
Didier Verna - Press Book

Biography, Links, Projects, Discography, Album Chronicles, Press Quotes, Interviews...

Last update: April 2016



Photo: Bruno Charavet

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Biographic Material

Short Bio

Didier Verna is a French Jazz guitarist, singer and composer, alternating his musical career with that of an assistant professor in Computer Science. Involved in music since the age of 5, he has studied music theory, percussion, piano and finally guitar.

As a singer, he was part of the **Voice Messengers**, a vocal Jazz Big Band led by **Thierry Lalo**. As a guitarist and composer, he has founded and leads the @-quartet (**Laurent Epstein**; formerly **Guillaume Naud** / piano, **Yoni Zelnik**; formerly **Gilles Naturel** / upright bass and **David Georgelet** / drums), a band with which he has released two albums (« @-quartet » and « Roots and Leaves »).

Didier Verna has also played and / or recorded with important personalities of Contemporary Jazz, such as **Antoine Hervé**, **Glenn Ferris**, **François Laudet**, **Andréa Michelutti**, **Yves Carbonne** (Carbonne / diPiazza / Manring), **Denis Gouzil** (Cie Lubat), **Déborah Tanguy**, **Sonia Cat-Berro**...

Internet Links

Website: <http://didierverna.com/>
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/didierverna.jazz>
MySpace: <http://www.myspace.com/didierverna>
Google Plus: <http://plus.google.com/+didierverna>
Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/didierverna>
SoundCloud: <https://soundcloud.com/didierverna>
Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/didiervernajazz>

Musiculum Vitae



Once you fall into Jazz and improvisation, you can never escape from it. The taste for risky business, the pleasure of maltreating all music styles, transgressing all rules, and above all, playing in the ludique sense as well as in the musical one... Jazz is all that. It is not a style of music; it is a philosophy of music. Of all the music.

Didier Verna

It is probably by going through musical styles as various as folk, rock or Brazilian that one becomes an open-minded Jazz musician eventually. Didier Verna is all that and his music acknowledges this fact: his compositions are without any barriers of style, original, diverse and meanwhile very personal.

It is also by falling very early into music, and by trying numerous instruments (drums, percussions, piano, guitar, vocals) that one becomes an educated improviser. As a guitarist, Didier Verna offers us a very melodic and, at the same time, rhythmic playing, in which one easily recognizes the footprint of his contemporary Jazz masters: **Metheny**, **Stern** and **Scofield**.

Born in 1970, Didier Verna gets involved in music at the age of 5. He studies music theory for two years at the conservatory and learns successively percussions, classical piano, and classical guitar. At 13, he discovers Jazz and studies harmony and improvisation for 3 years with French guitarist **Denis Gouzil**. At 18, he starts playing in Bordeaux in various bands, like a guitar octet with **Denis Gouzil** and **Yves Carbonne** (Compagnie Lubat, Carbonne / di Piazza / Manring).

At the age of 21, he moves to Paris in order to continue his scientific studies. Since then, he tries to maintain both his careers as an assistant professor in Computer Science and as a musician. He hence continues his Jazz formation as a self-taught, multiplying musical experiences both in bands (from trio to septet, or even in a guitar sextet with a rhythm section) and in styles (jazz rock, modern jazz, Brazilian...). Meanwhile, he develops a vocal jazz technique very much inspired from the work of **Bobby Mc Ferrin** and begins giving voice solo sessions.

In 2001, he meets pianist **Thierry Lalo** and creates with him a piano / vocal duet, an adaptation and extension of his solo vocal work to a total improvisation duel. In 2002, he

enters the **Voice Messengers**, a world-renowned vocal Jazz big band, where he sings as a tenor.

In 2006, he gets back to his main instrument and creates the “@-quartet”, with **Laurent Epstein** (originally **Guillaume Naud**) on piano, **Yoni Zelnik** (originally **Gilles Naturel**) on bass and **David Georgelet** on drums; a band that he equips with a repertoire of original compositions and with which he has released two albums as a leader.

Didier Verna also played, among others, with **Antoine Hervé**, **Glenn Ferris**, **Yves Carbonne**, **Thierry Lalo**, **François Laudet**, **Adnréa Michelutti**, **Denis Gouzil**, **Déborah Tanguy**, **Sonia Cat-Berro...**

Projects



The @-quartet

The @-quartet (pronounce "at quartet": @ as in @coustic) was created by its leader, Didier Verna (guitar and composition), in order to bring life to a set of original compositions exclusively. The repertoire is meant as tribute to all the influences that affected his playing until now (except for jazz-rock; that would be another band). Mostly in a traditional acoustic setup, one can find medium jazz, ballads, some very bop tunes, Brazilian colors, a touch of binary and some pieces heavily tinted with free-jazz. But we are more than the sum of our influences. The repertoire, although of various styles, remains coherent thanks to the guitarist's personality, very apparent both in composition and improvisation. By enrolling the best rhythm section one could possibly dream of, Didier Verna also

wanted to let the music express itself, in some way: imposing only very few things and letting each musician's personality blossom allows a music to emerge, that is not necessarily the one that was expected in the first place.

