

IAN CLEAVER

THOMAS POL



WOLTER KUHNE

JASPER BLOM

Zilt

Teacher and student Jasper Blom (saxophone) and Ian Cleaver (trumpet) developed a repertoire of songs by Duke Ellington and Misha Mengelberg - jazz legends from two different eras with a similar open and playful character. Generations of jazz come together on a record that was developed during live gigs in a crowded café, treading boundaries between low and high art, free jazz and entertainment.

A tiny stage in a crowded bar, whiskey & brass

When Jasper Blom, renowned jazz saxophone player and teacher at the Amsterdam Conservatory, heard one of his new students play the trumpet - so joyous and free - he was inspired. What was supposed to be a lesson turned into a jam-session, and what was a jam-session turned into regular gigs at a café called 'Zilt' around the corner in Amsterdam's Chinatown. ZILT is the result of this collaboration - a recording of the repertoire they developed on that small crowded stage. These two generations, teacher and student, found a joy in playing together and developing ideas, where very soon the traditional dynamics between mentor and mentee evolved into a spirited conversation between two soloists with a shared outlook on jazz.

Jazz can be overwrought and intellectualized - but playing right next to the bar in a crowded café makes one realize that jazz was once popular music, music for the people, music to swing to, music to entertain - and it has that same power still, if you play it right. In café Zilt Blom and Cleaver were acutely aware of their audience, sitting only inches away from them, and realized that any jazz they played needed to surprise, uplift their listeners, but also entertain them.

Ellington meets Mengelberg in café Zilt

While playing their live gigs on the small floor of café Zilt, Blom and Cleaver were looking for repertoire that wasn't overplayed - with that hint of newness, yet honoring legendary composers of jazz past. They settled on the works of two composers from very different backgrounds; Duke Ellington and Misha Mengelberg.



ZILT is: Jasper Blom (sax), Ian Cleaver (trumpet), Wouter Kühne (drums), Thomas Pol (bass).

Duke Ellington once defined his own role as a bandleader as 'running a casual business' - to him, even though his compositions were played in concert halls around the world, there was always an impromptu and free feel to it. Ellington's band was a real popular orchestra - playing live, they performed a medley of their greatest hits. As such, he was treading the line between high art and popular entertainment, music as both something transcendent and as pragmatic as a fulltime job. Cleaver and Blom were not only inspired by his compositions, but also by the sound of Ellington's band; somehow, even though twenty musicians are playing at the same time, you can hear every single voice and its character come through. Character that they believe is paramount to good jazz - letting your personality, your voice, your sense of humor shine through. There was a looseness about Ellington's sound, a freedom, that felt inspiring.

As some tell the story, the Dutch avant-garde composer Misha Mengelberg heard Ellington's orchestra play as a child, and was inspired - not by the concert itself, but by the spontaneous jam-session he witnessed between the sets. Music can be written down and prepared, but what possibilities open up when people start to improvise in the moment? Mengelberg grew into a more conceptual composer, asking questions about the artform itself in his works, and always with humor and a certain playfulness.

When Blom and Cleaver decided to record their repertoire with Just Listen Records, a small jazz-label under the wing of the bigger audiophile NativeDSD recording platform, it felt like a perfect fit. Just Listen catches their artists live, without headphones, all in one room - very similar to a live-setting, with only an audience lacking. There are no sound-proofed cubicles - instead, the space in which they play is an integral part of the sound, and the musicians play to and with each other, in an intense focus; only a few takes, with no do-overs. This way, with the artists all playing live in the same room, every happy mistake is captured, there is no editing to hide behind. Recording live captures that unique focus that players tune into when performing for an audience - being fully present with each other, paying close attention. Character shines through when nothing can be smoothed out; character and a certain liveliness that is inherently fitting to the ZILT project.

After settling on a repertoire combining Mengelberg and Ellington, these two very different jazz composers, they also started to incorporate aspects of both composers in their playing itself. Blom took a Mengelbergian approach to some of Ellington's compositions; in their rendition of 'I Like The Sunrise', he uses his saxophone to make a weird/inventive noise in the accompaniment. Oriented by sound rather than harmony, he applies some of Mengelberg's concepts to Ellington's music.

