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Jürgen Friedrich: **Monosuite** for String Orchestra and Improvisers

Release: June 2012

Pirouet Records · PIT3064

Jürgen Friedrich composer, conductor

Hayden Chisholm alto saxophone

Achim Kaufmann piano

John Hébert bass

John Hollenbeck drums

Sequenza String Orchestra

1st violin: Gerdur Gunnarsdóttir, Constanze Sannemüller, Elias Schödel, Adrian Bleyer, Kira Kohlmann, Christine Rox

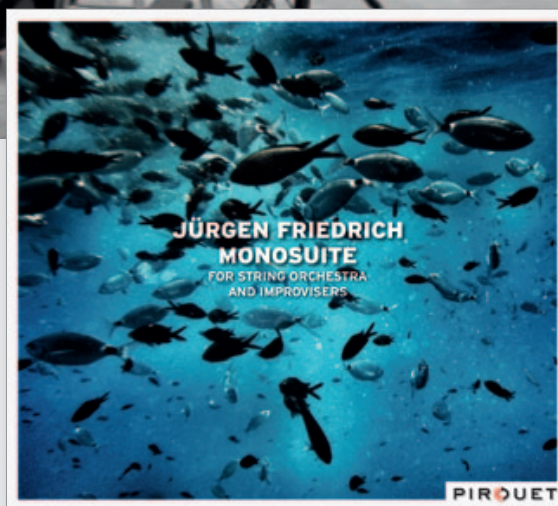
2nd violin: Irmgard Zavelberg, Mirjam Steymans, Alwin Moser, Naomi Binder, Adi Czeige

viola: Marla Hansen, Pauline Moser, Yodfat Miron, Andrea Sanz-Vela, Valentin Alexandru

cello: Ulrike Zavelberg, Teemu Myöhänen, Nil Kocamangil, Marnix Möhring

bass: Axel Ruge, Matan Gurevitz

1. Waves 2:02 2. Breaks 2:16 3. Fiddlesticks 2:31
4. Blossom 3:55 5. Low Tide 2:03 6. Loops 12:13 7. Ritual 7:02
8. Chacaglja 9:53 9. Weave 7:11

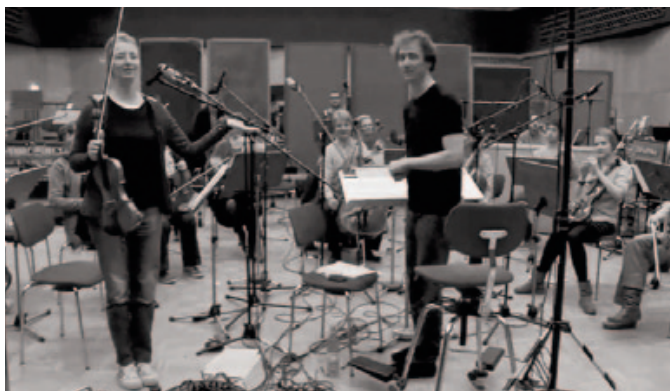


Press release
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Waves and the enchantment of nuanced color

Captivating streams of sound—Jürgen Friedrich's *Monosuite* for string orchestra, featuring four masterful improvisers—seldom is music so accessible and complex at the same time.

Strings never sounded like this before. Cologne jazz musician Jürgen Friedrich brings them to dancing. Or even better—they ride on silken waves of sound. The CD begins with the delicately moving, organically flowing sounds of a string ensemble—tones that spill out into a strong-streaming, clear river. Other instruments merge into the flow: alto saxophone, piano, bass, and drums. The sounds are transformed into a special sort of magic in which the listener is caught up in a maelstrom of unanticipated beauty. This is music for a twentytwo-piece string orchestra and four renowned jazz soloists. And something else deserves attention: Jürgen Friedrich, who is an outstanding jazz pianist, has no role as a soloist—rather as composer, musical director, and conductor. Four soloists are embedded in concertmistress Gerdur Gunnarsdottir's specially selected Sequenza String Orchestra: saxophonist Hayden Chisholm, Pianist Achim Kaufmann, bassist John Hébert and drummer John Hollenbeck. This fascinating, iridescent work is called *Monosuite*.

