

KENT CARTER (2019)

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JEAN LAPOUGE

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Haus der Kunst, Munich

To celebrate my 60th birthday, in January 2013, my wife Laurence took me to Munich for “ECM: A Cultural Archeology”, a multimedia exhibition recounting the early years of the famous German jazz label and opening its archives to the public. A trip at this period of the year had become something of a ritual for us. We'd often settle for an art exhibition in Paris. This time, probably due to the solemn nature of the round number, she went all out.

It wasn't as if Laurence didn't know ECM. She and I met in January 1997 for the interview I always have with my new pupils.

In the course of her first guitar lessons, she told me her favorite pianist was Keith Jarrett. A revelation which suddenly boosted her lessons' level of interest. Gone was my professional reserve, her scores grew in complexity, grew too complex, the margins annotated as they often were with required-listening discographic references! A relationship was born, and we naturally ended up merging our record collections...

Many years later, when Laurence showed me the stack of scores I had written out for her lessons, all well organized in her personal archives, I noticed that all the recording references I had scribbled in the margins at lesson's end were, you guessed it, ECM records. My 60th birthday present hadn't come out of the blue.

The Munich exhibition certainly delivered. John Kelman gave a thorough report of the setup in his excellent article for *All About Jazz*: *All About Jazz/John Kelman*. The high point was of course the wall of magnetic tape boxes of all brands and sizes organized by date, I suppose, within which visitors could search for their mythical albums, with handwritten titles on the edge or complete credits when displayed full-on. My browsing of this massive collection yielded the original *Dis*¹ and *The Survivors' Suite*² tapes: shivers...

I was in for another shot of adrenalin. As we walked through the exhibit we suddenly entered a room shrouded in darkness in which a large screen was positioned diagonally, allowing us to see it from both sides – the same movie playing on each, with no projection rays to be seen. A magic trick soon overpowered by what I saw on screen: Kent Carter, "my" Kent, filmed with three African-American musicians playing "Great Black Music"! I immediately recognized George Lewis on trombone, but was not familiar with the saxophonist and drummer. The screen, standing at a good 2 x 3 meters, enveloped us with their music and physical presence. I was alternately stunned by the device itself and the subject it projected. All of a sudden I remembered what Kent had once told me, in contradiction with that I was seeing: "Manfred Eicher doesn't like me". An explanation is in order.

We have to go back to 1994 in order to understand the personal meaning of the great double bassist's assertion.

1. Jan Garbarek – *Dis* ECM 1093 (1977)

2. Keith Jarrett – *The Survivors' Suite* ECM 1085 (1977)

The end of Contrejour

The recording and release of *Hauts Plateaux* in 1993 was an essential milestone in my musical career. But the sessions had been rife with dissension in our quartet between the drummer and the double-bassist, and they had the bad idea to reignite their feud before a concert in Limoges.

I could no longer stand the bickering, and had no clue as to how to avoid it; backstage, I decided to tell Christian (Paboeuf), my oboist and vibraphonist friend and fourth member of the quartet, that I was over with the band. I was horrified by what I had just said, yet felt relief and a sense of freedom.

In parallel with *Contrejour*, I had started playing as an informal trio with Daniel (Renault), the drummer from Noëtra, and Jacques Dufour, bassist from the local scene in Périgueux, with the intention of playing the nascent "jazz bar" circuit. We played a repertoire comprised mostly of standards, a couple of my more "jazzifiable" pieces, and a few of Jacques' compositions. This formula allowed me to easily put to the test the improvisational theory I had accumulated after the Noëtra fiasco. Bar after bar, the hands-on experience pushed the process forward.

We got hired for what would become Périgueux' first Jazz Festival.

Sharing the bill were a band whose name I forgot, us (Jean Lapouge Trio) and the headliner: the B.M. Quartet, a circumstantial ensemble comprised of a local Dutch pianist with Jean-Marc Périssat on drums and Kent Carter on double bass. After our set I settled down to my first encounter with Kent Carter's world.

With his severe and sullen air he splashed through the pianist's feeble "middle swing" compositions. I had never heard such a sound come out of a double bass, and his flow was that of a raging mountain stream.

I remembered that Pierre Aubert, our violinist in Noëtra, had played some gigs with Kent Carter a few years earlier, as they both lived near Angoulême. Pierre had even told me in passing - I hardly acknowledged the information - that Kent had recorded for ECM.

A few short moments after the last note of the festival had been played, a strange scene played out in front of me, which I did not immediately understand. Jean-Marc Périssat manoeuvred to lead Kent away from the dutch pianist and pack him and his double bass into their Renault 4L for the ride back to Angoulême. I later learned that the night's fees promised by the dutchman had been significantly downsized...

In the aftermath of Contrejour, I yearned for simplicity. Managing a band is not always an easy task. Gig hunting was getting more and more complicated. Every concert was fiercely bargained and often led to dissapointment and regret. A break was in order. It lasted two months.

The memory of Kent Carter's emotionally charged playing surfaced from deep within.

The meeting.

A band doesn't get much simpler than a duet.

To say that I felt up to the challenge of playing with a musician of Kent Carter's stature would be stretching the truth. Let's just say I wasn't completely frightened. My guitar parts had grown and gained in clarity, they worked on their own and were evidence to my progress. Also, I had been listening compulsively to a record¹ by Ralph Towner and Gary Peacock that had just come out - a model for my project, fueling me with the energy to go forward with it.

