

# EVIL RABBIT

BY ANNA STEEGMANN

Founded in Amsterdam in 2006 by Dutch pianist Albert van Veenendaal and German double bass player Meinrad Kneer, and since 2015 based in Berlin and run solo by Kneer, Evil Rabbit Records, as it says on its website, is “an independent label by musicians for musicians as a platform for honest, authentic, contemporary improvisation and jazz music with a European touch.” Kneer has certainly achieved his goal of creating a community of improvisers and like-minded artists. A nonprofit organization with worldwide distribution by Subterranean Distribution, its profits go directly to the artists, who keep the copyright of all their work.

Kneer moved to the Netherlands in 1995 to study double bass, formed the quartet Dalgoo with reed player Tobias Klein and became a member of Amsterdam’s vivid improvisation and jazz scene. He had the chance to work with Han Bennink, Ab Baars, Ig Henneman, Joost Buis, Paul Pallesen and Tristan Honsinger, to name a few. Always open to exploration, he found himself in bands performing ethnic crossover music with musicians from India, Morocco and Turkey. He started to work with the pianist and composer van Veenendaal. When the two had no success finding a label to publish their duo improvisations, they decided to release it themselves.

Kneer recalls that, after a fruitless brainstorming session trying to come up with a name for the label, “I stood in the door with my jacket on to leave, I turned

around, and without thinking, I said ‘Evil Rabbit’. I don’t know where it came from, but there it was, and we couldn’t find any better name after that.”

Not flush with money, both musicians insisted that the CD packaging should mirror the music’s quality. To be cost-effective, they printed six outer sleeves at a time and added specific information about the tracks closer to the production time. The CD sleeves, initially designed by Lysander Le Coultre and, after his untimely death at age 46, by his colleague Jeroen Gouw, are truly eye-catching. Printed on light brown cardboard, the sleeves became a characteristic of their design. Three concentric rabbit holes were cut into the cover, revealing the color on the front and the CD on the inside. Monique Besten provided gorgeous photos for each recording, and the color of each CD was chosen to match the image.

Kneer stayed in Amsterdam for 15 years and formed many connections and friendships with musicians, many of whom recorded with Evil Rabbit. In 2012 he moved to Berlin, and van Veenendaal left the label two years later. Asked about his criteria for accepting music for release, Kneer doesn’t think there are definite criteria for music to be accepted. The label is mostly about improvised music, but he doesn’t want to exclude anything. However, he must feel that the music and the musicians fit in with his catalog. He further explained: “I would never have thought of releasing a Monk CD, though I love his music, (and) there it is: *Monk on Viola* by George Dumitriu—too good not to be released! Other exceptions, like *81 Matters in Elemental Order* by Marko Ciciliani, were too good to be turned down, even though the music didn’t fit then.”

Asked about the artists/recordings people should listen to get a feeling for the catalog, Kneer found it

challenging to answer. “There are recordings from solo instrumentalists up to sextets so far. You can find well-known musicians like Matthew Shipp, Han Bennink, Paul Lovens, Floros Floridis, Bill Elgart, next to less-known musicians in the catalog.” He recommended starting with the label’s first release: his duo improvisation with van Veenendaal and the reason the label was created, as well as *Playstation 6*, an exciting sextet, plus *Rigop Me* by Tone Dialing, a trio that still surprises him a lot. There’s van Veenendaal’s dazzling solo recordings, the double bass quartet Sequoia’s *Rotations* (with Kneer and Miles Perkin); a powerful free jazz trio (Ab Baars/Kneer/Elgart—*Live at Konfrontationen Nickelsdorf 2012*); a duo recording of violin and turntables (Ayumi Paul/Achim Mohné—*Sketches For Violin and Vinyl*), which should get more attention; Andreas Willers’ delicate quartet from Amsterdam (*Haerae*); and the label’s latest release: Dumitriu’s *Monk on Viola*.

Asked about his move to Berlin, he said, “I met a lot of amazing improvisers here, the scene is huge, and many new musicians are moving in—and you meet another scene with a different approach to improvisation. So your improvisational vocabulary grows fast, and your playing changes into something else, based on where you come from.” Asked how he balances his career as a musician with the work for the label, he admitted that it’s not always easy. Starting the label, he decided that it was not about making money. He’s still content with that. When he is touring or busy with other career-related things, the label work sometimes has to wait.

