

# GOTTA LET IT OUT

ENTER THE WORLD OF WEIRD  
BY FRANZ MATZNER

Founded in 2016 by Tomo Jacobson, Gotta Let It Out (GLIO) is hard to pin down with its genre-free catalogue—unless there is a genre of *weird*. Not in the common usage of strange, odd or off-kilter but, rather, we’re talking about disconcerting, preternatural, uncanny. Rooted in Copenhagen’s thriving international music scene, the label features a wide range of experimentation and musical improvisation that falls somewhere between jazz, electronica and the untamed.

Asked about his central motivation for establishing the label, Jacobson explained that it reflects his love of discovering “something that I never even imagined.” He emphasized that this “doesn’t mean it’s something I’d want to listen to all the time,” but ultimately its purpose is to be “an expander of human perception.” From this perspective, GLIO hits the mark. *What Is Jazz* sounds like Einstürzende Neubauten colliding with a cement truck. Tisziji Muñoz’ sizzling guitar on *Spiritual Drum Kingship* explodes into freneticism akin to Jerry Garcia playing backwards. And the unnerving noisescapes produced by trumpet innovator Timothée Quost on *Before Zero Crossing* unfold as if he has tapped into sound’s primordia.

The label originated with Jacobson’s desire to “strip the music-making process of everything that gets in the way of doing it. So, we’d do everything ourselves... just make music and cast it into an object.”

Speaking to label artists, there is a clear consensus that GLIO is a rare forum for unrestricted creativity where ideas and explorations can be pursued both individually and via exchange within a circle of collaboration and community. In the words of drummer Szymon Gąsiorek, “what makes it a special label is acknowledging and supporting the spontaneous creative gesture of artists—a necessity to share with the world.” Violist Mat Maneri, who features on two particularly inventive releases, concurs: “I yearned to be in different areas of the structure... I found [that] the viola could navigate the rhythms and harmonies of the music I was playing... [GLIO opened the door to] unfettered ideas, [which] is so needed in today’s world.”

Another hallmark of the label is the array of unusual techniques utilized on its albums. A prime example is *Lake of Light: Compositions for AquaSonics* featuring veteran New York bassist William Parker and his quartet. The AquaSonic is a more portable version of the waterphone invented in the ’60s and is renowned for its ability to create and manipulate a wide range of sound. On *Lake of Light*, all four quartet members play the instrument. The result is an unending stream of sonic variations, from wails to gongs to droplets of water falling on a taut drum, to whale song, deep rumbles and dissonant screams. Parker explained that the draw of working with GLIO is “they are homegrown with the musician’s interest at heart... there is no contract: the music is the contract. The vibe is beautiful... a beacon that attracts light.”

Another example of the label’s adventurousness is *Underwater Disco* by Lo Arsare and Albert Karch, the duo behind NENNE. Solely comprising Ersare’s vocals

and Karch’s music production, the album manipulates the human voice’s range, shaping it into a variety of layers, floating and swerving with ethereal lightness. *Oneness and the Transcendent Truth*, a solo album by the Latvian saxophonist Kārlis Auziņš, plumbs the many techniques applied to the saxophone, including an array of novel methods that produce everything from bird calls to minimalist, prolonged murmurs to distorted sibilation. Striking a common theme, Auziņš again expressed admiration and gratitude to Jacobson, stating, “I have released two conceptually rather different solo albums on this label... (and) I wouldn’t have done this without Tomo’s encouragement.”

In addition to managing the label, Jacobson also appears on several releases, primarily playing bass, but experimenting with more unusual elements like the midi-ribbon. Most notable is his ability to adapt to the significantly divergent musical structures from one album to the next. For example, the (mostly) minimalist, spectral *Egin* is an entirely different beast from *Warmbladder*, which dives into layered percussive dissonance created by Jonathan Leland (electric drums, percussion), Ignacio Nacho Cordoba (electronics) and Jacobson (midi-ribbon). The music throbs with energy and erratic effects.

GLIO’s album sounds are also consistently matched with gorgeous and unique album art, including paintings, photographs and drawings. Select releases are additionally put out on lovely, well-produced vinyl. In short, not only has the label facilitated a space for free expression, it also has established a close community of support and mutual respect. It is evident

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*Spiritual Drum Kingship*  
Bob Moses/Tisziji Muñoz/Kresten Osgood



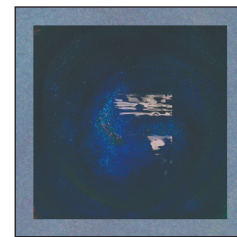
*SPIRIT SPIRIT*  
Torben Snekkestad/Søren Kjærgaard/Tomo Jacobson



*nullpluss*  
Kristian Tangvik



*Farm Fresh*  
Maria Faust/Tim Dahl/Weasel Walter



*Lake of Light: Compositions for AquaSonics*  
William Parker

## VOXNEWS

# RICHES

BY SUZANNE LORGE

Pent-up demand? Rampant escapism? A sudden groundswell of goodwill? For some reason, an unprecedented number of thematic vocal jazz performances and releases come to New York this holiday season. Given the geo-cultural-political-climactic-financial upheavals that attended 2023, perhaps we might just accept this downpour as a gift—whatever its provenance.

