

Tim Berne

Tim Berne was born in Syracuse, New York in 1954, and was subjected to a perfectly normal childhood. But he didn't decide to take up music until nearly twenty years later when he was attending Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, putting most of his energy into intramural basketball. At this point, while resting a sore ankle in his dormitory, Berne encountered a saxophonist who was selling his alto, and bought it on impulse. "There was just something about the sound of the saxophone that got to me," he says.

Musically, up to that point, Berne had always been motivated by all types of music, but especially by the great Stax artists like Sam and Dave and Johnnie Taylor, as well as Motown artists like Martha and the Vandellas and Gladys Knight. This passion for the soulful quality in music would follow him for the rest of his career, a career that he could not possibly foresee at the time. "I hadn't listened to much jazz, but then I heard Julius Hemphill's album *Dogon A.D.*, and that completely turned me around. It captured everything I liked in music. It had this Stax/R&B sensibility and it had this other wildness. It was incredible. That's when I started playing."

Berne moved to New York in 1974, sought Hemphill out, and entered into a sort-of apprenticeship with the elder musician. The "lessons" they had together lasted for hours and covered everything from composition to record promotion to recording to pasting up handbills to aspects of magic and spirituality and, sometimes, even playing the saxophone. "From the beginning," Berne says, "even while I was still learning to play the saxophone, Julius always encouraged me to write my own music as well. So it never occurred to me that most people don't play their own music or aren't bandleaders. I thought that was just part of it. You learn how to play music, you start a band, and that's it. Julius didn't offer me one system, but a lot of possibilities, with the emphasis always on ideas and sound."

Berne began issuing his own albums on his own Empire label in 1979. Over the next five years he would record and distribute five albums under his own name which included such musicians as Ed Schuller, Olu Dara, Paul Motian, John Carter, Glenn Ferris and Bill Frisell. Following two recordings for the Italian Soul Note label, Berne recorded *Fulton Street Maul* and *Sanctified Dreams* for Columbia Records. These recordings coincided with an increasingly active worldwide touring schedule.

In 1988 Berne began a long relationship with the JMT label with the first of two recordings with the co-operative *Miniature* (with Joey Baron and Hank Roberts). In 1989 Berne's JMT release *Fractured Fairy Tales* was hailed as a masterpiece by the *New York Times*. Berne's JMT legacy climaxed with the historic *Paris Concerts* given by his quartet *bloodcount*, released in three volumes (*Lowlife*, *Poisoned Minds* and *Memory Select*). These recordings have received unanimous praise. Since 1994, *bloodcount* has performed over 250 concerts worldwide.

In 1996 Berne once again founded his own record label, *Screwgun*, and released a three CD set of live recordings by *bloodcount*, *Unwound*. He also had a new string quartet, *dry*

ink, silence, premiered by the Kronos Quartet at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. 1997 has found Berne touring the U.S. and Europe with bloodcount, writing music for large ensemble on commission, and preparing the next three Screwgun releases by his bands bloodcount and Paraphrase. In addition, a recording of *The Visible Man*, a piece commissioned in 1992 for the Rova Saxophone Quartet, has just been issued on a disc called *The Works, Volume 2* on the Black Saint label.

COMMISSIONS:

- Shifting Foundation
- New York State Council on the Arts
- New York State Foundation for the Arts
- Readers Digest/Meet the Composer (for the Kronos Quartet and the Rova Saxophone Quartet)
- Birmingham Jazz (for *Caos Totale* with Django Bates)
- British Arts Council Touring Fellowship for 1997

RESIDENCIES:

- Djerassi Foundation (California)
- MacDowell Colony (New Hampshire)

Tim Berne's Paraphrase; [Schedule]

Nate Chinen. *New York Times*. (Late Edition (East Coast)). New York, N.Y.: Dec 16, 2005. pg. E.1:30:

There may not be a jazz musician more in tune with the notion of rugged individualism than the alto saxophonist and composer Tim Berne. More than 25 years ago, Mr. Berne released the first album on Empire, his own label. He has trafficked in the above-ground music industry since then -- recording for the Polygram imprint JMT, and, more fleetingly, Columbia Records -- but nothing seems to satisfy him more than self-reliance. Since 1996, Mr. Berne has channeled his autonomy through Screwgun Records, which he runs out of a brownstone in Brooklyn. The label faithfully mirrors its founder's ethos of hardscrabble abstraction: until recently, Screwgun CD's came in industrial brown cardboard, with graffiti-like scribbles by the graphic artist Steve Byram. "Pre-emptive Denial," the label's 16th release, bears more colorful packaging but leaves the music raw; its source material was a bootleg of Mr. Berne's band Paraphrase, performing in the East Village just seven months ago. Dividing evenly into two 25-minute tracks, the album follows the sort of wide exploratory arc that has long typified Mr. Berne's compositional voice. The catch is that Paraphrase is a free-improvising trio, shaped as much by the sensibilities of Drew Gress, the bassist, and Tom Rainey, the drummer, (above left, with Mr. Berne, center, and Mr. Gress). Appearing in Mr. Berne's native Park Slope next week, the musicians will see their work supplemented with spontaneously arranged projections by Mr. Byram and another artist, Jonathon Rosen. This cross-disciplinary experiment could succeed or fail; either way, it should jibe with Mr. Berne's intrepid ideals. NATE CHINEN

Chris Speed

Chris Speed is a composer, clarinetist and saxophonist living in Brooklyn, NY. His bands include Human Feel, yeah NO, Trio Iffy, Pachora and The Clarinets. He is a member of Jim Black's Alas No Axis and John Hollenbeck's Claudia Quintet.

