IMPROVISING DRUMMING RECORDS

SONIC EXPLORATION

BY KEN WAXMAN

The disruptions and isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic created hardships for everyone. And because there were no outlets in which to play even through 2021, French drummer Tiri Carreras decided to fulfill a long-held desire to record a solo disc and start his own label, Improvising Drumming Records (IDR). The smaller-than-boutique label now has a dozen discs in its catalog, featuring Carreras improvising alongside some of France's most accomplished free-music players. Those releases include sessions going back to 2009, which featured Carreras, and in some cases were originally released on other imprints. This cooperation continues: IDR's two most recent releases, *T(h)ree* with Carreras, tenor saxophonist Sylvain Guérineau and bassist Fred Marty, and *Live @ La Guillotine,* with saxophonist Jean-Luc Petit and Carreras, are coproductions with Portugal's 4DaRecord label.

"It's fairly simple to release an album on your own label. Finding a label that's willing to distribute your work is much more complicated," explains Carreras, who describes himself as IDR's jack-of-all-trades. "The benefit of being distributed by a label like 4DaRecord gives us a level of legitimacy and expands our audience."

Initially a straight-ahead drummer, Carreras' concept changed radically in the early 2000s when he began frequenting sessions in the Paris suburbs. Playing with musicians such as bassist Benjamin Duboc and pianist Dominique Dubois-Taine, he developed a new playing style. "I enjoy using unconventional setups, such as a horizontal bass drum, as well as everyday objects to produce unique sounds." At that juncture he was in the midst of creating *Élan vital*, a solo drumming disc, when the pandemic's restrictions intensified. As business contracted, the grants-funded small labels weren't able to operate. The duo albums he later recorded with Guérineau, for instance, were offered to more than 80 labels, he notes. "Most either didn't respond or turned us down. Some would have liked to distribute our music but lacked the resources."

Back to 2021: "Due to the lockdown, I was forced to work solo. I'd been thinking about a solo album for a long time, and COVID-19 gave me the opportunity to do just that." He set up a recording studio in the basement of his house in Étables-sur-Mer, Brittany, and "invested in equipment to make high-quality recordings and taught myself how to mix." He also created a Bandcamp page to stream and sell the music. That established, he followed others' suggestions, founding IDR and adding more sessions to the service. Not wanting to limit his product to streaming, he also made the music available as physical CDs. "We could send it to music critics and radio stations and sell them at concerts or by mail order. Bandcamp turned out to be the ideal tool for that."

Tenor saxophonist Guérineau, who lives in a village near Orléans, France, has been part of three IDR sessions: *T(h)ree* and two duos with the drummer. He says, "I can only really play when I have absolute freedom," and expresses his appreciation for the autonomy fostered by IDR. "(Tiri) takes care of all the logistical stuff. All I have to do is blow into the saxophone. I also have my say on how we record and on the sound quality. We operate in a very democratic way—no leader, absolute equality. The music is good when it just happens naturally."

Although Carreras is IDR's sole employee, who (as he reports) "manages the Bandcamp page, uploads new recordings and artwork, orders CD pressings and handles promotion," he echoes Guérineau's statement about group participation. "Work is shared among the musicians involved in the recordings,"

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Élan vital
Tiri Carreras



Agua Volume 2
Sylvain Guérineau/Tiri Carreras



Lichens
zBlug



Live @ La Guillotine
Jean Luc Petit/Tiri Carreras



O'pLoft
bBlunk

'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JAZZY

BY TESSA SOUTER

New Christmas albums are churned out every year. The challenge is to do something different: either write new songs, like **Jamie Cullum** on *The Pianoman at Christmas* (Island), or find fresh ways to do those old chestnuts. A fabulous example of the latter is LA-based drummer Christian Euman's gorgeous new album *Euman Christmas* (Chill Tone), featuring the silken voice of vocalist **Michael Mayo**. The recording features familiar songs—including "Jingle Bells", "I Saw Three Ships" and "Winter Wonderland"—but with arrangements so fresh you could easily play them year-round. For nostalgia lovers, **Vanessa Racci's** *Comfort & Joy* (VRE) will hit the spot. Produced by GRAMMY-winning vocalist **Nicole Zuraitis** (who appears at the Staten Island Jazz Festival Dec. 19) and featuring guest trumpeter and vocalist **Benny Benack III**, it brings Racci's straight-ahead jazz sensibility to Christmas classics. Catch the album release live at Birdland (Dec. 6). Kindred Spirits presents the annual NYC performance of *Bending Towards the Light: A Jazz Nativity* at St. Paul and St. Andrew's Church (Dec. 21). Written by vocalist-composer **Anne Phillips**, it has had a changing cast of players since 1985. This year's production features **The Royal Bopsters**, Ella Fitzgerald Competition winner **Lucy Wijnands** and singer-saxophonist **Camille Thurman**. *Winter Songs, Vol. 3* (Madre Vaca), **April Varner**'s new album, mixes winter- and Christmas-themed songs, from Joni Mitchell's "River" to "Silent Night". Catch the release celebration at Mezzrow (Dec. 13) and appearances at Jersey Jazz Live! at the Madison Community Arts Center (Dec. 6) and The Church at Sag Harbor (Dec. 19).

