

CHRISTOPH GALLIO

Taken & Transcribed by
LUDWIG VAN TRIKT

CADENCE: *Let's start from the beginning. Where and when were you born?*

CHRISTOPH GALLIO: I was born in Winterthur (near Zurich, Switzerland) on May 21st, 1957. When I was 19 years old I started to play the soprano saxophone and taught myself. Later during the '80s (1980 to 1982), I went to study Classical saxophone at the Conservatory of Basel in Switzerland. It was in the late '80s that I sought out Steve Lacy in Paris and studied with him from 1989 to 1990. In terms of composing I consider myself to be largely "self-taught."

When you say "self taught" in exactly what way did you learn to improvise in the non-formal sense?

C G.: Hmm...I really just started to play and teach myself certain things on the soprano saxophone (my first instrument). I also was hanging out in Jazz clubs, listening to live Jazz. Of the live players who I saw there were the English scene players like Evan Parker; along with the German musicians Alexander Schlippenbach and Peter Brotzmann. There was the Great Black Music, for example, of Anthony Braxton and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Most importantly I started to play with the musicians Gunter Muller, Irene Schweizer, Urs Voerkerl, and Norbert Moslang in places like the W.I.M. (Werkstatt fur Improvisierte Musik) in Zurich, which is still around. During that time I brought a lot of records—when I was 20 years old. Also I worked in several record shops which had a lot of Free Jazz, New Music and New Experimental Music. These record shops had a lot of small labels from all over the world. What was great is I had the chance to listen all day long to very unusual and rare music. However these shops disappeared very fast.

The soprano saxophone is well known for being difficult to keep in tune. Why did you lean toward it being your first instrument?

Well...yes, the soprano sax is the most difficult of the saxophone family. But my intonation was quite good from the beginning—kind of a natural



Christoph Gallio and Christian Weber by Ken Weiss

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to be a durable friend for Margie and the children...Tazza, Providence (401/421-3300), offers a Jazz jam with **Brian Thomas** and the Allstars every Thur...In October Berklee announced that it will build a college of contemporary music in Valencia in collaboration with Sociedad General de Autores y Editores de Spain. The first students are scheduled to matriculate in 2011...Mon nights there's big band Jazz at Bovi's, East Providence (401/434-9670) with the **John Allmark** Jazz Orchestra... There's a cliché that has been floating around for decades, namely that drummers really don't know music. Oh, they can keep time and stuff like that, but they don't really know what's going on beyond that. Nonsense, of course. But the joke sticks. I can remember more than once a pianist or horn player just before counting off a tune asking Alan Dawson what the key of the tune was. Of course, he'd always know the answer. And there was another lesson in reality 8/30 at Amazing Things in Framingham when drummer **Ralph Rosen** brought his Organic Horns to offer two sets of his thoughtful, challenging yet engaging music. By now Ralph should know his music. I remember him first during his three-year tenure with the legendary Jelly Belly (who died in 1988). He was Jelly Belly's last drummer. And he's been on the kit with everyone from Albert King to Stovall Brown and from Norris Turney to Fathead Newman. You're most likely to catch Ralph these days sharing the stage with Bruce Katz, George Garzone, or **Greg Hopkins**. Greg was with him 8/30 along with **Rick DiMuzio** (tenor sax) and **Shinichi Otsu** (organ). Greg obviously had a longer

thing. I purchased my first soprano sax with my money I had after quitting school and then working as a security guard (but not for a long time). The soprano was an instrument from an Eastern country, perhaps from the Czech Republic; its cost was \$200.00. In the beginning I had nobody who told me how to play, to use the instrument. No teacher. So I learned to play by myself. Then after three years I went to the Conservatory to learn Classical saxophone with Iwan Roth at Basel Conservatory. The most important and interesting studies were actually with the late Steve Lacy. We played together, talked much about music and other things like poetry, art, and history. We had a good time and became friends. Later I also worked with his wife, the violinist and vocalist, Irene Aebi. She sung a couple of my songs and we continue to talk to this day.

You seem very dismissive of your Classical studies. The American saxophonist Branford Marsalis has stated that the technical demands of this genre are so much harder than Jazz saxophone playing. What is your opinion of this?