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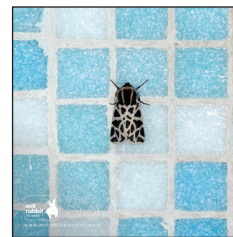
*The Munderkingen Sessions Part 1*  
Meinrad Kneer/Albert Van Veenendaal



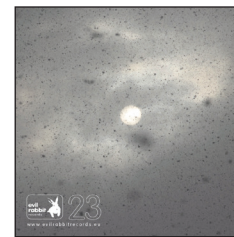
*Monk On Viola*  
George Dumitriu



*Live At Konfrontationen Nickelsdorf 2012*  
Ab Baars/Meinrad Kneer/Bill Elgart



*Tone Sequence Evaluators*  
Floros Floridis/Yorgos Dimitriadis



*Featuring Matthew Shipp*  
The Core Trio

## VOXNEWS

# EPIC TALES

BY SUZANNE LORGE

Forty years ago, guitarist/singer **John Pizzarelli** released his debut album, *I’m Hip (Please Don’t Tell My Father)* (P-VINE). The father in this scenario is famed guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli, who passed in 2020—one of the jazz world’s many profound losses to COVID. John, like his other siblings, follows in his father’s outsized footsteps; to date, he’s recorded more than 20 solo albums and contributed to scores more as a guest. This month he adds another title to this impressive body of work: *Stage & Screen* (Palmetto), a carefully-parsed collection of 12 songs from mainstream musicals and films.

These traditional pop songs perform a particular function in the narratives they serve, by moving the storytelling along. They are rich in dramatic impact, a value that was top-of-mind for their lyricists and composers. For *Stage & Screen*, Pizzarelli culls tunes from the best ampersand-linked writing teams, including Kander & Ebb, Rodgers & Hart, Rodgers & Hammerstein, Youmans & Caesar, Stein & Green/Comden, Bernstein & Green/Comden, Cahn & Styne and Lerner & Lane. He then adds his own imprimatur to these well-crafted songs—a near-plaintive vocal on “Tea for Two”, a rarely heard verse on “As Time Goes By”, a Django-esque turn on the comedic uptempo “A Coffee in a Cardboard Cup”.

Most impressive is his locomotive scatting on tunes such as “Too Close for Comfort” and “I Love Betsy” and his flawless fretwork on instrumental tracks including the ballad “Some Other Time” and the shifting medley “Oklahoma Suite”. These instrumentals (with bassist Mike Karn and pianist Isaiah J. Thompson) demand as much interpretive skill as does a vocal line—something Pizzarelli seems to know intuitively. The John Pizzarelli Trio appears at Jazz Forum Arts in Tarrytown (Mar. 31-Apr. 1), gearing up for the release of the anniversary album at Birdland (Apr. 25-29).

When **Cécile McLorin Salvant** recorded the Grammy-nominated album *Ghost Song* (Nonesuch), she kept one song behind. This original composition, “Mélusine”—a simple air for guitar and voice that recounts a medieval tale of death, love and phantasms—became the title track for her just-released new album. In choosing material for 14 tracks, Salvant turned to eclectic sources: early chant and secular music, 20th century Francophone popular music, rock opera and her own wide-ranging jazz roots. Additionally, she sings mostly in French on the album, at times switching to English, Haitian Kreyòl and Occitan (a romance language from Southern Europe). These creative moves signal Salvant’s increasingly personal approach as she tackles themes of “solitude and self-reliance and being adaptable”, as stated in the album bio. As a pre-launch teaser, she created an arthouse video containing self-footage interspersed with text, animation and outdoor shots (birds, a lizard, gardens, a flaming building). This evocative video reflects Salvant’s serious interest in the visual arts. This

other side of her artistry will receive fuller expression with *Ogresse*, an animated film project that Salvant has been touring the last several years. In February she announced a creative partnership with Belgian animator Lia Bertels and French studio Miyu Productions to develop the film, which will feature Salvant’s music and animated characters, all based on oral fairy tales from the 19th century.