So I gathered my two Cds and all the press clippings I could find (which amounted to not much) into the most attractive sales pitch bundle possible, as if I were addressing a record company, and sent it off. I let two weeks pass. Holding my horses no longer - I can be impatient at times – I mustered up the nerve to call him. I had mentally prepared to interact in english. A good thing I had. Fortunately, I had started studying English again, this time in a really serious way, after a very unpleasant mishap². Kent Carter had received my parcel and was willing to meet me at his place in Juillaguet, Charente, the following thursday. This was Ascension Day in France, as memory serves.

1. Gary Peacock / Ralph Towner – Oracle ECM 1490 (1994)

2. This went back to 1989, five years earlier. The trio I was heading at the time had opened for Jack Dejohnette's Special Edition ensemble, which Musiques de Nuit had invited for a concert in the suburbs of Bordeaux. At the end of the concert, I was backstage putting my gear away when Jack Dejohnette himself came up and offered a warm handshake. He congratulated me for the music we had played, and we struck up a conversation, from one

I knew absolutely nothing about Kent Carter. My research had gone no further than finding his phone number and adress on the minitel, which was all one could do with that contraption. I just wanted to play with him.

His lair lay at the dead end of a long asphalted country lane which led into a courtyard serving a group of buildings. Beyond an open gate, a large assembly was finishing a meal under a chestnut tree. It was 2 P.M., warm and sunny. Kent Carter got up and mumbled a few words, pointing me to his studio. In an atmosphere of general indifference, I slung my guitar over my shoulder and took an amp in each hand, passed through a well equipped control booth, stepped into a small room containing a piano and the bass, set up my gear and waited. He arrived a good half hour later. I had propped a few scores on his music stand. He skimmed through the first one.

- Can we try this? I ventured.

- Ok, and we were off for a “normal” rehearsal, such as I had grown accustomed to conducting for so many years now, Kent Carter letting me take the lead .

Several years later, he confided that he had accepted to meet me thinking I had wanted to hire his studio...

I can't remember the rest of that first day, or perhaps it has blended with the many similar days' ends. Kent had taken a liking to our get-togethers. Once again, only much later would he confess to the

musician to another. I was chuffed to hear him say he had stayed backstage to listen to the entirety of our set. Seeing us thus engaged, our percussionist joined us. He spoke English much better than I did, and he took advantage of it, steering the conversation his way. Jack Dejohnette asked him some questions concerning the problem he had encountered with his berimbau during our set. Our colleague jumped on the opportunity to market himself: he played in a much better-known eight person band, and so on. Jack Dejohnette cut him short, no longer interested, and walked off. Inwardly, I resolved to never let this happen again!

shocking effect the chords pouring out of my guitar had had on him, he who had liberated himself from harmonic structure for years, playing the freest of musical forms, even noise music at times; “insect music”, as he would refer to it. Now, we saw each other almost every friday. I can't really say how our complicity came into being. Perhaps recounting a typical friday might help.

I'd arrive around 10 in the morning, and come in the back way, it was always open. I knew the place by heart, first an airlock, a sort of scullery with a small fridge I think, with an ashtray on top as the space served as Kent's smoking room during our often long breaks: we would chat, the two of us, with the outside door open. The airlock opened into the control room where stood a great and beautiful mixing desk and its peripheral gear. In front of the desk, beyond a glass pane, was studio A, a large renovated barn of 90 m2, with a very high ceiling and a magnificent oak flooring; on the left was studio B with its upright piano and bass, where we rehearsed. Whenever Kent felt it was time he'd say :

- Coffee?

- Yes! And he'd go fetch two americanos. Around 2 P.M. :

- Hungry?

-Yeah, and we'd go to the kitchen in the living quarters adjoining the studio, making our way around the building outside, there he'd cook, improvising with whatever was available. The day would often end with a can of beer, on the smoking room fridge. So easy-going. I loved being with him.

Every so often I'd be invited to dinner. I met his wife Michala Marcus, a modern dancer from Denmark who spoke french perfectly, which came in quite handy at times, as Kent didn't speak a word of our language. As I would often come to hear, he even anglicized proper

nouns. These evenings were a favourable time for confidence and anecdotes of all sorts.

I particularly enjoyed spurring him into talking about his american period, “October Revolution” and his important collaboration with Steve Lacy...

But most of the time we would work. We'd always start with one of his pieces, playing his music had come naturally.

I would discover his compositions fresh from the printer and would sight-read them as best I could; at times he would leave me alone a while so I could better concentrate.

At first I wanted to throw a few standards into our repertoire in order to better seduce the local gig audience, and further my improvisational workout. We played a few. Some quite beautiful, I might add. And then our relationship grew serious. Kent plays “free”, as we say in France, he improvises freely, off a blank slate. He was solidly schooled in music, his father was a respected conductor. I learned to play “free” with him. You know how hard it was for me to learn to improvise at all.

My brother François even told me a very long time ago: Jean, you're not made for that, you're a composer! I've never stopped trying to prove him wrong.