Samara Joy has just released *Live at the Blue Note, LA* (Verve)—surprisingly, her first live recording. Even as a six-time GRAMMY winner, she's still doing spontaneous pop-up gigs at intimate clubs, including The Jazz Gallery, Jazzcultural and Ornithology. She's also helping nurture NYC's grassroots jazz scene, curating jazz and vocal jam sessions at the Corner Lounge Bistro in Harlem. Resonance recently put out *The Sound in San Francisco: Live at Keystone Korner* (recorded in 1976), by the Stan Getz Quartet, with special guest **João Gilberto,** as a deluxe three-LP set. Julian Lee will celebrate the Antônio Carlos Jobim and Getz centennial in "Bossa Swings," featuring vocalist Mar Vilaseca at Dizzy's Club (Dec. 1-2). A two-night mini-festival at Roulette will feature the NY premiere of composer and NEA Jazz Master Anthony Braxton's *Thunder Music* (Dec. 11). Among the performers blending their voices with pre-recorded sounds of thunder and nature are vocalists **Nick Hallett, Kyoko Kitamura, Raquel Klein, Adam Matlock, Anne Rhodes** and **Fay Victor,** the latter who also leads her ensemble in *Black Poems* at the Brooklyn Public Library (Dec. 13). Drawing on eight poems by Black poets, Victor's work takes the form of a suite built around a tapestry-based score. She will be joined by poet and vocalist **LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs** and bassist-vocalist **Devon Gates**.

QUICK PICKS...**Catherine Russell** will sing in the New Year at Smoke (Dec. 31). **Hilary Gardner** and the Lonesome Pines perform cowboy songs in their holiday show at Birdland Theater (Dec. 20). Hot jazz vocalist and trumpeter **Bria Skonberg** is at the Birdland Theater (Dec. 11-13). The Jazz Forum Annual Fundraiser this year features **Cécile McLorin Salvant** (Dec. 4-6), who also appears this month at The Pocket (Dec. 10-13). **Theo Bleckmann** gives a holiday concert at The Jazz Gallery (Dec. 23). **Jane Monheit**'s Christmas show will be at The Pocket (Dec. 19-20). Five Spot Jazz features several vocalists, including **Marcus Goldhaber** (Dec. 16), **Judy Niemack** (Dec. 19), **Sarah Pillow** (Dec. 20) and **Vicki Burns** (Dec. 4), the latter celebrating her new single release "Violets for Your Furs" and adding songs from last year's Christmas album. For the first holiday album in the label's women-centric Flying High series, musical director **Champian Fulton** calls in vocalists **Nicole Zuraitis, Carmen Bradford**, **Emily Braden** and **Bria Skonberg** for *Flying High for the Holidays* (Songbook Ink). At the Zinc Bar, **Johnny O'Neal** (Dec. 22) and **Vanisha Gould** (Dec. 30) will be performing. Electronicist Ikue Mori's trio features **Sara Serpa** at The Stone at The New School (Dec. 11). British jazz superstar **Emma Smith** appears at Birdland with her quartet (Dec. 8-12) and with the Birdland Big Band (Dec. 29-31). **Stacey Kent** will also be at Birdland (Dec. 15-17). **esperanza spalding** will be at Carnegie Hall (Dec. 18) and **Stella Cole** celebrates "Merry Christmas, Darling" at The Town Hall (Dec. 21).

**Tessa Souter's* Beyond the Blue *has just been reissued as a limited-edition, 180g double LP in the Venus Masterpiece Collection*