Jürgen Friedrich was born in 1970 in the town of Braunschweig, Germany. He is a musician who can be counted on for the unexpected sound, for music of the highest quality. In his previous Pirouet CD from 2009, *Pollock*, Friedrich along with world-class bassist John Hébert and drummer Tony Moreno played off the impressions garnered from American abstract expressionist painter Jackson Pollock's 'drip paintings'. The album won praise from both the

German and the international press: "...a sensual, complex experience..." was celebrated, one in which "...tones drip, colors mix and meld...", and the music flows. It was certified as "...the art of painting in sound using the most miraculous colors." One critic raved about the "...coherent textures, applied through the last tone...", another stated categorically, "You absolutely want to hear more." One might suppose that such comments were about *Mono-suite*—but they all refer to *Pollock*. Not only Jürgen Friedrich has attracted attention as the essential part of a trio; he has also caught the jazz world's attention as composer for both small and large ensembles. In 1997 he was the first European to win the USA's prestigious Gil Evans Award for Jazz Composition. More followed, including twice winning the Julius Hemphill Composition Award given by the Jazz Composer's Alliance, an organization that was grounded in the USA in 1985. Friedrich is also in charge of master studies in composition and arrangement at the Mannheim University of Music and the Performing Arts. Since 2006 he has taught in Mannheim as a professor.

Jürgen Friedrich is an outstanding pianist as well as the creator of unusual musical worlds. Thus this piece, which was supported by the North Rhine-Westphalia Art Foundation and the music initiative of the German Cultural Foundation, was a logical development of the artist's. Friedrich commented concerning the genesis of the piece; "It all started with waves. I went from flowing water out into a wave, ▶



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► layering the strings one on top of the other. After this I just couldn't stop; I conceptualized nine sections, built soundscapes and textures, sought out tonal material and meters, tried out new concepts, until I was finished. I started out with only a single idea and wanted the resultant material to always illuminate from a single beam—unadorned, single-color, mono.”

So much for what the composer has to say about his compositions. And about the title *Monosuite*; the words unadorned, single-color, mono are purposeful exaggerations—the suite is not as unadorned and monochromatic as one might suppose from the description. The piece is approximately 50 minutes in length, and it evolves through a lot of nuances as it decides on a basic color. And there is complexity in its unadorned simplicity. Friedrich has limited the material, but in the process, his work is painstakingly subtle as he places diverse tonal layers one on top of the other. Thus *Monosuite* is a sort of musical wolf in sheep's clothing; as high art on a multiplicity of levels, it purposefully comes across as basic and unpretentious.

The resulting sounds are remarkably accessible. The suite has a certain something that heads the listeners' way on the first hearing, enfolding them in a sense of warmth—there is a thrilling ambience of “beautiful” sounds, also in a completely naïve sense. Thus Friedrich is able to sidestep something that has made combining strings and jazz soloists in sophisticated jazz compositions hard to stomach: the all-too-high aspirations of so many of the works of the “Third Stream” movement, which was launched at the end of the 1950's. The movement attempted to combine jazz and modern classical music, to form a new, “third stream” of music. Jürgen Friedrich, however, imposes no programmatic ambition as a central focal point. Rather, there is quite simply a passion—as indicated by his exclamation, “after this I just couldn't stop”. And this passion is not only palpable—it is quickly conveyed to the listener.

Jürgen Friedrich has named a wide variety of artists as having influenced the suite. Painter Mark Rothko stands in the first row of influences with his “color field paintings” in which large-format canvases are recovered with fascinating blocks of one or more contrasting, yet complementary colors seemingly radiating against one another. With Rothko, the respective colors were the themes of the paintings. And this is also the case in “Monosuite”: a particular base-color or base-voice is the theme of the whole suite. Or, as Jürgen Friedrich puts it, “as plain and simple as the individual colors might seem, in their detail, they are actually complex: layers, polyphonic textures, superimpositions, interferences.”

When Friedrich speaks of important influences on the suite, he also highlights several musicians. There is the American composer John Adams; in his compositions, Adams has refined and further developed the tonalities within the repetitive structure of minimal music. Then there is jazz saxophonist Steve Coleman, who in the 1980's set new criteria for improvisation with his “M-Base” collective, for example, by using non-Western rhythmic and melodic concepts. In addition, the name of Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) surfaces, a composer and organist who carried out scrupulously precise studies of birdsong. These studies had a major influence on his compositions, their consequent tonalities, and their universal association with color. And finally, Friedrich mentions the Aka Pygmies from Central Africa, an indigenous people who sing an exciting music containing extremely intricate rhythmic motifs—music that the contemporary classical composer György Ligeti termed “higher mathematics”. Transmitting the traditions over thousands of years of folk memory, the Aka have uniquely added to the simple and the complex.