A piece by Kent always starts with “the head”¹, that is: everything that's on the score; then we get to “the playing”², aka the black hole, the total vacuum, whatever happens, play! At first I received a few pointers which soon morphed into recriminations, or even exasperation: Jean: don't follow me, don't wait for me, create something, an event, something that will surprise me... I remember

1. Exposing the theme.

2. Free improvisation after the initial exposition, generally ending with the reprise of the theme

being the exasperated party one day, I decided to eschew any and all difficulties by just playing randomly; on the spot, Kent's face went flush with colour, he threw his bass in its corner and walked out in anger... to come back half an hour later, calmed, but with an air of “don't ever pull that on me again”.

And then I started to enjoy the vacuum, the search for what could fuel a musical dialogue outside the realm of tonality and the constraints inherent to chord changes. We continued on our path of musical seriousness. There were down days, of course, Kent would drag his feet, we would whittle away the day with breaks, the day would turn into one big break, Kent was down. There weren't so many of those days.

We played for an audience early on, Kent having a small network of local bars, restaurants and private parties in english homes around Angoulême, all eager to see him play. That's where we forged our repertoire. And then I got a lucky strike.

Izmir

I wanted to play my part in finding gigs. I managed to come up with bits and pieces around Périgueux, but nothing substantial. I mustered up some courage and decided to reactivate my contacts – dormant since the end of Contrejour. The list was rather bare.

A foreign telephone number attracted my attention: it was that of the french cultural center in Izmir, Turkey. The turish project which had gone south with Contrejour comprised three gigs : Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, but had been overseen by the city of Ankara. Calling Izmir was going into uncharted territory. I tried my luck. A charming person answered my call: the director himself, a rare occurrence. He remembered the Ankara project quite clearly, his contract at the culural center was coming to an end, and his budget had a positive balance: why not spend it on me? The fact that I was currently playing with a US national was not ideal, but he was keen on completing an unfinished project...

A fortnight later I received two airline tickets for Izmir, with a stop at Istanbul. We had a great contract, with a comfortable budget. Kent was both pleased and worried. Truth be told, he hadn't taken the gig seriously before seeing the plane tickets, but something else was eating at him. He admitted he had never flown with his double bass. He had toured exclusively by road ever since he was in Europe. He

was relieved when he found he could rent a flight case in Paris to protect his bass from the rigours of the baggage hold. I took on the responsibility of clearing our gear with customs by getting the necessary ATA booklets stamped by the french administration. It was all new to us.

We had booked a hotel in Orly on the eve of our flight – 11 o'clock the next morning. We had a reservation for a two bed room. No problem there, except Kent watched american television late into the night, probably because he had no TV at home...

Boarding went smoothly, the double bass' great white flight case arrived on time and we watched our gear head out to the hold. I had just forgotten to have my booklet stamped...

I was about to fly for the very first time, Kent was very nervous, he needed a beer. Once airborne he relaxed.

Through the great bay windows of the international zone at Istanbul airport we watched our gear being taxied out to the small plane that would take us to Izmir. Everything seemed to be OK. We were met by the director of the cultural center himself as we disembarked, but Kent was summoned to the customs office for an ID check. He came out after the director had paid a *bakchich*, a seemingly usual local practice, relations with the american embassy being what they were at the time.

Curiously, the director paid no attention to Kent during supper, which he had invited us to, and refused to speak english. Our hotel was luxury class, the rooms were huge. Kent and I had agreed to meet up at the bar. For this first evening as a musician abroad, he treated me to quite an improvised sketch. He ordered a double whisky and started miming, in pseudo sign language, his enforced silence over

dinner; he carried on, miming the state in which he would find his double bass the next morning, turned to dust or rubber... I was laughing to tears on my stool!

He reunited with his contrabass in perfect shape the next morning at soundcheck. That evening, the venue was packed. My piece *Tunisiens*, which we had recently added to our repertoire, was well received. Paradoxically, Kent really enjoyed playing it, even though its theme was more reminiscent of world music and Anouar Brahem, who I had recently discovered, than of unbridled free jazz.

On our arrival in France we had to go through french customs and get our ATA booklets' return stub stamped to get our gear back. A simple formality. Our blood went cold as the customs agent told us she could not stamp the return stub, since the gear had not left the country! The departure stub was blank. As I translated the problem to Kent, who had already caught on to what was happening, he started acting up dangerously. The customs agent managed to sign off a release voucher for our gear, with summons to address our local customs authorities if we wanted to avoid a fine, before he broke into a rage, belching out an impressive number of "fucks" – all pertaining to french administration. I managed to get him out of the office and meet up with the guy who was to pick up the flight case and bring it back to Paris...

I went to pick up my car, parked at the far end of the huge airport zone, Kent and all our gear waiting at the terminal. My old Fiat Tipo gave no sign of life as I turned the key. Sudden death, cardiac arrest. A half hour later, after a desperate kick to a tire, She digned to come back to life. Luckily, a simple electrical problem. All we had to do

now was get back to Juillaguet without cutting the motor...

Such are the adventures that forge a band. Another way to forge a band – or split it up – is to lock it up in a recording studio.

Hartmut

Kent was the first to bring up the subject of recording our music. This was in december 1994. He set the sessions up himself, and hired Hartmut, a flegmatic and endearing sound engineer from Wuppertal, Germany, a good friend of his. I would be staying four days in Juillaguet for the project. Hartmut, as I would quickly find out, shared Kent's passion for nocturnal hang outs, and they got along very well. I wasn't well exercised in that sport myself, and hoped at least not to deceive.