Most of the songs on **Gregory Porter’s** first-ever holiday album, *Christmas Wish* (Blue Note), speak of peace, hope, love—yardsticks by which we measure the year at its closing. The record covers many winter classics but the crossover composer has his own songs—and point of view—to add to the holiday lexicon; his three originals (“Christmas Wish”, “Heart for Christmas”, “Everything’s Not Lost”) remind us of our responsibilities toward others in our world, the message wrapped in that generous, comforting baritone.

Porter invited 2023’s breakout jazz star **Samara Joy** to join him on “What Are You Doing New Year’s Eve?”, and Joy has her own seasonal debut, *A Joyful Holiday* (Verve). Both Porter and Joy developed their powerhouse voices in the church, and gospel is never a

far remove from their work as jazz singers. Hear Porter’s rousing exultations on the title cut or Joy’s choir-backed praise on “O Holy Night”. The gospel singers on the latter are Joy’s family—she’ll be touring the record with them, with a stop at the Apollo (Dec. 14-15).

*Family Guy* creator **Seth MacFarlane** and singer/actor **Liz Gillies** recall the flirty duets of Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney on *We Wish You the Merriest*. No surprise, perhaps, that several of the album’s tunes are best known from animated Christmas specials (“Frosty the Snowman”, “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”, “Holly Jolly Christmas”) or beloved seasonal movies (“Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”, “Happy Holiday”, “Here Comes Santa Claus”). Notably, these popular films and TV shows were created in the mid-20th century, when jazz was the lingua franca of orchestrators and soundtracks. Arranger Andrew Cottee artfully captures this retro vibe on each of the 13 songs, framing MacFarlane’s happy crooning and Gillies’ charming delivery with festive orchestrations.

With a categorically different take on holiday classics, pianist/composer George Burton puts forth *The Yule Log* (Porge)—nine stunning modern jazz treatments of both well- and lesser-known melodies. Vocalists **Nancy Harms** and **Aryssa Leigh Burrs** shine all the brighter for the chamber setting, but don’t be misled: the groove and the bite are the main takeaways here. Burton celebrates the album release at Dizzy’s Club (Dec. 5).

Not every event this month relates to sleigh bells and mistletoe. London-based American singer **Stacey Kent** will introduce *Summer Me, Winter Me* (Naïve) at Birdland (Dec. 13-16); this multi-lingual collection highlights tunes from some of our most romantic musical storytellers—Michel Legrand, Jacques Brel and Antonio Carlos Jobim among them. As a follow-on to their 2019 duo debut, *LP1*, this month vocalist **Theo Bleckmann** and electronic musician Joseph Branciforte self-release *LP2*, a marvel of improvisation/composition, live performance/studio recording and human/machine sounds. And **Nicole Zuraitis**, a 2024 Grammy nominee for *How Love Begins* (Outside In Music), releases a bundle of bonus tracks from those sessions with *Caffeine and Affirmations* (La Reserve) at Drom (Dec. 2).

Check this list twice: After **Champion Fulton** plays Django (Dec. 12), she’ll present *Christmas with Champion* at Birdland (Dec. 21-25). **Kat Edmonson**, too, visits Birdland with *Holiday Swingin’!* (Dec. 14). At Blue Note is **Lauren Henderson’s** *Holiday Favorites and More* (Dec. 17). **Stephanie Nakasian’s** holiday tour takes her to Chelsea Table + Stage (Dec. 20). At JALC, **Ashley Pezzotti** fronts Wynton Marsalis’ JLCO in *Big Band Holidays* (Dec. 13-17) and **Tammy McCann** headlines in *Merry Christmas Baby* (Dec. 20). **The Hot Sardines** offer *Holiday Stomp & Midnight in Paris* at Joe’s Pub (Dec. 31). And singer/composer **Anne Phillips’** perennial favorite, *Bending Towards the Light: A Jazz Nativity* is at St. Paul & St. Andrew United Methodist Church (Dec. 18).

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(BRIC JAZZFEST CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

Hendricks & Ross, and not just in name: straight-ahead swing and whimsical vocalese are their bag. The trio was led by vocalists Sydney Panikkar and Eleanor Leigh; alto saxophonist James D’Ambrogia stood in as a third voice of sorts for Rosner, who was ill. Let’s see how this group, clearly skilled as individuals and as a unit, comes to distinguish itself from its predecessor.