Didier Verna (Guitar, composition)

Guitarist, singer and composer, he started music at the age of 5 and learned various instruments until he discovered Jazz and improvisation, and eventually settled for the guitar. As a singer, he was part of the **Voice Messengers**, a vocal Jazz Big Band led by **Thierry Lalo**. He also played and / or recorded with important personalities of Contemporary Jazz, such as **Antoine Hervé**, **Glenn Ferris**, **Guillaume Naud**, **Gilles Naturel**, **François Laudet**, **Andréa Michelutti**, **Yves Carbonne** (Carbonne / diPiazza / Manring), **Denis Gouzil** (Cie Lubat), **Déborah Tanguy**, **Sonia Cat-Berro**...

Laurent Epstein (Piano)

Settled in Paris since 1992, he is one of the most solicited pianists in the capital and had been leading one of the most frequented jam sessions there, at « Autour de Midi », for several years. He can be found next to the greatest French and international Jazz players: **Patrick Saussois**, **Richie Cole**, **Gianni Basso**, **Christian Escoude**, **Marc Fosset**, **Anne Ducros**, **Michel Pastre**, **Renato d'Aiello**, **Claude Tissendier**, **laurent Mignard's Duke Orchestra**. In Mars 2010, he was the pianist for the Jazz Hot 75 years celebration party, first in duet with **Brisa Roche**, then in trombonist **Sarah Morrow's** formation.

Yoni Zelnik (Bass)

Born in Israel in 1975, Yoni began music by playing bass guitar in a rock band with his teenager friend. Later, he discovered jazz and moved to Paris in 1995 to study the double bass at the CIM and the 15th district conservatory. He has recorded about 30 albums as a sideman and has performed in about 40 countries. He has collaborated with **Sophie Alour**, **Billy Hart**, **David Doruzka**, **Youn Sun Nah**, **Laurent Coq** and **Sam Sadigursky** amongst others. He can be heard with the **Geraldine Laurent quartet**, **Sandro Zerafa quartet**, **Robin Nicaise 5tet**, **Frank Woeste** trio, **David Prez quartet**...

David Georgelet (Drums)

He studies drums at the Niort conservatory, in George Packzinski's class at CIM, and in Brazil with Rosa Passos's musicians. He played and / or recorded, among others, with **Youn Sun Nah, Deborah Tanguy, Gilles Wolff, John Graf, Ari Hoening, Sandro Zerafa, Emmanuel Brunet, Sébastien Llado, Olivier Zanut, Nico Gori, Mauro Gargano, Michael Chéret, Aline de Lima, Frank Rabereau, Max Pinto, Florian Pelissier...**

Formerly: Guillaume Naud (Piano)

He studies Jazz piano at the CIM in Emmanuel Bex's class, and attends a Deug in musicology at the Paris VIII St-Denis university with Max Hediguer and François Jeanneau. He has been teaching piano at CIM since 1998. He played and / or recorded, among others, with **Sonia Cat-Berro, Youn Sun Nah, Marc Thomas, Sophie Alour, Stéphane Belmondo, Larry Browne, James Lewis, Emi Oshima...**

Formerly: Gilles Naturel (Bass)

Composer, conductor and sideman, he possesses all the qualities of a great bassist: swing, precision, tempo, inventivity, and above all an exceptional sound which is not far away from that of Paul Chambers, with whom he shares the very rare ability to execute superb solos with the bow. Today, he is one of the most demanded bassists in France. He played and / or recorded, among others, with **Ray Bryant, Benny Golson, Art Farmer, Johnny Griffin, Didier Lockwood, Michel Legrand, André Ceccarelli, Laurent de Wilde, Jeanne Lee, Sarah Lazarus...**

Discography



Roots and Leaves

Didier Verna @-quartet

With Laurent Epstein (piano), Yoni Zelnik (contrabass) and David Georgelet (drums). Recorded by Pierre Dachery at Caves Prado (Paris). Mixed by Pierre Dachery and Didier Verna at Color Sound Studio (Paris). Copyright © 2014 Didier Verna. Reference: DVL0914JZ. DVL Records. Copyright © 2015 Plaza Mayor Company Ltd.

Excerpt from the booklet: “Roots and Leaves... Roots are our foundation, our basis, our legacy and our culture. They are our link to the Earth, the anchor point, solid, static and invisible, on top of which we build ourselves. Leaves are the multiple, blooming facets of our personality, our character and our uniqueness They

are our link to the Sky, the point of release, fragile, ephemeral and agitated through which we express ourselves”. With this new opus from the @-quartet, Didier Verna continues to explore the founding idea of this formation and its music: how, depending on our cultural legacy, does the personality of a musician flourish? How, from a collective heritage, does his or her artistic individuality build itself and evolve?

As with the first album, these eleven new compositions continue to offer a variety of styles; a coherent set of multiple influences. At the same time, the compositions here can be perceived as more asserted, more aggressive, more “self-proclaimed”. Finally, this time, the variety of styles goes hand in hand with an obvious widening of the sound palette, something that was less developed in the first opus. On top of a traditional rhythm section, four different guitars, among which a fretless one, were used, also including guitar-synthesizer techniques. Didier Verna is hereby paying tribute to the “pioneers of sound” that affected his musical path, starting with the musicians of Uzeb, Michael Brecker and his EWI, Pat Metheny and his GR-300, John McLaughlin, and all those who saw beyond the natural abilities of their respective instruments...

TRIBUNE2LARTISTE

- « Coup de coeur » of french magazine Tribune2Lartiste



par Jean-Marc Gélin

Didier Verna? Unknown. A computer scientist I think. As well as a researcher it seems.