One of the stages where Salvant first unveiled the *Ogresse* material was Jazz at Lincoln Center, where she’ll return this May. No doubt she’ll introduce *Mélusine* then; in the meantime, you can hear her in a tribute to Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison at Princeton University (Apr. 12), or on *Olympians*, a new album by Vince Mendoza and Metropole Orkest for BMG. According to Mendoza, the *Olympians* of the title are musicians, like Salvant, at the height of their godlike powers.

Last month’s VOXNews attributed *Both Sides of Joni* (ACME) to singer **Alexis Cole**. That’s almost right: Cole will in fact launch the album with pianist/arranger Monika Herzig at Chelsea Table + Stage (Apr. 26). But singer/producer **Janiece Jaffe** recorded the album with Herzig; her vocals ring and growl and whisper on this homage to Mitchell, another protean artist. The April concert will in turn honor Jaffe, who passed away unexpectedly in November.

Also at Chelsea Table + Stage, **Tawanda**, winner of the 2020 Sarah Vaughan International Vocal Competition, officially launches *Smile* on Resonance (Apr. 21). Tawanda is the rare singer who brings optimism and hope to every lyric—this Songbook collection bursts with promise.



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**CC:** The teacher I had at the time was more a Broadway type. She taught me some exercises, but I would say my education came more from listening to recordings, and realizing how these vocalists delivered lyrics, the sound, the diction and how the songs conveyed feelings and ideas and moods. One expresses those things in speech, and to me singing is an extension of one's speaking voice. One articulates phrases and words, or changes the timbre of one's voice, depending on how one wants to come across. When I listen to Billie or Abbey, it's all [about] the way they deliver lyrics.

**TNYCJR:** That's a eureka moment, because you have a specific theatrical style as part of your singing. Did that come from your teacher or is it something that developed naturally?

**CC:** It's all from singing with recordings, and just imitating Sarah and Billie.

**TNYCJR:** Your sound is really your own.

**CC:** There's something interesting about singing to me. It doesn't go through a middleman, such as an instrument; it's the interior, you're transferring your interior into sound, and there's something very universal and direct about that. There's hardly a culture that doesn't have singing and many cultures are defined to a great extent by a great voice, like Mahalia Jackson or Mercedes Sosa, Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder.

**TNYCJR:** Are there any instrumentalists, though, that you feel have contributed to your own style?

**CC:** I would say Steve Lacy, very much. He's so deliberate in the way he plays. There's nothing that's unnecessary, it's very specific. There's this pure sound that I absolutely love about his music. There is Bill Evans, who I absolutely love. He touches me every time; I connect with his music. But it's mostly vocalists, I have to say.

**TNYCJR:** Your improvising tends towards a legato, lyrical style. Is that your natural inclination or something that you developed?

**CC:** It's kind of interesting. When I'm practicing at home, I will scat because I want to get more familiar with the harmony of what I'm singing. But when I sing in public, I will not scat because I made the decision not to. And then when I'm in teaching situations, I'm teaching improvisation with scatting and everything, but, personally, I will not do it in public. Scat syllables don't appeal to me. Are we doing it just because instrumentalists are doing it? We don't have to.

**TNYCJR:** But is improvisation where you have space to add in some non-Western details?

**CC:** When I was in India, I never studied classical Indian music. We were always in this Western kind of vein. However, in school, we learned Indian folk tunes. And I've sung folk songs in concert. My ancestors are from Goa, south of Mumbai, which used to be a Portuguese colony. I've sung the music of Goa, I've sung in these languages. I think maybe that some of the inflections creep into [my singing], even with words.

**TNYCJR:** What kind of ideas do you want to cultivate in your students?

**CC:** It's very inspiring to teach at Columbia. I've been on the faculty the past 15 years or so. I've also been

directing the main jazz camp, which is a summer camp for much younger students, since the early '90s. I find this very, very fulfilling, because the Columbia students are a complete inspiration and a joy to be around, they're totally focused, they want to be challenged, they're completely open to any music I bring to them. I bring in Mingus, I bring in Monk, I bring in Kenny Wheeler, Abbey Lincoln. And to hear their interpretations in class and their performances brings me pleasure.

The summer students tend to be middle schoolers and high schoolers, and the only experience those kids have is playing in jazz big bands, so I bring in faculty like Tony Malaby and Kris Davis. Some of those students do end up taking music [later], but that is not my goal. The goal is to just have them incorporate the arts into their regular lives and be supporters. We want to make them a good audience. The rewarding thing is to watch these students just blossom and find their own voice.