The sessions themselves kicked off with one of my pieces: Régates (Ouiguetss, in Kent's – and therefore everybody else's – mouth). He had chosen the piece, but my nervousness prevented us from recording a decent take. Kent on the other hand was used to studio work, and would churn out fabulous solos, upping the pressure on myself. The studio, superb though it was, was not set up for editing. We were at the beginnings of digital recording, using ADAT technology, and Hartmut, as a free lance engineer, was more used to direct recording than studio work proper. We had to record live, with no overdubbing possibilities to fix mistakes. We ended up giving up on the track.

A beneficial decision, as I then relaxed, and we moved on serenely with our work.

During the summer of '94 I had acquired the much-touted Godin Multiac electro-acoustic nylon-stringed guitar, which could drive a synthesizer. I enjoyed using it in an orchestral manner, which is best shown in the Carla Bley piece, *Closer*. Kent had had the wonderful idea of exhuming the score from his archive, having played the piece with Paul Bley. We only played the "head", as I did not yet have enough experience to offer up-to-par "playing". A shame, really, yet Kent was satisfied with our rendering of the theme.

- I'll send it to Carla ...

Did he ever ? The subject never came up again. For *Gospel* (*Gaspôl*) another of my compositions, he dug out some candles so as to match the lighting to the mood of the improvisation.

Hartmut extended his stay to finish mixing, and we now had a tape to pitch to concert promoters.

Kent took on the demo's visuals. I was quite moved by his implication in the project.

Staying for dinner after one of our friday rehearsals I had told him of my ECM adventure. I believe from then on he always thought I had come to him in the hope of getting back in touch with the record label. That was the evening he told me the phrase that came back to me in the Munich exhibition: 'Jean, I can't give you what you're looking for: Manfred Eicher doesn't like me!' Kent went on to explain how Eicher, then an aspiring contrabassist, would often come to see him play when he started out in Germany. Kent was later hired by ECM on three occasions, and their personalities had clashed. I can't say whether or not Kent was right in his assessment of my

motivations – one never really knows from what depths our acts are born. Regardless, and having forewarned me, he agreed to call Steve Lake, Manfred Eicher's assistant, who produced one of his albums¹. 8 days later, I received the following fax² :

Dear Jean

The ECM demo tape situation. The office gets about ten tapes a day, that's almost 4000 tapes a year, so I guess you can understand that it's not possible to give a detailed critique of each of them. Further more, in 26 years, exactly two artist were signed as a result of sending tapes. Noetra was almost the third... but it was a long time ago.

I don't know what you mean about your music being too «optimistic» for ECM. If you want me to be blunt, I felt that the music didn't really go anywhere, that it had a surface prettiness but was rather static. (by the way Manfred also listened to some of the music with me).

Nonetheless, the reason for rejecting your tape - and the other 99.99 per cent that arrive at ECM - is indeed the impossibly overloaded production and release schedule. In the current climate for a tape to be considered it has to be more than amazing.

Anyway: good luck!

Best - Steve Lake

The fax had absolutely no repercussions on our work together nor on our relationship.

1. TOK - Paradox Japo 60029

2. Page 53

Follow-ups to our first recording

A massive send-out of our recording (on cassette tapes) landed us two gigs. I pulled in a spot in the 1995 edition of the “Jazz au fil de l’eau” festival in Parthenay (Deux Sèvres), while Kent clinched three evening performances at “La Tour rose” (The Rose), a well-known Jazz club in Lyon.

In Parthenay (Pautinéie) we played at 5P.M. in a chapel, to a rather sparse audience I must say. As we left the venue after our set, I recognized some musicians from La Rochelle we’d run into at the time of Contrejour playing to a gathering of festival-goers under a marquee; I self-importantly thought to myself I had moved up the social ladder of musicians.

After dining with Andy Emler’s band (who were artists-in-residence at that year’s festival) we stretched the evening out before getting back to the hotel. Kent wanted to hang. After attending the big evening concert with Claude Barthélémy’s Orchestre national de jazz, we ended up crashing a café’s jam session. Taking an electric piano by storm, he dived into a mad improvisation, spurring me on to join him. I did, taking over the bewildered guitarist’s instrument. We killed the jam’s easy-going spirit and brought the place down by knock-out.

Kent handled the three gigs at “La Tour Rose” in Lyon in his own way. For the first evening we morphed into a trio, joined by Itaru Oki, a Japanese free jazz trumpet player friend of Kent’s who lived near Lyon. He was in dire straits, and Kent, being the good-hearted man he is, wanted to share our generous fee with him.

The planned afternoon rehearsal never materialized, and I ended up with what they remembered of melodic bits and pieces written out on paper tablecloth corners – hopefully inspiration would be plentiful enough to take us through our three sets. To top things off, Kent had extended his generosity to Itaru’s entire family, inviting his wife and two young daughters to dinner before hitting the stage. La Tour Rose happened to be, first and foremost, a five star hotel, and one of the best restaurants in Lyon.

The evening was a disaster.

But we managed to get back on track the next day, and the third evening culminated in all-out enthusiasm, prolonged by Kent’s playing the lounge’s grand piano to an intimate audience of female admirers. From my room, I heard him play late into the night.

To follow up on these concerts I wanted to set up a small tour of eastern France (where I had never yet played). I managed to suss up 4 prospective gigs, two of which actually materialized.

These were the best of times for our duo.