Okay, the technical demands of Classical music maybe are harder. I am not really sure about this. One thing is certain though—a big technique without sound, inspiration, vision and ideas is to me useless. My experience at the Conservatory was not the best. Maybe for someone else it would work out better; this is an individual thing. For example, I never learned anything about the essence of music. There was one piano teacher who I did like...he admired Stan Kenton's Big Band. This teacher was able to tell me something deeper about what I call "movement" in music. Sound is very important for me. It is also very individual in nature; the personal language of every single player. The drummer Rashied Ali said to me once after a recording session, "Man, I knew that you can play but I didn't know you had such a big sound!" Steve Lacy taught me how to get a bigger sound on the horn. He also conveyed that you can approach a musical composition from different sides. There was, to Lacy, no one single "right" way... always different and various ways. Also I saw that a very experienced musician and composer can have the same problems as a beginner or young musician. Steve Lacy once asked me why I sought him out and wanted lessons.

I said to him that I have problems losing what musicians call the "red line" during improvisation. Steve Lacy told me, "I have the very same problem!" Lacy was very supportive of me going in my own musical direction. After all, Steve Lacy was a man without compromises in his own music.

What do you mean by the "red line"?

Oh, it means when you play an improvised line—be it an abstract or more concrete line with, say, a fixed melody—the fear that some of us have is to get lost... imagine for example being a theater actor who has a big monologue. Then picture the actor being afraid to forget his lines on the stage.

Since you were so close to Steve Lacy did you have to perhaps work on getting rid of some of his influences on your own playing?

Yes, his influence had a very strong effect on me. But I also had to rid myself of the Classical music emphasis on traditional tonality and what I call the "Classical music attitude." It is a long journey to find your own voice as an artist. And I think we had the same kind of spirit or love in doing things (I am speaking of Lacy and I). Well, Steve was a positive example for me, that is for sure. Also, I try to keep and develop a tradition of musical history, almost like a big connecting chain.

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tenure with the band than the other two, but everyone acquitted himself superbly. Certainly the abilities of all four musicians made everything work. But the “you can’t fall asleep” charts were at the heart of the evening’s success. So, if you ever hear someone voicing clichés about drummers, take the lip to catch the Organic Horns. He will find at least one drummer who knows that a good time is more than keeping time... Amazing Things, Framingham (508/405-2787) presents Indian classical violin master **K. V. S. Vinay** with Boston’s **Natraj** 1/30 and has a Jazz jam session every week led by **Daryl Lowery** on the 1st Tues, **Ted Knowlton** on the 2nd Tues, **John**

Is it accurate to say that Steve Lacy influenced your ideas in forming the trio, Day & Taxi?

He did influence my compositional style, but not in the concept of the band.

What about John Coltrane?

Coltrane was a genius! He had a wonderful tone with its sense of despair mixed with love. I heard in his playing the feelings of belonging and pain. To this day I listen to a lot of Coltrane although I never tried to play either horn like him. My horn is the alto. Although I like the tenor, I am just not the tenor type. Steve Lacy had much more simplicity in his playing. Lacy was a major influence on Coltrane picking up the soprano sax.

After your various studies, how long was it before you started recording?

That would be in 1981, although my first gigs with bands started in 1977. The funny thing is, my first recording, made in 1981, came out in 2006 (Atavistic).

Your discography is documented on a variety of labels including Leo Records, Slam, Unit, and Percaso (your own label). What was your general experience with these various labels?

Oh, I had good experiences with these labels. UNIT Records is an old musicians’ founded label. There has always been a collaborative effort between UNIT Records and my label, Percaso. Leo and Slam Records have documented me only has a sideman with no direct contact.

Please delve into the history of Percaso. Do you make money on the recordings?

The label was founded by me in 1986. My first two productions did fairly well. There was a cassette (which sold out) and a “maxi single” (an LP; very few are left). UNIT Records was the only company interested in my music, but I had so many problems with their graphic design. My dislike of the design for my first releases was so strong that I formed my own label with a graphics crew. There was the Danish graphic designer, Anne Hoffmann, for example. The concepts I had for my cover art was to incorporate fine artist like Christopher Wool, Beat Streuli, and Emmett Williams. The duo of Gilbert & George are two artists who have worked together for a very long time and of course I used them, too. Unfortunately I don’t make money with the label. I have to put my own money in it... well, it is, after all, a label for music lovers or collectors.

One of the intriguing figures with whom you worked was Urs Blochlinger (1954-1995)—the original horn man with Day & Taxi.



Christoph Gallio and Christian Weber by Ken Weiss

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Funkhouser on the 3rd Tues, the Rivers School Faculty on the 4th Tues, and vocalist **Kaoruko** on the 5th Tues... I leave you with everyone's favorite quote of departure: So long, and thanks for all the fish.