Yes, that's it. Not someone used to evolve in the regular, known and renown Jazz spheres. Except that, after moving from Bordeaux to Paris at 21, he could quickly exercise his 16 years of conservatory, and above all, his incredible talent. It is as a singer that he first distinguished himself in Paris, when this long-time fan of Bobby Mc Ferrin's met Thierry Lalo and joined the Voice Messengers, a band well known for the required level of its recruitment.

Talking about this polyinstrumentist musician's influences, we can hear that of very classical guitarists (Wes Montgomery for instance), but also Pat Metheny or the likes of Mike Stern and all those who plot around the jazz-rock boundaries. We can also hear some connivance with John Scofield from whom he likes the reverb game.

From his past as a singer, Didier Verna kept a true sense of melody and a very natural lyricism which could almost make him pose as a six strings singer. It also happens that this gentleman compose magnificently and plays with this sort of obviousness that makes the music flow naturally from him, with grace.

Didier Verna has practically everything for himself. As well as being an extremely nice and uncomplicated guy, he also possesses a bluffless mastery of his Jazz, inside and out, which he displays with the elegance of the modest.

In this album, Didier Verna is backed up by a wild unit, an infernal trio which has been touring together for ages (Eptein - Zelnik - Georgelet; the « Autour de Minuit » jam's old timers still remember this) and which works perfectly.

Didier Verna's album, out there for a year now, is still somewhat confidential because the man does not benefit from an agent or any big marketing machinery. Believe me however when I say that you should definitely rush to this CD which does a world of good.

In any case, I come back to it on a regular basis. In fact, I listen to it in a loop.

Pure joy.

TRIBUNE₂LARTISTE

by Jean-Jacques Dikongué

It is not very often that, unless being faced with a pure race musician, since the very first notes, we are welcome by the fluidity of the playing, we are comfortably ventilated by some music, because it is not saturated. It is this strong feeling of well being that is brought to us by guitarist Didier Verna's album Roots & Leaves.

12 tracks (including an alternate solo take of the song Coconette), symbolizing the blooming of a guitarist already firmly anchored into his art.

An airy album, of a thrilling freshness, joyous, which ventilates all the subtlety of the playing and exhibits the good spirit of the musicians. While Didier Verna transports us with

the good quality of his playing, we feel compelled to mention his complicity with the excellent Laurent Epstein on piano; this complicity being cadenced by David Georgelet on drums, under the groove of Yoni Zelnik on the double bass.

Very very good 12 tracks album by Didier Verna. A genuine discovery!



by Chris Mosey

Parisian guitarist Didier Verna plays very much in the Pat Metheny tradition but with a sunny, melodic touch. His music is well thought out but never overly serious, with humor playing an important part in his compositions and improvisations.

Roots And Leaves, the title of this, his second album, was chosen with care. Verna says: "Roots are our foundation, our basis, our legacy and our culture... leaves are the multiple, blooming facets of our personality, our character and our uniqueness."

He names the Quebecois band Uzeb as one of his influences but is less reliant on synthesisers than they were. And he is far more down to earth—often downright funky—than another mentor, John McLaughlin.

Verna calls his quartet "@," insisting that it should be pronounced English-fashion as "at," even though his fellow countrymen prefer "aerobase" (the final "e" is optional).

The songs are all originals. "Old Times" is based on a former practice routine. It's a gently swinging piece with a nostalgic feel, featuring solos from the leader and pianist Laurent Epstein, known for his work with manouche jazz guitarist Patrick Saussois and New Jersey alto saxophonist Richie Cole, among many others.

It's followed by a more recent composition, the up tempo "Circulocentrique." Verna says of this one: "It turns around itself. It's the chicken and the egg, the dog biting its own tail." He establishes a solid groove with bassist Yoni Zelnik.

By contrast, the standout track, "Coconette," is a lovely, lilting, very folksy number that Verna sings to his daughter Coline at bedtime. It's reprised as a solo at close of play.

Verna has a real feel for the blues, typified by "Vert de Blues (Green Blues)." It's called this because, he says, "it's a blues that's not fully ripe." Its "unfinished" quality is its charm. It starts slowly, almost uncertainly, then builds, with some dazzling guitar runs before solos by Zelnik and Georgelet.

The waltz "Petite Mort (Little Death)" belies its rather ominous name, rivalling "Coconette" in terms of melody. Epstein is in fine form on this one.

"Minor Nuisance" and "YYAB (Yet Another Blues)" are jaunty toe-tappers, while "Maroc" is a more serious, impressionistic piece, inspired by a trip to the Draa Valley in Morocco.

A lot to listen to, but never hard work.



by Roger Farbey

Don't judge a book a book by its cover or a recording by its first track. "Old Times" is certainly that, a paean to the swinging age of the Quintet of the Hot Club of France and guitarist Didier Verna displays his considerable talent with a nimble solo, as do each of the other members of the quartet.

In the true tradition of Moby-Dick, "Circulocentrique" is something completely different. This is a tasteful funky blues workout, again with some gripping guitar. The elegant ballad "Coconette" has an engaging melody and shows that—as with all the selections on this disc—Verna is clearly capable of composing solid, memorable tunes.

"Hints, Tips, Tricks 'n Cheats" starts with collective improvisation but settles into something more organised and fast moving, with Verna displaying considerable skill on fretless guitar. "Vert de Blues" is a straight ahead rapid-fire track as is the subsequent track "Monday Morning" replete with a jaunty melody.

