

DIETER ILG

The bassist and Echo Jazz award winner Dieter Ilg is today one of only a handful of top European musicians who know how to add their very own unmistakable feel to every project they are involved in. Whether as an in-demand, reliably adaptable band member or as the leader of his own ensembles: Ilg always knows how to combine his function as a bassist and musical foundation stone with a graceful lightness and expression that seem not to be bound by the instrumental intricacies of the double bass. Dieter Ilg unites the arts of accompanying and playing as a soloist like virtually no other.

At the tender age of six, steeled by excessive tooting on the recorder in kindergarten, Dieter Ilg started playing the violin, later the viola, to then move on to the double bass at thirteen. His first major influence as a teacher was Norbert Brenner, the double-bass soloist of the SWF Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden. Dieter Ilg studied at the Musikhochschule Freiburg and the Manhattan School of Music (1986/87). Parallel to that he soaked up as much about the secrets of the trade as he could from masters like Eddie Gomez, Ron McClure, Rufus Reid, Adelhard Roidinger and Miroslav Vitous. And he was able to build on his first profound music experiences, because even while still at school he became a permanent member of the Joe Viera Sextet (1981-84) and then launched his first trio together with pianist Klaus Ignatzek. Not much later he was playing with artists like Bobby Watson, Roman Schwaller and David Liebman. The latter of these was one of the main reasons why Ilg decided to move to New York, and he invited him to help put together a John Coltrane Memorial Concert in NYC in January 1987.

A few weeks after his return from New York, Dieter Ilg founded his own trio together with the guitarist John Schröder and Wolfgang Haffner on the drums. At the same time the youngster became a member of the Randy Brecker Quintet (1987-89). And all at once things starting going crazy: the Baden-Württemberg Jazz Award 1988, (from the jury's statement: "The expressiveness and luminosity of his sound, the originality of his ensemble concept and his singular harmonic way of thinking are fascinating"), regular shows with the WDR-Big-Band, a tour of Spain with Bennie Wallace (1989), the revival of his trio that same year, this time with the New York pianist Marc Copland on board. Three trio-CDs with the US drummers Bill Stewart, Ralph Penland and Jeff Hirshfield bear witness to this exciting cooperation.

Then came the musically inharmonious Nineties. Ilg was underway with Germany's most-renowned modern jazz combo, the Mangelsdorff / Dauner Quintet, from 1991 onwards. The Goethe-Institut sent him around the world at the side of Christof Lauer. The work with Copland ripened into an artistic friendship and gave rise to ever new and appealing sound facets in both the trio and quintet formations.

It was during this time that the first collaboration with ACT and Siggı Loch came to be: Dieter Ilg worked on the very first ACT album in 1992, the year in which the label was founded. It was the GRAMMY nominated flamenco-jazz production "Jazzpaña" (ACT 9212-2), under the leadership of Vince Mendoza and together with artists like Michael Brecker, Al Di Meola, Peter Erskine, Steve Khan etc.. Together with the French-Vietnamese guitarist Nguyễn Lê and drummer Danny Gottlieb, they jazz-rocked the house: Their albums "Million Waves" (ACT 9221-2) and "Three Trios" (ACT 9245-2) were published by ACT.

During this same period, Ilg was looking for his own project, for music he felt rooted in; and he found it in "Folk Songs" (1997), "Fieldwork" (1998) and "LIVEILG" (2001). The idea was simple and ultimately quite obvious: Where else do you search for your cultural origins than in your own homeland? Ilg began working on folk songs, and found the right basis-trio in the guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel and the drummer Steve Argüelles. The programme was a huge success. The musicians went on tour with it for four years, until they themselves could hardly hear "Im Märzen der Bauer" or "Winter Ade" anymore. The press was also enamoured (e.g. the 1998 Stern des Jahres award from the Münchner Abendzeitung newspaper) and Ilg became perceived as a leading expert on his instrument at home as well. He had long been teaching the young talents at the Musikhochschule Freiburg (1995-97, 2001ff) and yet up till that point he had still been considered a newcomer, an insider tip.

Perhaps it was actually the cuisine of Central Europe that kept him from moving to the US. Over the years, Ilg developed his love for culinary quality, which increasingly grew into one of his personal traits. He garnered himself a reputation as a gourmet and cook. Touring colleagues highly appreciate his gastronomic tips, and a meal at Ilg's has become a cult event in musician circles. He has been authoring a regular cooking column ("Jazz cooks") in the jazz magazine "Jazz thing" since 2000.

So Dieter Ilg stayed in his home country and worked on new projects. For example with Charlie Mariano. In 1998 he had already produced the album "Savannah Samurai" by that extraordinary and charismatic saxophonist. Extended tours with his band followed. The two got to know and appreciate each other better, and a top-class chamber music duo was born, which impressed greatly all the way until Charlie Mariano's death in June 2009 – and which remains immortalised on the albums "A La Carte" and "Eisenhans und Due". In 2001, Dieter Ilg launched his own label "fullfat", on which he only brings out his own projects.

In 2006, Dieter Ilg collaborated on another ACT production: "Abracadabra" (ACT 9447-2) contained 13 reworks of film music, composed by Germany's most famous sax player, Klaus Doldinger, played by the trio of Dieter Ilg (bass), Roberto Di Gioia (piano) and Wolfgang Haffner (drums). He also received the Reinhold-Schneider Award from the city of Freiburg in 2006. Between 2006 and 2011 he could regularly be heard in Till Brönner's live band. In 2008 the fine art of minimisation reached an apex on the solo double-bass recording "Bass", which drew a euphoric response from press and public alike. That same year, in March 2010, Dieter Ilg fulfilled a long-held wish by bringing out adaptations of Giuseppe Verdi's Otello in a trio with Rainer Böhm (piano) and Patrice Heral (drums).

In addition, Dieter Ilg took the stage in 2010/2011 with the new jazz, blues and soul programme of star baritone Thomas Quasthoff, and played on his album "Tell it like it is". In March and April 2011 Dieter Ilg went on a tour of Germany with Till Brönner's "At the end of the day". Further tours and concerts with his award-winning trio followed in 2011/2012, including performances at the Ludwigsburg Castle Festival, the Ruhr Piano Festival, the opening concert of the Thuringia Jazz Mile and the invitation to the Dresden Jazz Festival.

In the autumn of 2011, Dieter Ilg's first album came out under his own name on ACT: On "Otello live at Schloss Elmau" (ACT 9522-2) he presented impressive variations on Verdi's master opera between jazz and classic, in the proven trio with pianist Rainer Böhm and drummer Patrice Heral.

With "Parsifal" (ACT 9544-2), Ilg again took on a classical work. The music drama came out as a "chamber music, acoustic jazz opus" (Spiegel Online) in January 2013, at the start of the Wagner Year. Focus magazine called the album the "high point of the Richard Wagner Year 2013". Ilg, Böhm and Heral pick up on the romantic's themes, relieve them of their gravity and create room for improvisations that put Wagner in an entirely new light.

DIETER ILG ON ACT

As leader:

Parsifal, ACT 9544-2

Otello live at Schloss Elmau, ACT 9522-2

As sideman:

Abracadabra (with Roberto di Gioia and Wolfgang Haffner), ACT 9447-2

Three Trios (with Nguyễn Lê), ACT 9245-2

Electricity (with Bob Brookmeyer), ACT 9219-2

Million Waves (with the Nguyễn Lê Trio), ACT 9221-2

Jazzpana (with Vince Mendoza and Arif Mardin), ACT 9212-2