On the record, Ellington's and Mengelberg's compositions are woven together by interlude-like pieces; moments of improvisation where Blom and Cleaver join the tunes together freely, finding the connections between the songs and improvising with the vocabulary handed down to them.

The album ZILT sparkles with a childlike joy, a freedom and brazenness that feels like a medicine against the seriousness of our time. Clear moments of song, harmony, and free improvisation come together in a happy union, a playful back-and forth between art-music and entertainment, between different eras and generations. And finally, as is tradition in jazz and holds true for both Ellington and Mengelberg and their bands, Blom takes a younger generation on board, teaching them the tricks of the trade, and mentoring them into carving out their own place in the rich jazz tradition.

Jasper Blom is commonly viewed as one of the most important sax players on the Dutch jazz scene, one of the most versatile instrumentalists in the BeNeLux and a striking phenomenon as band leader. In his role as teacher at the Conservatory of Amsterdam he met Ian Cleaver, who started his studies there in 2016.

Ian Cleaver, the young trumpet player, won the Princess Christina Concours in 2016, and is considered one of the greatest trumpet talents of the new Dutch jazz generation. His play is deeply rooted in jazz tradition but he doesn't shy away from adventure. Mentoring Cleaver, Blom discovered a common ground in their playful approach to music.

Their lessons quickly turned into jam sessions that felt so natural that they decided to take it to the stage. A weekly evening at café Zilt, located close to the Conservatory on the Zeedijk, Amsterdam's Chinatown, provided the perfect place to develop their repertoire while staying in touch with the effect their music had on the audience.

Colofon

Producers Jared Sacks, Jonas Sacks

Label Management Jara Holdert

Recording engineer, editing, mastering engineer Jared Sacks

High Res Mastering Engineer Tom Caulfield

Cover Illustration Willem Smit

Photography Django de Groot (session), Joni Spaan (cover)

Liner notes Jara Holdert

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Microphones Bruel&Kjaer 4006, Schoeps, Neumann, AKG

Digital converter DSD256 Horus, Merging Technologies

Cables Van den Hul 3T

Pre-amplifiers Rens Heijnis, custom design

Editing Software Pyramix, Merging Technologies

Mastering Room Speakers Grimm LS1

ZILT

plays Mengelberg & Ellington

side	A		
1	Rollo III	Misha Mengelberg	(07:58)
2	Impro 1	ZILT	(00:52)
3	Who's Bridge	Misha Mengelberg	(04:42)
4	Azalea	Duke Ellington	(05:41)
5	Impro 2	ZILT	(00:52)
side	B		
6	Rumboon	Misha Mengelberg	(04:29)
7	Impro 3	ZILT	(00:42)
8	Rollo II	Misha Mengelberg	(04:06)
9	I Like The Sunrise	Duke Ellington	(05:19)
10	Impro 4	ZILT	(00:57)
11	Blues After Piet	Misha Mengelberg	(05:26)

ZILT is the project born from the ongoing musical conversation between Jasper Blom and Ian Cleaver. They met at the Amsterdam Conservatory, where Blom, a renowned saxophonist, was teaching - and Cleaver, a talented young trumpet player, came to study. Their lessons grew into jam sessions, and soon they took their music to the small stage of a whiskey bar in the centre of Amsterdam: Café ZILT. With Thomas Pol on bass and Wouter Kuhne on drums they played compositions by the idiosyncratic Dutch jazz pianist and composer Misha Mengelberg, balanced with pieces by the legendary bandleader and composer Duke Ellington.

This record captures ZILT's playful interpretation of this repertoire and the spontaneous and informal style they developed to match their material, calling to mind the small crowded stage on which their music evolved. We can hear Blom and Cleaver explore the boundaries between high and low art, popular and high-brow, in a musical dialogue between different generations and eras of jazz.

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