Proceedings slow down for the more reflective "Petite Mort," Yoni Zelnik contributing a fine bass solo and this pace paradoxically allows Verna's solo to make more impact. "Mister Crusoe" is an outing for Verna's guitar synthesizer with interesting results because he's not afraid to employ it in a more conventional way as opposed to attempting to extract the most unconventional sounds from the instrument, as seems to be the fashion with this instrument.

"Minor Nuisance" harks back to the swinging sound of "Old Times" and indeed its near-titled progenitor "Minor Swing," the standard by Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli. "Maroc" is a breezy composition in a moderate tempo and again Verna is heard soloing on guitar synthesizer.

As it says on the tin, "YYAB" is indeed yet another blues and gives both Verna and Laurent Epstein the opportunity for some satisfying solos. The final, bonus track, a reprise of "Coconette," reveals Verna in a totally new light, here playing unaccompanied acoustic guitar. A decidedly excellent, albeit short, track.



by Edward Blanco

French guitarist and composer Didier Verna delivers his second album as leader with the very audacious *Roots and Leaves* containing eleven original compositions ranging from contemporary traditional to funky, bluesy and even folksy at times. A classically-trained pianist who at age eleven moved to the guitar as his preferred instrument, employs the fretless and three other different guitars including a synthesizer to produce a variety of sounds that makes this album a pleasure to hear.

Inspired by the guitar-led Canadian jazz fusion group UZEB, Pat Metheny and John McLaughlin, the music of *Leaves*, in many ways, is a reflection of and pays tribute to, the different styles these multiple influences have had on the guitarist.

Joining Verna on this project are three of the most in-demand musicians from the Parisian jazz scene with pianist Laurent Epstein, bassist Yoni Zeinik and drummer David Georgelet forming the backbone of the leader's @-Quartet originally formed in 2006. Together the group lays down one formidable session of jazz worth repeated spins.

There are many impressive pieces including here among them, the opening and buoyant "Old Times," the blues-styled "Vert de Blues," the swinging "Monday Morning," the light balladic "Petite Mort" and the more reserved impressionistic "Maroc." Other notable stand out tunes not to be missed are two other bluesy-tinged tunes namely "Minor Nuisance" and "YYAB (Yet another Blues)" as well as the brief bonus track "Conconette" featuring the guitarist on an exquisite solo performance.

Parisian guitarist Didier Verna is a dynamic voice in the jazz world today and his impressive *Roots and Leaves* leaves little doubt that, with his talents as a composer and obvious mastery of the guitar, that this artist already has the firm roots and foundation from which to develop the international recognition he so well deserves.



@-quartet

Didier Verna @-quartet

With **Gilles Naturel** (contrabass), **Guillaume Naud** (piano) and **David Georgelet** (drums). Recorded by Dominique Samarcq at Sysmo Records Studio (Paris). Mixed by Jean Taxis and Didier Verna at Val d'Orge Studio (Épinay-sur-Orge). Masterized by David Achour and Didier Verna at Top Master Studio (Paris). Copyright © 2006 Didier Verna. Reference: DVL0206JZ. DVL Records. Copyright © 2015 Plaza Mayor Company Ltd.

The **@-quartet** (pronounce "at quartet") is the first album of an equally named band, created in 2006 by Didier Verna. This group constitutes a point of arrival as well as a point of departure in the guitarist's career.

A point of arrival because the repertoire entirely made up of original compositions of its leader, is like a summary of all the influences that affected his musical evolution until now (except for jazz-rock: that would be another band). One can find medium jazz, ballads, some very bop tunes, Brazilian colors, a touch of binary and some pieces heavily tinted with free-jazz. In other words, a sum of multiple influences. Some compositions are 15 years old while some others were written 3 weeks before the band was actually created.

A point of departure because one is more than the sum of his influences. The repertoire, although of various styles, remains coherent thanks to the guitarist's personality, very apparent both in composition and improvisation. By enrolling the best rhythm section one could possibly dream of, Didier Verna also wanted to let the music express itself, in some way: Imposing only very few things and letting each musician's personality blossom allows a music to emerge, that is not necessarily the one that was expected in the first place. Finally, the very "free" approach of some tunes produces some kind of spontaneous, instantaneous and collective musical composition, which constantly offers new perspectives of evolution.



- **Album of the week** on Radioio Jazz
- **Featured album** on Jazz Barrage
- French Jazz « **Coup de Coeur** » of magazine Longueur d'Ondes
- Congrats! Very very good album. I like it a lot – *Glenn Ferris*



by Martin Gladu

[...] In short, Verna is a force of nature. He has the technique and the talent to take it to another level...



by Mike Matheny

Quite impressive! Pretty good musicians with you too...



Nice example of autoproduction. [...] Supported notably by Gilles Naturel's double bass, Didier Verna plays indeed straight ahead Jazz clearly influenced by Pat Metheny from whom he has the roundness of sound and the limpidity of phrases.



by George W. Carroll

Talk about leaving an impression.....Didier Verna is a jazz guitarist dealing in melodic & harmonic invention. His Metheny-esque improvisational delivery is compromising, intellectual, non rigorous with a superb technique, connected with an extraordinary command of his music. In fact Verna's music is brilliantly interpreted & compelling in it's content. His music portrays images & sounds of his influences which have been by default..... quite positive!