A number of artists used the festival to try out new projects, including bassist **Jonathan Michel**. Titled *L’Ouverture*, after the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L’Ouverture and also for its meaning (“The Opening”), Michel presented the most thoughtfully conceived set of the festival, an homage to Haitian women and musicians as names and images of notable Haitian women (from foremothers to contemporary figures) flashed across the screen behind the stage. All of the guest performers, including Charles (playing flute on a melancholic blues), Val Jeanty on electronics and beloved vocalists Riva Précil and Emeline Michel, are Haitian by birth or heritage.

Pianist **Miki Yamanaka** also explored a new angle beyond her regular trio with her eight-piece ensemble, Origami. Performing both her own music and that of keyboardist and arranger Vickie Yang, her group, featuring horn-players Caroline Davis, Nicole Glover, Brandon Lee and Nick Finzer, had a familiar big band sound while also being fresh, with a real textural range across the set. Yamanaka claimed the name Origami didn’t have a deeper meaning beyond being an artform from her native Japan, while also acknowledging that colors and shapes are things she’s drawn to—abstract concepts that permeated her set.

Vocalist **Sarah Elizabeth Charles** always weaves intention and a grounded presence into her performances, and this set was no different. She offered the notion that this moment, within the room and at a time of global turmoil, “could be healing.” With visual art projected behind her, and cuing effects, she guided us through not just the sound, but the feeling of the music, while also expressing genuine reverence for her bandmates.

The Trill Mega Jam was the festival’s *pièce de resistance* of sorts. Featuring the members and leaders of New York City jam sessions from the last several years, including Arlene Grocery’s The Lesson and Nublu’s Producer Mondays, it had at various points three alto players simultaneously sidling up on a vamp and all manner of cowbell and tambourine—a true and beautiful free-for-all. One glowing moment: the Cuban vocalist Xiomara Laugart commanding the room with her rendition of “Bésame Mucho”, with her son Axel Tosca on keys.

Throughout the festival and across the many styles, backgrounds and talents of the artists who played, the spirit of forward movement within the music shone through. BRIC JazzFest felt hip and fun, a true something-for-everyone type of space that was a testament to the vibrancy of jazz culture.

For more info visit [bricartsmedia.org/bric-jazzfest](http://bricartsmedia.org/bric-jazzfest)

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(ŚMIETANA JAZZ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

whole. Niceberg is 23. You will hear his name again.

Runner-up Saldanha was a remarkably polished, mature, tasteful player. As was Turner in third place, though he was more funky and bluesy. **Raphael Silverman**, a senior at Columbia University, was one of the youngest entrants. He is another name to watch for. In the semifinals and also at the concert in the main auditorium of the Philharmonic on the fourth and final night of the competition, he offered gorgeous versions of “Manhattan”. The depth of Silverman’s lyricism is rare in such a young player.

The first night of concerts took place in Piwnica pod Baramani, an atmospheric stone cellar where, during the

communist era, the Polish Beat Generation (and political resistance) hung out. It is now the communists in Poland who are underground, but the Piwnica is still a very cool place to hear jazz. Pilon played in a duo with **Szymon Mika**, who won the first Śmietana competition in 2015, and who is now a presence on the Polish scene. Though based in Paris, Pilon has recorded and toured with notable musicians such as drummer Gerald Cleaver and saxophonist Walter Smith III. Alone together, Pilon and Mika conjured an evening of warm, sonorous stringed-instrument intimacy.

On the second night, **Marek Napiórkowski**, in a trio with Kowaleski and Palka, played the Harris Piano Jazz Bar, next door to the Piwnica. The Harris is also a basement cavern, and it was packed. Probably Poland’s foremost living jazz guitarist, Napiórkowski can segue organically between hammering funk and rapt ballads, hitting you right between the eyes and then touching your heart.

On the third night, **Peter Bernstein** played the Harris (packed again) with the adept Kraków-based organist Kajetan Galas. The guitarist is an A-list New York musician who has played with everyone from Lee Konitz to Sonny Rollins. Unlike many guitarists, he does not force himself upon you. He draws you in, with pearl-like notes that always flow and feel relaxed, whether on Horace Silver’s ballad “Peace” or a burning rendition of “Speak Low”.

The final night’s gala concert featured Napiórkowski in a mostly acoustic duo with guitarist Artur Lesicki. Then Bernstein and Pilon teamed up as the front line of a quartet. They took turns, beautifully, on the affirmational arc of melody that is “My Ideal”. The competition’s four winners also played one tune each.

Everyone involved in this year’s event seemed aware that it was taking place during an especially dark moment for the world. The war in Ukraine was raging (close to Poland’s borders), and the catastrophe in Israel and the Gaza Strip had exploded only a few days before the competition began. So much darkness and death made the light and life of music more necessary.