Speed was born in Seattle in 1967 and graduated from the New England Conservatory in 1990. In 1992 he moved to NYC where he joined Tim Berne's Bloodcount. Throughout the nineties Speed worked with many pioneering bands in the creative new music/downtown scene including the Dave Douglas Sextet, Myra Melford's Same River Twice, Erik Freidlander's Chimera, John Zorn's Bar Kokhba and Mark Dresser's trio with Anthony Coleman. During this time he also began pursuing his interest in East European folk music, forming Pachora in 1992, and traveling throughout Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Syria, and Macedonia. Speed is considered one of the leading NYC musicians linking jazz and creative improvisation with Eastern European and Middle Eastern folk music. Currently, he works with Uri Caine's Bach, Mahler, and Mozart projects, as well as Ben Perowsky's quartet.

Chris was named the rising star clarinetist in *Down Beat* magazine for 2004 and 2005. In July 2004 he was the special guest at the Copenhagen International Jazz Festival, working with ten different cutting edge Danish groups. In April 2006, he launched Skirl Records, a label dedicated to Brooklyn based creative music.

Michael Formanek

Composer/bassist Michael Formanek may have one of the most diverse biographies in contemporary improvised music. At first glance his list of musical affiliations is both intriguing and confusing. Spanning nearly twenty three years he has played and/or recorded with Tim Berne, Freddie Hubbard, Stan Getz, Marty Ehrlich, Chet Baker, Tony Williams, Gerry Mulligan, Kevin Mahogany, Fred Hersch, Marimolin, Dave Liebman, Uri Caine, Joe Henderson, Mark Isham, James Emery, Bob Mintzer, Mingus Dynasty, Mingus Big Band, Terumasa Hino, Cedar Walton, Attila Zoller, Eddie Daniels, George Coleman, Franco Ambrosetti, Jane Ira Bloom, Ted Rosenthal, Bob Moses, Daniel Schnyder, and Gunther Schuller. In addition to playing the acoustic bass, composition plays a very large part in Formanek's total musical picture. His four recordings for the Enja label, *Wide Open Spaces*, *Extended Animation*, *Low Profile* and *Nature of the Beast*, were received with wide critical approval. All of these recordings feature his compositions exclusively, performed by musicians such as Greg Osby, Tim Berne, Mark Feldman, Dave Douglas, Marvin "Smitty" Smith, Ku-umba Frank Lacy, Marty Ehrlich, Wayne Krantz, and Jim Black. In addition, Formanek's 1992 collaboration with Tim Berne and Jeff Hirshfield, *Loose Cannon* (Soul Note), continues to show up in many a serious collector's archives.

In the past ten years Formanek has performed his music many times with a wide range of ensembles. His band *Wide Open Spaces* played at the Leverkusener Jazztage in Leverkusen, Germany, the Espoo Festival in Finland, Lincoln Center Out-Of-Doors in New York City, and in many clubs and concert halls in the United States and Europe. Current ongoing projects include Tim Berne's bloodcount and the cooperative trio

Relativity with Peter Erskine and Marty Ehrlich, the latter of which has recently recorded a debut album for Enja. In 1998 Formanek released both his first solo CD, *Am I Bothering You?*, on the Screwgun label, and the debut CD by the Berne / Formanek Duo, *Ornery People*, on the Little Brother label.

Jim Black

For nearly three decades, Jim Black's musical creativity and unstoppable curiosity and have made him one of the most in-demand drummers in the jazz/new music scene today. With roots in Seattle, WA, Jim spent his early years exploring all styles of music – from garage rock to big band swing – before heading to Boston, MA to attend the Berklee College of Music. Jim moved to Brooklyn in 1991, where he currently resides, and maintains a busy schedule touring, recording, teaching and enjoying music across the world.

Jim Black co-leads and composes for the groups Pachora and Human Feel, and works in numerous groups alongside some of today's most creative artists including, Ellery Eskelin, Uri Caine, Chris Speed, Tim Berne, Dave Douglas, Dave Liebman and Laurie Anderson. He appears on over 100 recordings.

Jim finds himself most at home leading and composing original music for his band *AlasNoAxis*. In 2000, Jim released his acclaimed debut recording, "*AlasNoAxis*" on Winter & Winter Recordings (called "A masterpiece of future jazz" by *The Wire*) and toured internationally for enthusiastic audiences. In addition to "*Splay*" (2002) and "*Habyor*" (2004), "*Dogs of Great Indifference*" is the fourth album from the group, which includes Black's Brooklyn cohort Chris Speed - tenor/clarinet and frequent Icelandic collaborators Hilmar Jensson - guitar, and Skúli Sverrisson – bass.