CONTEMPORARY JAZZ

by John Luciano

@-Quartet (At Quartet) is a very promising debut recording from a part-time musician and self-professed UZEB fan. By day, Didier Verna is a computer researcher but he's left the computers and synths at the office and has delivered a very accessible acoustic album. @-Quartet is a great example of what contemporary jazz should be. It's certainly not smooth jazz. Although it's acoustic, I have a hard time defining it as straight ahead and that's the beauty of jazz, isn't it? These nine compositions are fresh, melodically challenging and engaging. Upon first listen a number of guitarists on the scene came to mind, but Didier definitely has his own voice. Rather than fall into the comparison trap, I'd ask you to take a chance on this very talented musician and make your own comparisons. Two tracks that really stood out for me are "Les Maleties," which took me back to early Spyro Gyra, circa Morning Dance-Catching The Sun, for the guitar piano interplay, and "Paris-Nice" which has a nice aggressive feel to it.



by Darryl Gregory

Didier Verna is in quartet mode with his new CD @-quartet. Verna steps out in front with his beautifully melodic guitar playing and leads his gang of four through nine tracks of seemingly effortless arrangements of original jazz. The difficulty lies in how to categorize his take on jazz. In the opening track, there is definitely a bossa feel, and yet we also have that feeling of West Coast smoothness in some tracks, and then there is the jumpy-intricate improvs of be-bop. Since I'm a big fan of eclecticism in art, I choose not to categorize, but for the sake of a review all I can say is get the CD and enjoy.

In true quartet fashion, the players each bring their unique voice to the group and something greater than the parts arises. Guillaume Naud's piano playing is in the right places and complimentary to Verna's melodic direction. Their interaction is evident throughout, but especially on track four, "Song for L." Gilles Naturel's bass walks and sings, and his time is right in the pocket. A good jazz drummer always amazes me. David Georgelet definitely has that amazement factor down, not because he is fancy or intricate, but because he plays like a vocalist - he knows how to make the kit sing and follow not only the rhythmic structure, but the melody line as well.

Only a part time musician (Verna's other gig is as a computer researcher) this CD definitely has a full time sound. You'd think that these guys have been on the road for years -- their sound is that tight and complimentary. Definitely a great addition to any jazz collection.



by a fan

This is a very good CD. The songs are original and good, and the musicianship outstanding. It is not overplayed, it is not underplayed, everything fits together well. [...] The sound is modern but not too abstract, very listenable and flowing, it is more straight-ahead than fusion. The solos are terrific, Verna is an outstanding jazz guitarist. His tone/sound is more like Metheny than Scofield, but his lines are his own. I'm looking forward to his next CD.

Press Quotes and Interviews

Multimedia

Underlined links clickable in the PDF.

Interviews (French)

- [Jazz Box](#) (Jacques Thévenet et Jean-Philippe Doret) second interview for the release of « Roots and Leaves »
- [Jazz Actu](#) (Bob Garcia) interview for the release of « Roots and Leaves »
- [Jazz Box](#) (Jacques Thévenet et Jean-Marc Gélín) interview for the release of « Roots and Leaves »
- [Jazz Box](#) (Jean-Marc Gélín) interview for the release of « @-quartet »

Autres

- The@-quartet [live at the M8](#) (Mainz, Germany)

Press Quotes

A six strings singer. — *Jean-Marc Gélín / Les Dernières Nouvelles du Jazz*

I hear a well articulated playing, in the tradition, masterized. — *Alex Duthil / Jazzman*

A dynamic voice in the Jazz world today. — *Edward Blanco / All About Jazz*

Didier Verna plays very much in the Pat Metheny tradition but with a sunny, melodic touch. — *Chris Mosey / All About Jazz*

Didier Verna plays straight ahead Jazz, clearly influenced by Pat Metheny from whom he has the roundness of sound and the limpity of phrases. — *Citizen Jazz*

Didier Verna is a Jazz guitarist dealing in melodic and harmonic invention. His Metheny-esque improvisational delivery is compromising, non rigorous with a superb technique. — *Georges W. Carroll / EJazzNews*

Fresh, melodically challenging and engaging. — *John Luciano / Contemporary Jazz*

A force of nature. — *Martin Gladu / All About Jazz*

In the early Scofield Department. — *Fiona Ord-Shrimpton / All About Jazz*

Some beautiful Jazz guitar. — *Antoine Hervé*

Super sound, beautiful compositions. — *Ludovic de Preissac*

You have a neat touch and a very limpid playing. — *Sébastien Charlier*

I really like your playing and above all its fluidity, one essential quality, for me, in music. — *Benoît Sauvé*

Your playing reminds me of Jimmy Raney's which I love for its fluidity and its obviousness. — *Jean-Michel Kajdan*

I think that this is great quality jazz music. — *Yves Carbonne*



All About Jazz Take 5 Interview

Which instrument(s) are you playing?

My main instrument is the guitar (although that's already a plural; see my answer on « sound and approach to music » below). I also play some drums, percussions and vocals.

Who are you teachers and/or influences?

I've had and continue to have numerous influences, but to name the most important ones: Pat Metheny, Mike Stern, John Scofield, Bobby McFerrin, Michael Brecker, Chick Corea, Uzeb, Joe Zawinul, Tribal Tech, the Yellow Jacquets...

When did you realize you wanted to be a musician?

I discovered Jazz and improvisation, at the age of 15. I had been learning music theory and various instruments for quite some time, but while I knew I loved music already, I also felt that something was wrong.