For more info visit [smietanacompetition.com](http://smietanacompetition.com)

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(JAZZFEST BERLIN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

made the fabulous *Laying Demons To Rest* (Rogue Art, 2023). Here they were supplemented by Berlin-based Brazilian percussionist Maria Portugal, whose sensitive deployment of texture and clear appreciation of space only enhanced the pair’s near extrasensory communion. Silva exploited all the tools in the modern trumpeter’s armory while Frith’s range seemed limitless as he restlessly modified his sonic signature, abetted by an array of implements and FX. Their set was a quicksilver series of memorable vignettes, constantly posing the question: how on earth did we get from there to here?

Unfettered expression and preternatural communication were also the stock in trade of saxophonist **Ingrid Laubrock**’s trio with Brandon Lopez (bass) and Tom Rainey (drums). Lopez’ unconventional techniques—scuffing, swishing and scratching—proved key to the unpredictable and empathetic interplay. Simultaneously poised and experimental, Laubrock always seemed to hold something in reserve, giving her another gear which she utilized to electrifying effect. In fact, all three knew the virtue of holding back, veering into the weeds at will, before uncovering new trails to be pursued, as if following a lucid narrative thread.

Two of the most distinctive and forward-facing voices on the New York scene, **Sylvie Courvoisier** (piano) and **Mary Halvorson** (guitar), launched the proceedings with palpable duo chemistry. Courvoisier’s command of high-wire improvisation and new-music-inflected classicism spiced an idiosyncratic take on the jazz vernacular. In that she’s matched by the guitarist who defies classification, as happy touching on spidery

scuttling as scrubbed skronk. Their compositions burst at the seams with knotty not-quite harmonies, unexpected volte-faces and sudden unmoorings where everything you knew was upended.

**Joshua Abrams** presented an augmented version of his Natural Information Society for a set which went far beyond their customary brand of trance-inducing gnawa free jazz. The cornet of Ben LaMar Gay and saxophones of Anna Kaluza and Mia Dyberg added an ecstatic, almost oceanic swell to Abrams’ guimbri-fueled dusty grooves. But the undoubted star of the show was 79-year-old AACM veteran tenor saxophonist Ari Brown, who issued a majestic stream of hoarse vocalized cries and tart, piercing runs which invigorated everything he touched. German trumpeter Axel Dörner further deepened the discourse, offering not only episodes of free splutter and circular breathed snark, but also provocative commentary on whatever else was happening.

**Zoh Amba**’s records in no way prepared the listener for the visceral impact of the sound emanating from her slight frame. Having taken NYC by storm, the young saxophonist is doing the same on the European touring circuit. Her first-time encounter with Berlin-based Brazilians Vinicius Cajado (bass) and Mauricio Takara (drums) was a high-energy meeting of minds in which cathartic benedictions mingled with searing tumult. But what distinguishes the saxophonist, and indeed the trio, from the norm, was the ability to sustain such gambits into something deeply cohesive and gut-wrenchingly engaging.

Also of note were the combination of trombonist **Connie Bauer** and morphing grooves of the almost telepathic bass/drum tandem of William Parker and Hamid Drake, while the melodic dialogue of saxophonist **Bill McHenry** and drummer **Andrew Cyrille** couldn’t have been further from the tropes of *Interstellar Space*. Cellist **Vincent Ceccaldi** was the most sedate presence in his exuberant Bonbon Flame quartet, an anarchic assemblage illuminated by the histrionics of guitarist Luis Lopes and keys of Fulco Ottervanger. **Paal Nilssen-Love**’s Circus was likewise unhinged, rallying behind some ferocious beats, enhanced by the remarkable voice of Juliana Venter. The firebreathing saxophones, gusty brass, propulsive drums and careening strings of **Andreas Røysum**’s Ensemble closed the festival in a raucous good-time extravaganza, which also found space for one of the most beautiful songs heard over the four days, a haunting version of the old English folk air “Hares on the Mountain”.

That every concert was sold out provides eloquent testimony to the marvelous work of the team led by Festival Director Nadine Deventer. With its superb programming, appreciative audiences, excellent sound and top-notch venues, JazzFest Berlin demonstrates once again that there’s no need to dumb down to succeed.

For more info visit [berlinerfestspiele.de/en/jazzfest-berlin](http://berlinerfestspiele.de/en/jazzfest-berlin)

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that the level of freedom it provides has unlocked a unique wellspring of creativity.

Ultimately, Gotta Let It Out lives up to its name and the motivation feels compulsive rather than overtly planned. Its catalogue comprises a wide range of talent, with approaches that are often groundbreaking and certainly unpredictable. Experiencing this label is not necessarily about loving all the music or understanding every piece. However, it is as much about honoring the artists’ musical endeavors and the purity of their motivations, while experiencing new auditory sensations.

Prepare to enter the world of the weird and see where it leads.

For more info visit [gottaletitout.com](http://gottaletitout.com)