Our complicity, both human and musical, had reached a point of equilibrium. Kent would often pick up on the negativity I had

developed in my darker years, expressed in words such as: “Once we’ve made progress...”; “Once we figure this out...”; “Once we’ve upped our game...”. He would stiffen up and frown, hitting me with a peremptory: “Jean, you have an attitude problem, we’re already very good!”

More often than not I would stay for dinner after our rehearsals. Kent told me he was seriously thinking of taking me to the US to go on the road, playing the bar circuit, wherever it would take us... That scared me straight out of my pants! I couldn’t imagine leaving my wife and kids on a whim to end up playing to Texas cowboys or Alabama truck stops, getting boo’ed of stage for serving up a musical background comprised of Plaything, Madrilènes or Closer. His melancholy and touching answer to my fears: “I’m more selfish than you”!

I had now met some of his friends. Among them, a Chinese doctor who worked in Paris, and who had bought, with her husband, the neighbouring house. One day, taking me aside, she confided: “Kent is going through a difficult period (indeed I had on several occasions seen him prostrate before his stove...) you seem to be a beneficial presence, your work together fulfilling in part his ‘professional’ difficulties.” I couldn’t bring myself to tell her the reverse was true for me.

This period would close on a fine artistic and financial success: a concert negotiated by Kent in Jarnac (Djornek) for 10.000 FF.

Attempting to extend the Duo

As always, Kent was the first to kick the idea around. He'd often told me the trio was his favorite musical ensemble. One of his career highlights had been his trio with Paul Bley on piano and Barry Atchul on drums.

I was open and willing, any idea coming from Kent was worth a go.

He set up a work session with an up and coming local drummer. I immediately remarked Kent's skill in working with drums, he'd developed an exceptional sense of acuity and was quick on the draw. Unfortunately, the poor kid was no match to our bass Titan's temper, spoke the crudest English, and approved any and all of Kent's suggestions – making things unbearable for me. This first attempt failed.

But the stage was set and I dove in. I'm not a virtuoso but I've always enjoyed orchestrating and arranging my ideas. I had already figured out the ideal ensemble for my music, and Kent was part of it. A cello and trumpet would flesh out my dreams. Kent, unconcerned, gave me a free hand. Highly motivated, and after years of working on my guitar playing, I churned out sophisticated arrangements of song upon song. So much so that I'd present our two new companions with unplayable scores. Simplification was in order, everything was

over-orchestrated except for one piece (*Les Soldats*), which took overabundance well.

The general idea had been to build a repertoire comprised of 30% of the duo's programme and 70% of newly orchestrated material. Pascal Gachet (flugelhorn and trumpet) and Lionel Morand (cello) were well up to the task. Lionel had confided, during our return/debriefing trips from Juillaguet to Périgueux, that he found Kent somewhat frightening. Admittedly, our bassist had retreated into a rather silent stance, which could be difficult to read.

Ultimately, I didn't breathe as much life as I would have wanted into this quartet, but we did manage to play a handful of successful concerts.

I am stubborn and obstinate. So is Kent, perhaps more so. He hadn't given up on a trio. He knocked me out cold.

Around the month of April '97, he announced a producer he knew had offered a six concert tour in Portugal. This producer was based in Porto, and there was a condition to the tour: he wanted a trio with drums, as the venues he had booked were rather large. Kent had played shortly before with Claudine François, a Parisian pianist whose regular drummer was an American living in Paris, Jeff Boudreaux. Kent had felt Jeff would be ideal for our duo.

One caveat – Jeff's schedule had no room for rehearsing before the gigs. A cassette recording of the duo would have to make do.

First concert. Lisbon. Air travel for the drummer. Car travel for contrabass and guitar, as dictated to Kent by thrift and logistics. As a driver, Kent will be Kent. All good most of the time, indeed very good.

He is not a geographical mastermind, a driver just needs to know what direction to take. Get the tiniest bit off course however and irritation rears its head, eyebrows frowning to a string of “we are in the shit, man! We are in the shit!”.

At the hotel: as we already know, an adorable companion, but American TV ‘till three in the morning. So, Kent on tour, my dream come true.

The trio in Portugal

Kent and I neared the port of Lisbon at the end of a two day journey. My old Peugeot 405 had no air conditioning, but it did have heating – in fact, it couldn't be turned off. This was early June, and it was getting seriously warm. Kent did not flinch.

And so I met Jeff Boudreaux, fresh off the plane from Paris. Thirty-something, sporting the pale face of many a Parisian. We just about got straight to work. One of Jeff's great qualities, which I would be witness to on many occasions, was the ability to coax great sounds out of any run-of-the-mill snare drum - true mastery. All in the hands. No problem therefore with the rental drum kit, we were off to a good start. Thanks to the tape cassette Kent had sent him, Jeff knew the repertoire like the back of his hand. Within two hours, almost in real time, we had the set down pat, ready to hit the stage.

The producer had planned a cold meal before our three sets, served right in front of the stage – not the cosiest of spaces. Kent and Jeff exchanged a few words, then Jeff pulled the Herald Tribune from his bag and shut his surroundings out until 'concert' time.

The venue was rather like a dance club, the audience parked in a large chair-less space with a huge bar at the back. Our music not

being particularly danceable, the customers came and went noisily in a sort of perpetual motion. The sound system wasn't loud enough to stun the crowd into staying put, I broke a nail... a horrible evening. But here I was in Portugal with two top American musicians - not too bad, wouldn't you say?