For more info visit [christinecorrea.com](http://christinecorrea.com). Correa's album release concert is at Bar Bayeaux Apr. 28. See Calendar.

**Recommended Listening:**

- Frank Carlberg—*Crazy Woman* (Accurate, 1995)
- Frank Carlberg—*Variations On a Summer's Day* (feat. Christine Correa) (Fresh Sound New Talent, 1999)
- Frank Carlberg—*State of the Union* (Fresh Sound New Talent, 2005)
- Ran Blake/Christine Correa—*Down Here Below* (Tribute to Abbey Lincoln, Vol. One) (Red Piano, 2011)
- Frank Carlberg's Word Circus—*No Money In Art* (Red Piano, 2014)
- Christine Correa—*Just You Stand and Listen With Me* (Sunnyside, 2021)

(LEST WE FORGET CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

"Summer of 1981, I'm at a friend's home, a whole family of musicians," Bernstein recalled enthusiastically. "The father is an instrument maker and loved jazz, loved to turn his daughter's friends on to cool music. So I go there one day and he's like, 'Steve, come here, you gotta hear this really far out record.' It's like, whoa, this is what I've been imagining but didn't know what it was."

Bernstein pulled out his copy of *Amarcord* and spoke even more excitedly. "Blondie, 1981, that's 'Rapture'. Man, it was crazy, you have Steve Lacy solo, you have the biggest pop act in the world, and then you have Muhal [Richard Abrams]. I was like, this is the world I want to be in!" Bernstein was to be a part of bringing *Amarcord* to Lincoln Center Out of Doors in 2018, but the concert was rained out and never rescheduled. Five years later, that show will finally happen at Roulette, following Willner's Lincoln Center set list and notes and with Bernstein at the helm.

*Amarcord* has evolved over the years. Guitarist Bill Frisell will be present at Roulette, for example, but his solo rendition of "Juliet of the Spirits" is now arranged for ensemble. And Anderson, who was not on the original album, will appear in this new version, as will a couple dozen other performers mostly associated with the Downtown scene from which Willner drew.

"Hal helped put the original world of Downtown and Roulette on the map", Bernstein said. "I think people don't understand how wide a door Hal opened." He recited a quick list of Willner's unlikely productions, including putting Reed and Ornette Coleman together for *The Raven*. "Hal opened the door to a world where all that was possible."

For more info visit [haltribute.com](http://haltribute.com). Steven Bernstein presents Willner's *Amarcord* Nino Rota at Roulette Apr. 8 with

guests Bill Frisell, Laurie Anderson, Bob Stewart, Marty Ehrlich, Gary Lucas and others. See Calendar.

**Recommended Listening:**

- Various—*Amarcord* Nino Rota (Hannibal, 1981)
- Various—*That's The Way I Feel Now: A Tribute To Thelonious Monk* (A&M, 1984)
- Various—*Lost In The Stars: The Music of Kurt Weill* (A&M, 1985)
- Various—*Stay Awake: Various Interpretations of Music from Vintage Disney Films* (A&M, 1988)
- Various—*Hal Willner Presents Weird Nightmare: Meditations on Mingus* (Columbia, 1992)
- Hal Willner—*Whoops I'm An Indian* (Pussyfoot, 1998)
- Various—*Stormy Weather: The Music of Harold Arlen* (Sony Classical, 2002)

(LABEL SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

Musicians who have published with Evil Rabbit have nothing but praise for Kneer. Willers said, "Meinrad is a close friend, and we have worked on several projects. So when I gave him my recording, asking for feedback on this solo acoustic endeavor, I felt happy and honored that he offered to release it on ER immediately. It feels good to have a harbor for personal musical statements like this."

Baars sums it up: "Meinrad puts out CDs that reflect his musical taste. He always pays much attention to the musicians, a good collaboration, and he only does it for the love of the music."

For more info, visit [meinradkneer.eu](http://meinradkneer.eu)

# INTERPRETATIONS

SEASON 33 2022- 2023



ALEXANDRA GARDNER

APR 13



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\$20: General \$15: Members, Students, Seniors.  
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Concert begins at 8:00pm.