In fact, I couldn't see the point in learning a tune, playing it, and then move on to the next. This just didn't make sense to me. But once I discovered improvisation, I suddenly realized that it was what I had been looking for: music as an everlasting personal development path, experiment and game. Music as a lifetime of research and evolution. Music as a language in perpetual motion. It's all about Jazz and Jazz is all about that: it's a philosophy of music rather than a particular musical genre.

What is your sound and approach to music?

I'm a guitar player not because I love the guitar, but because when I discovered Jazz and improvisation and fell in love with it, I was learning the guitar. Before that, I had been learning drums and piano and I might have been stuck with these, had I discovered Jazz earlier.

The result is that I've never actually been in love with my instrument. Some guitarists are in love with their guitar, or a particular genre/sound of guitar. I'm not. Sometimes, I even regret not being a drummer (because I think rhythm is more important than harmony), a pianist (for their ability to support harmonically any possible improvised idea in real time),

or even a sax player (for this incredible physical connection that you have with a wind instrument).

As a consequence, I try to explore all aspects the guitar can offer, in terms of techniques, sounds, genres, and even beyond the instrument itself. I use seven different guitars, including an electric sitar and a fretless guitar, nylon or steel strings, I drive synthesizers from my guitars (yes, I was a huge fan of Uzeb from day 1!), I do some guitar slapping like bassists would do *etc.*

Perhaps being some kind of a « frustrated » guitar player is also at the origin of my work as an *a capella* singer (heavily influenced by Bobby McFerrin). In a way, I've always felt that no instrument will ever be capable of connecting you to your own music as directly as the voice can do.

What is your teaching approach?

To me, academic music teaching (especially in French conservatories) is doing it all wrong. Consider that in the 21st century, with all the background in pedagogy that we have, conservatory students still need to follow at least a one year cursus of music theory prior to even touching an instrument. This doesn't make any sense. Do you learn grammar before you actually talk?!

To me, the key point is this: *music is a natural language* and should be thought of as such. Look at children. They learn how to speak because they have things to say, and they know how to speak long before they actually learn how to read or write, let alone grammatical knowledge. But I don't want to say too much here because I have written a fairly detailed blog about this, so I'd rather point you to it: <http://www.didierverna.com/blog/index.php?opost/en/2011/09/23/The-%28natural%29-Language-of-Improvisation>.

What is your dream band?

I cannot really answer this question because the answer would be different every day, or maybe different for almost every composition I wrote. I can however give you an example of a feeling that I have, just now... Right after releasing my second album as a leader (« Roots and Leaves »), I feel that I will never be able to play Mister Crusoé properly, and that this tune should really be played by the Parallel Realities quartet instead!!

Give us a road story: your best or worst experience.

Have you ever played at a party where nobody listens to you, where everyone is drunk at 22:00 and where people start throwing raw chicken pieces at each other at 23:00? I have.

What is your favorite venue?

Interestingly enough, it's easier to remember the worst venues than the best ones! But I guess I like all places for different reasons. I love the promiscuity of night clubs that give

you a special connection with the audience. I also love playing in theaters for the space and amplitude it gives to the music.

Your favorite recording in your discography and why?

Always favor the last one. And then, be sure to move on to the next!

What do you think is the most important thing you are contributing musically?

Anything I can think of sounds pretty pretentious or arrogant to my own ears, so I'd rather not say, or say, I contribute mostly to my personal development. The key to any art form is to do it for yourself before anything else. The rest is beyond your control anyway. I do intend on developing more fretless guitar playing and synth-access though...

Tell us something not readily known about you.

Did you know that apart from being a musician, I'm also a part time assistant professor in Computer Science? I could never make a decision as to my professional career, so I decided to not choose one, and remain a part-time this / part-time that. Not an easy life, but no life is easy I guess... On that matter (the relation between Science and Music, you may be interested in reading this blog entry: <http://www.didierverna.com/blog/index.php?post/2007/04/03/Lisp-Jazz-Aikido>

What was the first jazz album you bought?

« The Kid » by Didier Lockwood if I remember correctly. The fact that we have the same first name is pure coincidence. It also was my very first contact with Jazz, Fusion, and probably the trigger that made me stick to guitar, Jazz, and improvisation.

What music you are listening to these days?

- Chick Corea: the Vigil
- Moutin Factory Quintet: Lucky People
- Sakesho: We Want You to Say
- John McLaughlin: Floating Point
- Didier Verna: Roots and Leaves... of course! (actually, I don't like to listen to myself...)

What would be your desert Island picks?

I cannot answer this question in terms of albums, because again, the answer would change every day. I can however answer in terms of tunes:

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- All fast blues and anatoles basically drive me crazy (e.g. Suspone by Michael Brecker and Bait Tone Blues by Mike Stern)
 - Third Wind by the Pat Metheny Group, and most of the Brazilian Suite
 - Tumbleweed by Michael Brecker
 - Solar and Cantaloupe Island by Parallel Realities (live)
 - Spider, Loose, Not Even the Shadow of a Tail of a Lizard and 60 Rue des Lombards by Uzeb (World Tour 90)
 - Pretty much every tune on Tribal Tech's Primal Tracks
 - Raju, Inside Out and 14U by John McLaughlin
 - Dive, by Mike Stern

How would you describe the state of jazz today?