The next day we were playing a theatre in Coïmbra, 200 km north of Lisbon. A complete change of pace, here we got to play our music in decent, or should I say ideal, conditions. Kent felt it was one of our best concerts ever, it would have deserved to be recorded. The next four gigs were played in the suburbs of Porto, in the producer's Jazz club.

Back to France. Car, hotel, American TV, same old same old.

Strangely enough my relationship with Kent waned from then on, which can be explained quite simply. It was obvious, after our stint in Portugal, that we had to carry on as trio. There was no point in rehearsing as a duo any longer. What's more, Kent's personal career was getting back on track in Germany with his new String Trio. I was facing the dreaded 'no concert – no rehearsal' syndrome, hitting me harder yet with an American drummer living in Paris. Professionalization has its drawbacks.

I thought I was alone in feeling this detachment. Kent however, analysed the situation well. 'Jean, we've got to do something with this trio, let's record in my studio!' By the end of march '98 we had a new tape to market ourselves, now as a trio.

I don't know Kent's astrological sign, but I do know the characteristic

of my own: slowness.

At the end of our final day in the studio, we had a three-way conversation concerning our respective immediate futures. My plan was to drop some calls, send our tape here and there...

- Jean, do it now! Why not? Take my phone, go on!

Off I went to studio B, negotiating there and then a four-day tour for next June with our Portuguese producer!

Things got much tougher after our second stint in Portugal. In spite of being the main composer for the trio, assuming leadership was difficult. My two 'Mericans had oodles of character. With Jeff in the band speaking English had turned into a whole new ballgame, with Kent going all out. I bought "Vocabulaire" (English magazine for non-native speakers) every week to try and keep up on vocabulary, but it was beyond me at times. Not always however... As we were playing a piece called *Trop loin, trop cher*, whose theme everyone enjoyed, the improv section rolled along easily over a three-chord vamp, not to Kent's liking: turning to Jeff, he said: It's too much Mickey Mouse, you see what I mean? Unfortunately, I saw all too clearly what he meant.

I missed our complicity as a duo.

The trio in Paris

Assembling a coherent set of music for the purposes of contacting a record label has always been my way of doing things, even if, in the end, I generally have to get things done on my own. The list of labels I have contacted since starting out is an impressive one, as is the list of rebuttals. One and the same, actually.

I had an address a Parisian bassist had jotted down for me backstage in Périgueux : “Charlotte Productions” was an agency run by Isabelle Méchali, wife of the well-known contrabassist of that surname. The “Charlotte” label had, according to my colleague in Paris, released a couple of interesting records. Ms Méchali had liked our last recording from Kent’s studio. She wanted to see us play live.

As a regular at the ‘7 Lézards’, the Parisian jazz club on Rue des Rosiers, Jeff easily set up a gig for us. Driving into Paris with Kent as co-pilot was memorable, every road sign unveiling an unexpected pronunciation, every complex junction eliciting a string of four-letter words.

Insist as I may, Ms Méchali did not show up.
By chance, I got a second go.

Six months later I received a call from my new bassist 'friend'. He had heard the staff at the Auvers sur Oise jazz festival was looking for a band to sit in after a last minute withdrawal. Could we, on short notice, open for the Michel Graillier / Paolo Fresu duo? No way could Ms Méchali not be there this time.

Strangely, the idea didn't really click with Jeff. He even suggested we call on Jean Marc Périssat instead, because he didn't want Paolo Fresu to see him in an "awkward situation". Boy, did that hurt. In the end he came around when I assured him we could rehearse at his place just before the gig and would hit the stage well-prepared. I took the opportunity to add two new pieces which sounded quite nice and showed the trio under its best light: *Trois canards dans la mare* and *Illusion du fond*.

The concert went smooth as a dream. At evening's end, before setting off, Paolo Fresu came up to me and said: thanks for the music!

Still, Ms Méchali did not show up.

Rochefort

I was about to go through a pretty rough period of my life. My marriage was going sour. We had taken on the renovation of a small farmhouse 25km south of Périgueux, which both exhausted me and kept me from my musical preoccupations. My psychic balance was affected.

A ladder accident in which I found myself temporarily unconscious sent home the message – I had to get my priorities straight. By chance Marie Christine, my wife, inherited some money from an uncle, which helped us finish the house and free me from renovation work for a while. I slipped in a request to fund a new record...

In my mind we had to surf on our success in Auvers sur Oise, and keep an audio record of my work from the last five years.

I booked us a two evening gig at the Café du Boulevard in Melle, Deux-Sèvres, near enough to our recording sessions that it would serve to brush up our repertoire. The café provided accommodations for the two days. Jeff arrived from Austria in a terrible mood. Unfortunately, the hopefully soothing shower ran cold – nothing doing to get it even warm. What an atmosphere. Kent put everything right after the first concert by staying up until three in the morning chatting and drinking with the owner. Unexpectedly, Jeff gifted me

his first compliment that day: “Man, the tune we rehearsed this afternoon (*Dans les champs*) is one of the best I have played for a long time...” No less.

