

Georg Ruby & Wollie Kaiser / „Ruby Domesticus Vulgaris“

What actually drives jazz musicians to play in a duo or, more precisely, what are the advantages of such a formation in contrast to a "normal" jazz quartet?

Such questions are particularly pressing in view of the increasing number of recordings with chamber music instrumentation that have been released in recent years.

If you listen to Wollie Kaiser and Georg Ruby, not only is the question answered immediately, it becomes invalid; their sceptical undertone cannot stand in the face of the musical answer. The most striking thing is surely that an intimacy is achieved in the interplay that is hardly possible in larger formations. The feeling for time, slurs and pauses can hardly be developed in such a way as demonstrated here in duo playing. This degree of sensitivity would certainly overtax a standard jazz instrumentation. The danger of such a chamber-music approach is that the "time-playing" is often dispensed with, that this music ripples along in a beautiful, spiritually non-committal way like an eternally long cadenza. Aggressiveness and bite are then often missing. These dangers are skilfully circumnavigated here, or better: the musicians work offensively against them. This music has the elements of groove, swing and time, as well as chamber-music-like, freitonal-abstract or free-jazzy-aggressive passages. Both musicians often consciously replace bass and drums, they take over their function and don't let longings for a quartet arise in the first place. In addition, the instrumentation is extremely varied, almost fiddly. Apart from the usual saxophone, you also hear the clarinet family including bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet.

After listening to this music, I ask myself the same question: why do musicians actually play in a trio or quartet?

Joachim Ullrich / 2004