



Silke Eberhard

## German Saxophonist Silke Eberhard Reimagines Eric Dolphy

Silke Eberhard first picked up the clarinet when she was 11 years old, and three years later she switched to the alto saxophone. Her discovering of jazz was still a few more years away—her point of entry was big band music because it reminded her of the traditional Bavarian brass bands she'd grown up with in the small village of Oggenhausen in the southern part of Germany, near Ulm. "Where I came from there was very little jazz," Eberhard said. "My father had some Glenn Miller records."

Her education proceeded rapidly in her late teens, and within a couple of years she's graduated from absorbing big band music to the work of Eric Dolphy, whose music remained with her ever since. Last year, more than two decades after her initial introduction to the iconic reedist, Eberhard debuted a fascinating new project called Potsa Lotsa (an alternate title of Dolphy's composition "Number Eight"). Recently the quartet—which includes tenor saxophonist Patrick Braun, trumpeter Nikolaus Neuser and trombonist Gerhard Gschlöbl, all of them neighbors now in Berlin—released its debut album, *The Complete Works of Eric Dolphy* (Jazzwerkstatt), a mind-bending double CD that features Eberhard's arresting arrangements of all 26 known Dolphy compositions.

"People always think of him as a bass clarinetist and not an alto saxophonist, and I think more people should know about him," she said. "I wanted to do a special lineup, something different from what Eric Dolphy did. I wanted listeners to be able to hear his music from a different perspective. I thought about many different possibilities—with strings, with a guitar, this or that—and I eventually decided on four horns."

Eberhard had long wanted to present a project focusing on Dolphy's music—she admitted that the comprehensive nature was loosely inspired by Alexander von Schlippenbach's Monk's Casino band, which recorded all 70 of the pianist's tunes—but Potsa Lotsa

is no facile tribute band.

Eberhard created rigorous arrangements for all of the tunes, which, considering the quartet's unusual instrumentation, presented some significant challenges.

"Some tunes fit very well for the lineup and some where not so easy," she said. "'The Baron,' for example, has such a high range that not even one of our instruments could cover the melody, so I had to split it up on all four horns."

Although the band members improvise across the album, the focal point is how Eberhard harnessed Dolphy's quirky compositions into tightly woven expressions of jagged melody and tart harmony. Most of the performances clock in under four minutes, a necessity when dealing with so many tunes.

While Eberhard doesn't get to improvise at great length in Potsa Lotsa, she's been doing so with some other projects in recent years. In 2007 she made an international splash in a duo project with the pianist Aki Takase dedicated to the music of Ornette Coleman—their album *Ornette Coleman Anthology* (Intakt) delivered a slew of striking interpretations that both retained the composer's indomitable spirit while pushing his tunes into unexpected shapes and styles. Eberhard also leads a superb trio that's set to release its second album in January on Jazzwerkstatt. She's joined by the excellent, limber bassist Jan Roder—a member of Die Enttäuschung with whom she's worked steadily since 1996, a year after she moved to Berlin to study at the prestigious Hanns Eisler Academy of Music—and drummer Kay Lübke. In this stellar configuration Eberhard presents her own compositions, flexible and attractive vehicles rooted in hard-swinging post-bop that nevertheless provide her with great expressive freedom.

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