I had decided to record *Dans les champs* (*In the Tchaimpss*) and eight other new tracks in Rochefort, Charente Maritime (Ouachfaurtt, Tchewentt Mewytaïm), at François Gaucher’s brand new studio. He was the engineer who had recorded Contrejour. The three days of sound recording were exhausting for everyone. I was morally at an all-time low and had to reach deep inside to get to the end of it. The tension and helplessness in my solo on *Tunisiens* (*Tiounijeuns*) I can still hear today. During the mixing sessions Jeff was quite pernickety when it came to his drum sound. Who wouldn’t be? Out of earshot, our engineer nevertheless granted him the nickname “La Castafiore”.

The Alhambra Studio recording sessions from Rochefort didn’t come out for a long time. Once all wrapped up and mixed, I just wasn’t up to the task of contacting record labels or distributors: my personal problems had had the better of me; I was about to leave Marie Christine.

Kent couldn’t bear to see me in such a state. Late one night he called, luckily I was in my work room: “Jean, go out early tomorrow morning, pack your stuff in your car and GET OUT!”

I followed his advice, a few weeks later.

Epilogue

After leaving Marie-Christine I stayed at a hotel for a few days, keeping the location secret. I decided Kent would be my first visit as a free man. He and Michala were very happy to have me the next day, a Sunday.

I showed up in Juillaguet around 11 A.M., having picked up a cake in Villebois for lunch. Kent had other plans, he wanted to take me out to a restaurant, man to man.

Off we go in his “Rinaultt twenty five”, supposedly in search of a place. Actually, he had planned ahead and booked a nice table out in the hicks a short drive from his home.

I have no memory of what we ate or what we talked about. I do remember what followed, however. We went straight from the restaurant to a typical ‘gargote’, a sort of greasy café stuck in the rural 1960’s, filled with equal parts drunken locals and red-skinned Brits speaking a sketchy and wine-y French. Just the right place to hang out. The hours glided by, Kent drinking beer upon beer, I downing a few myself. Whisky/beers on top of that. Which brought us to one or two in the morning. Michala was expecting to share the cake with us around eight or nine P.M. The ride home in the R. twenty five was epic. Kent put on a CD of Keith Jarrett’s Standards Trio, volume all the way up - “Jean: listen to this! Man, it’s

unbelievable” and off he was singing the melody at the top of his voice. Kept it up as he parked in front of his house and slammed the doors. The reception committee was more than frosty, Kent payed no attention and went straight to bed. The next morning I left without a sound, head hung low.

I didn’t see Kent for a long time after that. I missed him a lot. But it was also a withdrawal of sorts.

We got together recently, same old Kent, take him or leave him. I’ll take him all over again.

Sarrazac, August 26th, 2019

Jean Lapouge



Stan Douglas: Hors-Champs (1982). Black and white video showing trombonist George Lewis, saxophonist Douglas Ewart, bassist Kent Carter and drummer Oliver Johnson playing Albert Ayler's *Spirits Rejoice*. The video was projected onto both sides of a diagonally suspended screen in the middle of a white and grey hall. Excerpt from John Kelman's article.
ECM: A Cultural Archaeology, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany

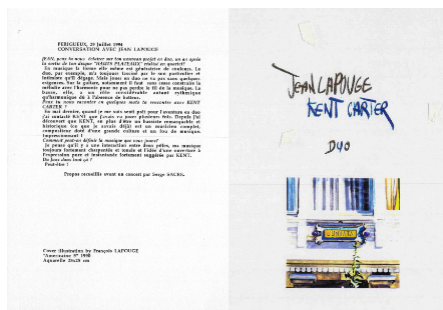


I still have the poster from our concert in Izmir's French cultural center hanging in my study. It's a bit kitschy, and our 'likeness' isn't even a photograph. It certainly expresses the precipitous manner in which the whole affair was undertaken.

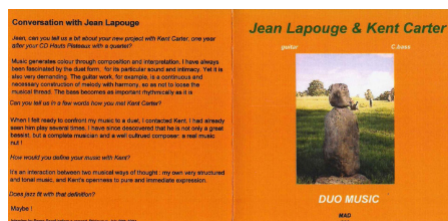


Photo : Jacques Dufour

Before the concert Quartet, Périgueux, October 19, 1995



In 1994 I had yet to go digital. All my scores were handwritten, and my flyers put together on photocopying machines. Kent on the other hand had owned a computer for years and could produce more professional documents.



Kent's CD booklet for Duo Music

JEAN LAPOUGE

KENT CARTER

quartet

AU PALACE

Rue BODIN

Jeudi 19 Octobre 95
à 21h00

Jean Lapouge

Kent Carter

Pascal Gachet

Lionel Morand

guitare

contrebasse

trompette, bugie

violoncelle

Musiciens : LE PALACE 53 53 80 78
MADISON 53 53 19 70
Prix des places 60 Frs

Monday -

Dear Jean -

The ECM tape situation. The office gets about ten tapes a day, that's almost 4000 tapes a year, so I guess you can understand that it's not possible to give a detailed critique of each of them. Furthermore, in 26 years, exactly two artists were signed as a result of sending tapes. Nostra was almost the third...but that was a long time ago.

I don't know what you mean about your music being too "optimistic" for ECM. If you want me to be blunt, I felt that the music didn't really go anywhere, that it had a surface prettiness but was rather static. (By the way, Manfred also listened to some of the music with me). Nonetheless, the reason for rejecting your tape - and the other 99.99 per cent that arrive at ECM - is indeed the impossibly overloaded production and release schedule. In the current climate for a tape to be considered it has to be more than amazing

Anyway: good luck!