I don't understand the question. Seriously, because Jazz is a research process, it can never die, so it's alive and kicking, almost by definition. Of course, there are things that I like more or less in its current state, but just about as everybody.

What are some of the essential requirements to keep jazz alive and growing?

Nothing. Seriously. See my answer to the previous question and the blog entry that I mentioned above. There will always be curious musicians, open minds, just because it's in Human nature. So just as there will always be scientific research, there will always be musical research, and *that*, is Jazz.

What is in the near future?

Apart from some gigs with the @-quartet for the release of the new album, I want to re-develop my solo, *a cappella*, Bobby McFerrin-like performances, I would like to play Jazz-Rock / Fusion again, I want to develop a repertoire of Caribbean music. I have another very special project in the oven, but it's still a secret... On a shorter term, I'm working on a guitar/voice duet with a repertoire of bossa-nova and Jazz standards.

What is your greatest fear when you perform?

Not being up to the expectations of the audience, and losing electric power in the middle of a tune (it has already happened to me)!

What song would you like played at your funeral?

I don't want a funeral, so I want Crystal Silence :-)

What is your favorite song to whistle or sing in the shower?

Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise (the Dave Weckl version) or One Liners (Mike Stern) but they really are the same song.

And by Day?

The same I guess. Boy, now that I think about it, it really is a sticky one...

If you weren't a jazz musician, what would you be?

In fact, I've already answered that question earlier, because I'm already something(s) else, but I would also have liked to be an actor (I did some theater acting), a humorist (I have a sense of humour), or an Aikido teacher (I do have a teaching certificate).

Thanks!



Krinein « @-quartet » Interview

For the release of his first album as a leader, Jazz guitarist and composer Didier Verna offers us a rich and wide musical jaunt, demonstrating that Jazz knows no bounds: from Latin ambiances to ballads, from medium tempo to bop rhythm, from a more electric sound to passing nods to free-jazz, in all cases the music is melodic and will please a very wide audience... definitely a guitarist worth keeping an eye on. We have met him.

Krinein: First of all, how do you pronounce the title of the album?

Didier Verna: This is also the name of the band. The "@" character should be pronounced "at", just as in email addresses. This is a passing reference to computer science: the title of the album simply means "Didier Verna in quartet".

But the "@" is also as in "@coustic" (laughs). The repertoire of this band is indeed almost exclusively acoustic Jazz. I have another project in mind, which would rather be focused on Jazz-Rock, so more electric. The band's name would probably be "e-something"...

Isn't 36 a bit old for a fist album, even as a leader?

I don't ask myself such questions. I do things at my own rhythm, when I feel the need to, that's all; I'm never in a hurry. There are real answers to this question though.

First, I'm only a part-time musician. Consequently, my career evolves at a limited speed.

Next, Jazz is a very demanding art: it requires a great maturity and a very strong instrumental mastering. So it's not uncommon to see Jazz artists emerge late in life.

Besides, in general, I'm a bit too aware of my own value. I could probably have recorded this album a few years back, but for a very long time, I've been thinking "what's the point in making a CD when there are so many musicians far more interesting than me out there". It's clear that with such a reasoning, you never get anywhere! But I can't help myself, I'm like that. It's very difficult for me to publicly release anything, before it's absolutely perfect, which of course never happens!

Actually, two particular events contributed greatly to trigger this project. The first one is a chat with Antoine Hervé who once said to me "if you want to be successful in this

profession, you have to be a little bit irresponsible". What he meant is that you can't become famous if you're too modest and humble ! This is logical if you think about it: if a product is cheap, you get suspicious because you think it must not be a very good one. So if you want people to find you interesting, you've got to have enough self-esteem and pretension. The second factor is that more and more people, while listening to my music, were saying "Oh yes, that's your style all right". From this moment on, I gradually let myself be convinced that I indeed had something personal to express, and that it was time to let people know...

In any case, humility will always be something very important to me, and I hope this shows through my music.

Do you find it easy to handle two different professions in parallel?

You mean three? (laughs) These days, I consider that being a father is a full-time job! Actually, I find this quite hard. Often, you get the feeling that you don't really belong anywhere. More precisely, you belong to two very different communities, but not completely to any of them. Besides, I get the feeling that being a researcher and an artist requires activating the same brain cells, so there are often conflicts for accessing them!

On the other hand, I ended up realizing that my life is not so different from that of some fully professional Jazz musicians: many of them can't manage to make a living with their music alone. So they also teach (I'm not saying that teaching is only good for getting money!). Consequently, the only real difference between them and me is that their field of teaching is also music, whereas mine is computer science. As for the rest, being a teacher allows you to live, and also to play at a loss...

There are very different sounds, ambiances, and rhythms on this album. Is there any homogeneity at all, is there a clue?

Good question! An album tells a story, just like a book. But when you read a novel, you're expecting different emotions: love, beauty, pain, distress, and developments. So why should a musical story be different? Platitude and monotony are boring, whatever their means of expression. By the way, this is a general shortcoming of the FM wavelength. Many popular artists have an idea and make a CD (sometimes a whole career) out of it, whereas there's actually room for one or two songs maximum. When you listen to their music, you get the feeling that it's always the same, and that's precisely the truth.

This album tells a story which is, as I say in the booklet, the story of my musical journey until now. That's the clue. As in a book, there are very different ambiances, because my influences are very wide and distinct, but each song is a "topic" on which I speak with my own words, at the level of composition as well as improvisation. Whatever the subject, this is one precise personality that is expressing, and that, is the homogeneity of the album.