—Stu Vandermark

This is Stu Vandermark's last "Short Takes" contribution. Those interested in picking up the Boston area reporting, please contact the Editor (cadence@cadencebuilding.com).

CHAPEL HILL, NC—Duke celebrates the legacy of its first-ever artist in residence with "Evolutions: The Mary Lou Williams Center's 25th Anniversary," featuring the **Geri Allen Trio** and **Patricia Barber 4tet** (1/31). **John Brown** leads the **Duke Jazz Ens.** in a concert with a special guest (2/20). The 32nd Carolina Jazz Festival at UNC-Chapel Hill opens with a "Meet the Artists Jam Session" (2/25) featuring **Jim Ketch** and other UNC Jazz faculty members plus visiting artists **Joe Magnarelli** and **Joel Frahm**. It continues (2/26-28) with a high school Jazz festival and concerts by the **UNC Jazz combos** and Jazz band, a master class and clinic, and after-hours jam sessions. Special appearances include the **North Carolina Jazz Repertory Orch.** and the **Branford Marsalis Quartet**. For more click on <http://music.unc.edu>. The **UNC Jazz Band**, directed by Jim Ketch, heads for New Orleans on a combined performance tour and Katrina rebuilding project (3/7-14). "Jazz Innovators and Innovations," a narrated program of historical highpoints in Jazz history by the UNC Jazz Band, comes to Hill Hall (3/31)... "Heart 'n Soul of Jazz" is a valentine from

Can you give us a glimpse into the man and his music?

What a sad story! Urs Blochlinger was a great musician and composer but also a difficult person. He could be very hard to handle on a personal level. We lost contact after he left the band...he went his way and I went my own way. Two months before he committed suicide he did call me. He had plans and wanted to start another collaboration, so he invited me to dinner. We did have a very nice evening and we decided to form a band. But the rest is unfortunately already known...

Let's back track and look at the history and concept behind your group, Day & Taxi.

Day & Taxi was originally formed in 1988 as a quartet with the late saxophonist, Urs Blochlinger. From the beginning the group consisted of me also on saxophones, the Scottish bassist Lindsay L. Cooper (who also died in 2001), and drummer Dieter Ulrich. I have led the group since 1989. Besides concerts in Switzerland, our group toured Russia and the Baltic States in 1993. We have performed in various Jazz festivals and in Canada since 1994. In the beginning the trio's stock repertoire was original compositions by each member. The initial work of the original trio is documented on a session (October 1991) entitled *All* (Percaso). Today we play my compositions exclusively. There have been some changes in the group's members. For instance, the late Lindsay Cooper went back to Scotland in 1994 and the group briefly disbanded. Then Day & Taxi resurfaced with a new contra-bassist, Dominique Girod, and fresh repertoire. The changes in the group's direction can be heard on *About* (Percaso), *Less and More* (Unit - August 1997). This is the trio that toured the USA and Canada in 1998 and Russia in 2000. The years 2001 to 2003, Day & Taxi documented its work on CD with yet another line up with bassist Daniel Studer and Marco Kappeli on drums. *Private* (Percaso - December 2001) and *Material* (Percaso - December 2001) reflect that particular band. This group also toured Japan in 2001. Another transition happened in 2004 when Christian Weber replaced Studer on bass. We did a tour of China and Taiwan in 2005 (documented on a rare LP on my label, Percaso) which yielded the date *Live in Shenzhen, Shanghai and Taipei*. To play in China is really hard because everybody is talking and using mobile phones during the concert. In China we also had to rent a double bass in every city, which was terrible for our bassist. Christian Weber is such a master of sound that he was able to create a good sound on each bass which we received. The difficult part though was he had to work on every instrument for at least two hours each. The other major problem for the whole band was the very heavy pollution—we all got physically sick from the bad air! The positive thing was that on every gig we had five to ten people who were sitting in the front with big ears... they listened carefully to our music. After the concerts these fans wanted to know a lot of things from us about the music.

China has fantastic food, nice countrysides and huge cities. The people are mostly very gentle. In Taiwan it was completely different, with the audience listening very quietly. For instance we played at a university in front of very big audiences with not one single noise but a lot of enthusiasm. It was great to end our tour in Taiwan.