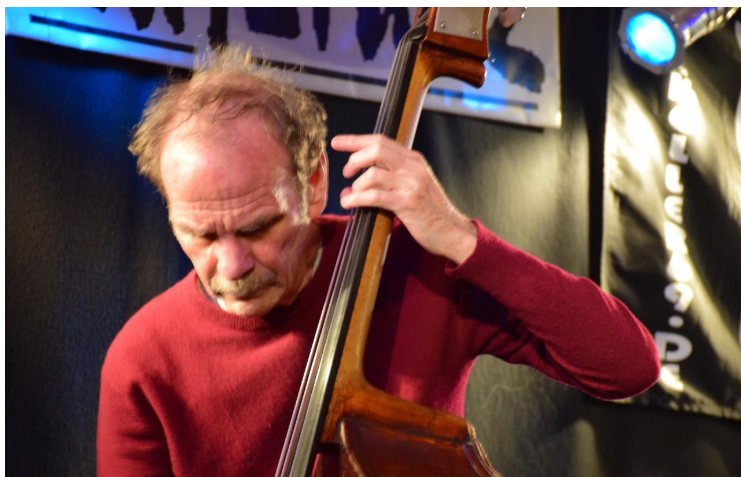
best
Steve Lake

Steve Lake fax, ECM 1995

Lionel Morand Pascal Gachet



Photo: Jacques Dufour



Kent : Berlin 2019

JAZZ DESCE À CIDADE

**La Pouge
Carter
Boudreaux**

TRIO

Kent Carter cto
Jean La Pouge guit
Jeff Boudreaux bat

HEINTROE
CIDADE
24

B-FLAT
JAZZ CLUB
25, 26 e 27
25 entrada livre

em parceria com:

CCJ
Comissão Cultural da Juventude

CEJA
Centro de Juventude
Câmara de Vereadores

Jean Lapouge Trio :
B Flat Jazz Club Porto 1997

Jean Lapouge - discography



Quadrilogie

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Christian Pabœuf : vibraphone, hautbois
Nicolas Lapouge : basse électrique

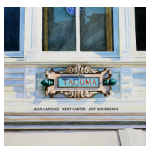
Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/quadrilogie>
août 2021.



En janvier

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Christian Pabœuf : vibraphone, hautbois
Christiane Bopp : trombone

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/en-janvier>
Janvier 2021.



Tacoma

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Kent Carter : contrebasse
Jeff Boudreaux : batterie

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/tacoma>
2019



Hongrois

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Grégoire Catelin : violoncelle
David Muris : batterie

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/hongrois>
2016



Plein air

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Grégoire Catelin : violoncelle
David Muris : batterie

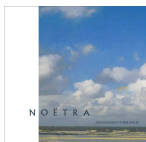
Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/plein-air>
2014



Des enfants

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Christian Pabœuf : vibraphone, hautbois
Christiane Bopp : trombone

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/des-enfants>
2012



Noëtra ... Résurgences d'errances

Noëtra [collectif]

Critiques du disque : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/r-surgences-derrances>
2011



Temporäre

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Christian Pabœuf : vibraphone, hautbois
Christiane Bopp : trombone

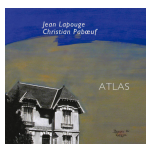
Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/tempor-re>
2011



Plaything

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Kent Carter : contrebasse
Jeff Boudreaux : batterie

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/plaything>
2011



Atlas

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Christian Pabœuf : hautbois, flûtes à bec

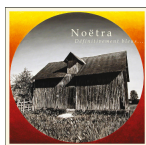
Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/atlas>
2010



Noëtra "Live 83"

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Christian Pabœuf : hautbois, flûtes à bec
Pierre Aubert : violon
Denis Lefranc : guitare basse
Daniel Renault : batterie

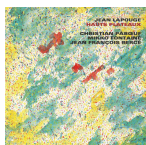
Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/live-83> 2010



Noëtra Définitivement bleus...

Noëtra (collectif)

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/d-finitivement-bleus
Juin 2000



Hauts plateaux

Jean Lapouge : guitare
Christian Pabœuf : vibraphone midi, hautbois
Jean François Bercé : contrebasse
Mikko Fontaine : batterie, percussions

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/hauts-plateaux>
1993



Noëtra Neuf songes

Noëtra (collectif)

Critiques du disque à l'adresse : <https://jeanlapouge.bandcamp.com/album/neuf-songes>
Juin 1992

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Jean Lapouge

KENT CARTER

...As we walked through the exhibit we suddenly entered a room shrouded in darkness in which a large screen was positioned diagonally, allowing us to see it from both sides – the same movie playing on each, with no projection rays to be seen. A magic trick soon overpowered by what I saw on screen: Kent Carter, "my" Kent, filmed with three African-American musicians playing "Great Black Music"! I immediately recognized George Lewis on trombone, but was not familiar with the saxophonist and drummer. The screen, standing at a good 2 x 3 meters, enveloped us with their music and physical presence. I was alternately stunned by the device itself and the subject it projected. All of a sudden I remembered what Kent had once told me, in contradiction with that I was seeing: "Manfred Eicher doesn't like me". An explanation is in order.

We have to go back to 1994 in order to understand the personal meaning of the great double bassist's assertion.

Translated from French by Serge Rémy Sacré