In addition, the personality of the other musicians, and the "soul" they bring to the music is not to be forgotten. As I also say in the booklet, it's only by giving them a complete

freedom of expression on my compositions that music becomes a collective process. This is the essence of Jazz.

What is Jazz?

Very difficult question! There are people who think this is simply a musical style: the "chabada" of the drums, the walking bass and so on. There are also people who think that Jazz died in the 50's and for whom the electric period of Miles Davis is an abomination. To make a long story short, there's no real definition. But I'll give you mine anyway!

Jazz is not a style of music, but a philosophy, a way to envision all styles of music. Michel Petrucciani once said "Jazz is a music of thieves", and he was right! A Jazz musician, like a researcher, is fundamentally curious. He's interested in everything he can hear, and tries to appropriate all the ideas he's exposed to by adapting them to his own personality. This is a process that happens in composition as well as in improvisation. Improvisation is, to me, the key factor that unifies all musical styles in Jazz.

There is this one thing I love to do, when asked what Jazz is. I take people home, have them listen to some precisely chosen excerpts from my record collection, and watch their face go through all the colors of the rainbow under the weight of incomprehension. I could play some Steve Coleman, and you would think it's rap. I could play some Tribal Tech and you would think it's very enraged hard-rock. I could play some Pat Metheny and you would hear world-music. And the story goes on and on... So, how is it possible that a Jazz passionate would listen to, and a fortiori play things so different from each other? Because all those musicians are actually doing the same thing: they explore music, whatever the style, as a true natural language; they constantly try to extend their knowledge and culture through new ideas to express, new vocabulary to manipulate.

There are also two other aspects that I consider essential in the practice of Jazz: taste for "risky business" and "play" as in playing a game. Being in a state of research means that you can potentially fail. When taking new directions in an improvisation, you never really know where you're going, and that's assuming you're going anywhere at all, so you can perfectly fall down and break your neck. But that's not important. It's part of the game, and the audience knows it. The other thing is that not only a Jazz musician takes risks, but he actually likes it. In order to explore new ideas, you've got to break the rules first. A Jazz musician basically loves to break rules and plays with it. It's a shame that we have a tendency to forget that to play music and to play a game is actually the same verb. A Jazz musician plays music as much as he plays with the music.

There does not seem to be many Jazz musicians in the auto-production sphere.

That is correct, but I don't think there's anything specific to Jazz in that fact. Rather, I think that the auto-production landscape simply reflects the respective notoriety of the different musical styles. Jazz has always been a bit (too) confidential.

Why making the choice of auto-production?

This is hardly a choice, even though it may become one in the future. If you want to make a name in this profession, there are several possibilities. The first one is to begin early, make some studies in a Jazz school, or at least meet a few important people and have yourself noticed by those people. This could have happened to me when I was living in Bordeaux, but I moved to Paris for my scientific studies, and I knew nobody there.

The second possibility is to try and attend all possible jam sessions in every single club you know where you live. This, you can try when you don't have to get up early every morning, which unfortunately has never been my case.

Finally, auto-production was the best solution left for me. To make a CD before being well known is perhaps the opposite of what common sense would tell, but it has its advantages: you present yourself with a product of professional quality, just as if you were in the business for quite some time. As a consequence, people do pay attention to you.

Auto-production also has the advantage of granting you a relatively cheap access to notoriety. In the traditional circuit, people suffer from what computer scientists would call a "bootstrap" problem: in order to play often and make recordings, you have to be famous. But in order to be famous, you have to play often and make recordings. One has to realize that in France for instance, in order to get subsidized as a young artist from organizations like SACEM, SDRM, ADAMI etc, it is required that you already have a producer, a label, a distributor, in other words, you should be already in the circuit, to the point that you wouldn't need financial help anymore! Of course, I'm exaggerating, but that's the idea. On the contrary, there are associations or organization that help auto-produced artists sell their CDs on-line for example. There are also numerous web radios that are willing to give a hand to independent artists by airing their music. These all are alternate yet efficient ways to spread your music out.

Another pleasant thing with auto-production is that it allows you to sell your music at a reasonable price. The price you pay a CD in a store is way to high in my opinion. By avoiding all the intermediates that withhold a percentage on the sales of your product, you can offer your CD at a lower price while earning as much or even more money per CD sold.

If you go even further, some great Jazz artists like Steve Coleman once decided that they were earning enough money with the gigs, and simply put all their former records available for download, free of charge. If only I could afford to do the same one day!

Who would you advise to listen to your album?

Everybody! Jazz amateurs of course, but also anybody else. Since the album is out, many people I know mentioned their surprise because they were expecting complicated, hermetic music, and eventually found it very melodic and accessible. For me, it's a victory.

Carla Bley once said "music should be simple, complex and natural". I would say that Jazz can be complex and understandable at the same time. This is a tricky exercise, which resembles scientific vulgarization a bit. How do you speak of complex things in simple terms? Music should be rich to be interesting to play (to me at least), otherwise, you get bored. Just like it is boring to listen to somebody only saying banalities. But this doesn't mean that you can only speak to an expert audience.

Being able to reconcile richness and apparent simplicity is very gratifying because at the same time, you please experts and you satisfy a wider audience... with the crazy hope to convert them for good of course!

Thank you!