The present edition of the trio is documented on the recording *Out* (Percaso) with Christian Weber and Marco Kappeli. This group plays only my compositions, which I define as a stylized mixture of Contemporary "New Music" and Jazz. The improvisation is abstract but fluid in that we combine

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The Arts Council of Moore County and Pinehurst Resort (2/13-15). Headliners are **John Pizzarelli** and **Marcus Belgrave**. Belgrave pays tribute to New Orleans and Louis Armstrong. Details at www.pinehurst.com...Guitar blues with **Jorma Kaukonen**, **Robben Ford** and **Ruthie Foster** at the Carolina Theatre in Durham (2/17). At the Temple Theatre in Sanford (3/3), the **Heart of Carolina Jazz Orchestra** with guest vocalist **Alexander Brower** perform the music of Billy Eckstine and Arthur Prysock. See www.carolinajazz.com... **Hiromi** is on tour and appears at NC State (2/24), Isothermal Community College in Spindale (2/20), the High Point Theatre (2/21), and Thalian Hall in Wilmington (2/26). **John Pizzarelli** visits NC State (3/18)... The theme of the 29th Annual North Carolina Jazz Festival, (2/5-7) at the Hilton Riverside in Wilmington, is "Lionel, Red, and Bunny—a tribute to Lionel Hampton, Red Norvo, and Bunny Berigan." Guests include **Ed Polcer**, **Joe Ascione**, **John Cocuzzi**, **Bucky Pizzarelli**, **Wycliffe Gordon**, **Judy Kurtz**, **Houston Person**, **Frank Tate**, **Nicki Parrott**, **Rossano Sportiello**, **Butch Miles**, **Anat Cohen**, and **Randy Reinhart**. The UNC-Wilmington Big Band opens the festival. More at www.capefearjazz.com. Earlier in Wilmington, **Dame Cleo Laine** and **Sir John Dankworth** at Thalian Hall (1/30). The 20th annual New Bern Jazz Showcase features "An Evening with Some of Benny's Good Men" with **Peter Appleyard**, **Derek Smith**, **George Sheck**, and **Dave Bennett** (2/8). The music will be better than the pun... The

extra important ingredients in the music of Day & Taxi. We also play miniatures or, as I call them, postcards—which are completely written pieces without improvisation. Homogeneity is not necessary; we also deal with Kitsch.

Our philosophy is to be very open.

You toured the USA with the band Day & Taxi. What were those tours like, money-wise and artistically?

Money-wise, touring in the USA was a catastrophe! Except for our participation in the New York City Vision Festival.

During our USA tour we mostly worked for door money with no fixed fee. No paid food or hotels and no cash for traveling. But we met a lot of very nice people in the audience and a lot of great people who organized the events. I remember some very good performances, which is always good for a band. Often we find new ways to play together and play the pieces in different ways. We do musical games and experimenting. Overall the trio had a great time in the USA. If we had not gotten the grants from the Swiss Foundations we would have not been able to come over... this is unfortunate.

The American Jazz scene has come under a lot of criticism recently. What are your observations?

I did not get a chance to check out the Jazz scene of today while we performed. I did however observe the 1970s and 1980s, especially the Great Black Music of Chicago's AACM and the New York Loft Jazz scene. That period was very interesting for me—the power, the spirit, the energy. Then later I dug the so-called Downtown music of Tim Berne, Dave Douglas. I think a lot of the so-called Downtown music was very influenced by the European Avant-garde Jazz & Improvised scene. Then there is the "noise scene" in New York City by artists like John Zorn, the late Tim Cora, Zeena Parkins, and Ned Rothenberg. Places like PS122, the Knitting Factory, and the Bunker were all very interesting. I am torn, though, because sometimes I think it was boring too.

My impression of the New York City scene is that it's all very competitive now, everybody has to survive. Everybody is playing too much in the city. This in my view is a form of over-kill. There really is very little time to develop the music. I have conflicting thoughts but maybe this conversation will start a discussion about music and the time we live in....

Since the 1980s you have collaborated with dancers.

I like the dancers, their movement—especially the way they use space. It's so nice to play on the border of a performance space and the dancer is using the whole room. Some of the artists I perform with include a Japanese dancer named Hideto Heshiki, who is based in Zurich. In the mid '80s I did just duo performances with Franz Frautschi, roughly from 1984 to 1985. My other collaborations include the dancers Christine Brodbeck, Yvonne Meyer, and a special work of Buto dance with Tomiko Takai in Tokyo in 1992.

One of your efforts include what you have labeled "song cycles." What does this mean to a lay person?

