

OTHER ANIMAL

'Open for Everything'

The Berlin-based Meyer brothers—guitarist Peter and bassist Bernhard—are best known as the force behind the Melt Trio, an ongoing variation on the guitar trio involving a highly personalized mixture of jazz, rock and atmospheric. The Meyers' new band, the aptly named Other Animal, is a fascinating quartet project that teams them with Wanja Slavin (alto saxophone, clarinet, flute and synthesizer) and the ever-flexible drummer Jim Black.

The Meyers' resume, alone and as a tight sibling unit, includes work with drummer Nasheet Waits, guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel, Portuguese bassist Carlos Bica and Norwegian live-remix king Jan Bang. Slavin has won much acclaim in jazz circles, particularly through this work in the quartet Amok Amor. Black had a particular influence on the Meyers' aesthetic, thanks to his work in such post-fusion outfits as Pachora, Human Feel and AlasNoAxis.

Other Animal's eponymous debut album, on the Traumton label, traverses turf both familiar and fresh. A core progressive jazz-rock element, carried over from Melt Trio, is further colored by abstract free-improv sections within the Meyers' custom-tailored compositions.

For this project, the Meyer siblings wrote a batch of tunes and booked time in the legendary Funkhaus studio, located in what formerly was East Berlin. "We played maybe two concerts before the recording," Bernhard explained. "We wanted to take the [opportunity] when Jim was in town and free, and just wanted to do it. Of course, we couldn't tell what would come out. We really focused on getting a band sound, actu-

ally, before going into the studio."

One hallmark of the *Other Animal* album is the unpredictability and license to creatively wander within the scored material. Structured components often peel away and new ambient free zones appear, sometimes returning to the head, sometimes not.

"With a lot of contemporary jazz tunes," Bernhard said, "you have the form, lots of difficult harmonies and all this stuff, and then people want to play over this structure. But we don't care. Maybe we'll do that, but if the improv part is something totally different and is better for the song, we always prefer that. If we have a melody that's written, and a certain harmony, that's fine. But sometimes, on the improv, we try to get to something else, something new."

"The improv part has the function like a bridge in a pop song," Peter explained. "We want it to be in the vibe of the song, the vibe of the band."

The brothers' formative years preceded the YouTube boom. "When we grew up," Peter said, "we didn't have everything available all the time, so we had to listen to what we knew. That was Bill Frisell and atmospheric stuff. Later, we started to listen to Coltrane and all that, and we loved that music, too—but not when we were young teens and started to develop our own tastes."

The 12 tracks on *Other Animal* cover a diverse range of stylistic and emotional terrain, from the quirky groove-driven tracks "Mr. Manga," "Drown Dreams" and "Qubits," to introspective ECM-ish numbers like "Name Of Cold Country," "Spectral" and the melancholic gem "Downbear."

Peter noted, "Sometimes I write songs where

I had the feeling in the end that they sounded like [Charlie] Parker chords but with an indie/Radiohead-ish vibe. There is a lot of half-tone skipping and transitions, but we always have a pop or indie vibe."

So where does Other Animal fit in the given landscape of genres and sub-genres within jazz? Bernhard replied, "We got a lot of our inspirations from jazz—like Weather Report, John Abercrombie, John Hollenbeck. For us, it's always hard to say what we are. We studied jazz and try to get better, and still like to play the classical bebop jazz language. ... I like Mahler and Bach, and I like Jim Black and Grizzly Bear. We don't mind if someone calls it jazz or progressive jazz. But if someone says, 'It's kind of instrumental indie music with improvised parts,' maybe that's right."

"We're open for everything," Peter said. "Coltrane was open for everything. Miles Davis—*Bitches Brew*—all these famous records are great because the musicians were open for what was around them. If someone says 'No, that's not jazz. It's rock,' that's OK for me. If he wants to call it that, that's fine for me. People can decide what they call it."

Other Animal represents a concept-come-true. "It was a dream to play with Jim," Bernhard said. "And we also wanted to play with Wanja. When we start a new project, we ... really want to do it as best we can."

Peter added, "We want to develop this band and its sound. We want to do a second recording. This is just the beginning, hopefully."

—Josef Woodard