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Brooklyn Jazz Underground Goes Global

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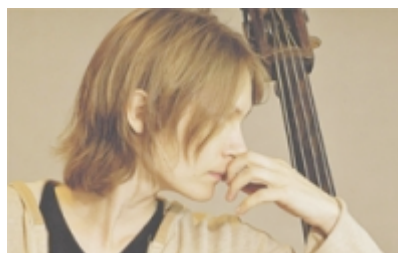
New Record Label Creates Publishing Platform For Brooklyn's Latest Jazz Ambassadors

By Beth C. Aplin
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

BROOKLYN — The Brooklyn Jazz Underground's plan for starting its own record label was, not surprisingly, a creative process. A little collaboration, a little improvisation, and a do-it-yourself attitude enabled the group of 10 Brooklyn-based bandleaders, which formed in January 2007, to create their own platform to publish their own music.

Their goal is pretty simple. "We want to have good music put out — music that really matters, that is creative, adventurous, contemporary and the best quality possible," says Alexis Cuadrado, a bassist/composer who runs the label with fellow bassist/composer Anne Mette Iversen. "We've worked hard to achieve that."

The result is Brooklyn Jazz Underground (BJU) Records, an



Red Hook's Anne Mette Iversen, whose album cover is seen here, and Ditmas Park's Alexis Cuadrado run Brooklyn Jazz Underground Records, an

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independent, artist-run label launched this spring with not one release but three: Cuadrado's Puzzles, Iversen's double disc Best of the West + Many Places, and Night For Day by Bernard Emer Lackner Ferber, a quartet led by BJU member Benny Lackner, a pianist/composer and Prospect-Lefferts Gardens resident.

independent record label started by a group of Brooklyn-based bandleaders. Visit www.bjurecords.com for more details.

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Though major record labels struggle to define themselves in the digital age, BJU Records' main concern is giving musicians full control. "As musicians, we know we don't want to give up rights and royalties of the music we worked hard for," says Iversen.

They were undaunted by their lack of business expertise and bolstered by their decades of collective experience as independent musicians who have managed every logistic from rehearsals to bookings to touring.

"From the beginning we decided that we were not going to run this record label in a traditional sense. It is artist-run in the sense that the artist does a lot of work for the release itself," says Iversen, a Denmark native and Red Hook resident.

"It really has been rewarding," she adds. "It was a lot of hard work in the beginning, but I think it will turn out good in the long run."

A Coalition of Artists

The Brooklyn Jazz Underground has been described by the New York Times as "a coalition of artists united by aesthetics as well as geography."

By pulling their resources together, the 10-member group has found that their individual workload is less while the attention paid their projects is more. Though they've branded themselves as leaders in Brooklyn's jazz scene, they've still retained their modesty.

"There's a lot more going on here [in the borough]," Cuadrado says emphatically. "We hope what we're doing might reflect some of what is happening right now."

Cuadrado's new album, Puzzles, is a true Brooklyn-based product. A native of Barcelona, Cuadrado has lived in Brooklyn since 1999 and wrote the album while undertaking a nearly three-year, gut renovation of his Ditmas Park home. He even had the album recorded in his living room.

Iversen's double-disc release includes an ode to Atlantic Avenue, where she lived for several years, as well as compositions performed by her jazz quartet and a string quartet, two genres that she has brought together in the past.

Now that BJU Records is off and running, perhaps a future project of the group could be a jazz venue in their home borough. Though BJU has a weekly residence at Park Slope's Tea Lounge, all three of BJU Records' CD release parties will be in Manhattan, where the exposure is greater and the venues are bigger. (May 23 at The Jazz Gallery for Puzzles, May 24 at The Jazz Gallery for Best of the West + Many Places, and June 14 at Smalls for Night For Day.)

"There are lots of clubs and bars with music in Brooklyn, but none are exclusively jazz," says Iversen. "I think we need a jazz club in Brooklyn. I have a friend who's looking into it."

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