that a jazz recording can make a difference?

"Oh, absolutely," he says. "If I didn't think music could make a difference, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now. I mean, the music I do isn't all that commercial in the first place, and the subjects I choose makes it even more difficult to sell. Nobody wants to hear about poverty, nobody wants to think about starving children.

"But I believe it can make a difference, because it's a way of beginning to raise the consciousness of the masses about these situations. I think it's time for artists to start taking the matter into their own hands.

"You know," concludes Perelman, who has been living in the United States for nearly a decade, "they say in Brazil that if you are past 30, you lose your ideals. But I just turned 31, and I still believe in my ideals." —DON HECKMAN