Okay, this is a hard question for me... anyway I'll try. I will use the example of a "song cycle" which I wrote especially for Irene Aebi. The work is a kind of a road movie... named "Cars & Variation."

Are we talking about lyrics?

No, no! I don't write lyrics at all. To be a musician and composer is enough! I often use very short poems to base this kind of writing on. Also, poetry

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Freddy Cole 4tet appears at the High Point Theatre in High Point (1/17). At the Dunn Center in Rocky Mount (1/23), the **John Brown** 5tet, the **Frank Kimbrough** Trio and muralist/artist Michael Brown collaborate in Jazz- Sound and Sight (3/14) at the Kirby Theater in Roxboro. At the Clayton Center in Clayton, **Johnny Winter** and **John Dee Holeman** in Blues Bash IV (3/14). The **Hot 8 Brass Band** visits UNC-Wilmington (3/18) and UNC-Asheville (3/20). **Casablanca Orch.** at Louisiana State University (3/20) and the **Artie Shaw Orch.** in Wilson at the Boykin Center (3/27)... At the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, the 17th Annual All That Jazz Weekend (1/30-2/1). Headliners are **Nancy Wilson** and **Kevin Mahogany** & The Godfathers of Groove (**Cyrus Chestnut**, **Red Holloway**, **Bernard Purdie**, **Kathy Kosins**, **Reuben Wilson**, and **Grant Green, Jr.**). The weekend also features many more Jazz performers, "Meet the Artists" receptions, and a Jazz clinic. Visit www.groveparkinn.com... It's Blue Note Records' 70th Anniversary and one of the stops for the Blue Note 7 on the anniversary tour is ASU in Boone (2/17). The septet is made up of **Peter Bernstein**, **Bill Charlap**, **Ravi Coltrane**, **Lewis Nash**, **Nicholas Payton**, **Peter Washington** and **Steve Wilson**... **Nnenna Freelon** is on a California trip this March (3/3-14) with stops at UC Davis, Pepperdine University, and La Mirada.

—Bill Falconer

OMAHA—In a dreadful economy that is inhospitable to disposable incomes and indispensable art,

often has humor but can still be very serious. One of my favorite types of poetry is from Fluxus Artist. These types of poets have plenty of humor. They think life is much more important than art. The notion of life being connected with art, not separate. I like this kind of thinking. In this way it's possible to use humor and poetic influences, even common cultural clichés. The poems are not always incorporated in the improvisation. The poems are a form of rigid composition in and of itself. Thus the Free improvisation used in these performances can be in contrast to the severe form of poetry. This is very difficult to explain in English. The contrast in a performance setting can be important to build up a listening framework. I am not interested in an actual fusion of spoken word with music.

Baden, Switzerland
February 21, 2008

SANCHEZ *Continued from page 19*

get comments when I play with the trio like "Who wrote that tune?" "Can I see the music?"

The pianist Cecil Taylor has cast such a long shadow over improvisational music. Yet, your own playing has none of the crowded phrasing he and other Avant-garde pianists exhibit.

I didn't really know Cecil Taylor's playing until I moved to New York City. I had one record of his when I left college, *New York City R&B* (Candid). I thought it was wild. I have seen him play a few times in the last 10 years. It is pretty amazing and powerful what he does. Endless energy that saturates the air and everything in it. I felt as if I disappeared for the hour that I was listening to him. I have never been the type of person to really get attached to a certain player. Early on I knew it had to come from within. Although I know we are influenced by someone or something, I use the inspiration I get from things that excite me to dig and study into myself. All of my favorite players have their own voice and their own path to get there.

Married Jazz couples are still a rarity. Is it difficult to create and also have a life together?

It has taken us a little practice to keep harmony between our family and artistic lives. Early in our relationship our personal life would sometimes leak onto the bandstand. As we both grew as artists this became less of an issue. Now we would never let our personal life consciously affect the music. It helps that we are of like minds and have similar musical tastes. When we started living together we discovered that we had a lot of the same CDs. We really enjoy playing music together but I think it's important to have musical experiences away from each other, too. The relationship you have with someone when you connect musically is a very special bond. This bond and connection is even greater with a soul mate.

We also think it's important to include our son in our music. We play sessions with him (he plays drums) and take him on the road. When he is older we will take him to gigs. I recently took him to a sound check that Tony had with drummer Paul Motian. He had a blast and Paul even let him sit in on the actual gig. As parents, this is really a joy to see.

New York City, NY
March 19, 2007