But that's not all! There is another important influence—and it is out of the realm of the spectacular. Here the name Laird Hamilton pops up. The 48 year old American has ►



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► surfed on waves that were over 72 feet (22 meters) high and rolled in at a speed of up to 50 miles per hour (80 KPH). At any rate, such extremes don't occur in the "Monosuite". Rather, the similarity between Friedrich and Laird Hamilton has to do with impressions; Hamilton makes the difficult look easy, and Friedrich's music sounds simple, but in the end it is anything but.

In nine movements, displaying names like *Waves*, *Break Loops* and *Ritual*, Friedrich has provided his soloists and string orchestra with many areas in which to display their wares. It is exciting to listen to what the musicians are able to develop and express. The soloists and the orchestra are on an equal footing—that is, the strings don't just function as a "cushion" or support for the soloists; rather, they have their own special worth when it comes to tonal coloring as they meet in dialogue with the soloists. The string players come from various countries: 22 musicians eleven violins, five violas, four cellos, and two bass. For Friedrich, it was important that the string orchestra was composed of musicians that had, as he termed it, a "passion" for such a project. It was for this reason that he left the choice of players for the ensemble in the hands of violinist and concertmistress Gerdur Gunnarsdottir. Gunnarsdottir has had a lot of experience with both New Music and Jazz, as she has worked with the likes of clarinetist Claudio Puntin. Thus, the dialogue between strings and jazz soloists is lively, elastic, and distinctly organic.

Friedrich calls these jazz musicians his "dream soloists". The New Zealander saxophonist Hayden Chisholm currently calls both Cologne and Barcelona home. He is the master of a highly flexible tone that at times flirts with microtonal intervals, and he has an almost casual virtuoso playing style. Pianist Achim Kaufmann is originally from Aachen,

Germany, and now lives in Berlin. Like Friedrich, he is a virtuoso instrumentalist who plays the most complex structures with remarkable ease. He is also renowned as a composer. Louisianian John Hébert has chosen New York as his current home. His virtuoso bass play is known for its strong, deep, moving tones. Besides being the playing partner of Jürgen Friedrich's, he has worked with a wide array of established musicians. Among them are John Abercrombie, Paul Motian, and Greg Osby. Drummer John Hollenbeck calls both Berlin and New York home. As drummer, big band leader, and composer, he is another master of combining high art with accessible music.

There is an amazingly organic intertwining of the musical languages between these master musicians and the Sequenza String Orchestra. The string passages and the solo parts never stand apart; rather, they arise from and dissolve into one another—much as Mark Rothko's blocks of color. And thus, the strings and the soloists continually respond to each other—with motifs and voices, with nuanced colors. Some of the suite's movements are short, barely two minutes long. But then there are sections that are over nine, even over twelve minutes long—at the high-point of the sound wave, so to speak. It's thrilling to hear how in the longer sections the soloists execute their artistic ride on the crest of the musical wave—this is jazz improvisation as the art of discipline and inspiration. In the way that Jürgen understands it, "mono" can be extraordinarily sophisticated (subtle). It is a passionate desire to continually assimilate the tonal nuances of these Rothkoesque blocks of color. "I just couldn't stop;" that's what the composer says about *Monosuite*, and this could also apply to a lot of the listeners who play this CD. Go ahead—take a ride on these waves! They will carry you a long way. ■





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Jürgen Friedrich
on Monosuite

The Monosuite has nine sections and is about an hour long. I first developed the rough concept of the sections, and then later worked out the details. I already knew what I wanted in terms of dramaturgy and contrast, which influenced the construction of the individual sections. And this to a such a degree that there was no need to do much within the sections. On the contrary, I have chosen only one theme for each section, found very specific musical material—and then illuminated it from only one side (such as conditions, color fields, columns)—hence, mono.

Waves is played only by the string orchestra. It is inspired by the flow of water in waves, varying in speed and direction. *Breaks* rips open for the first soloist. Hayden plays a cadence and accompanies himself with a sruti box. In *Fiddlesticks*, John has a drum dialog with the orchestra, which has a folkloric sound to it. *Blossom* is certainly influenced by contemporary composition. For me, it feels as if you are losing the floor beneath your feet. It quickly goes from eerie to shrill, a springboard for all the soloists to enter into a collective improvisation, like an explosion in slow motion.

Low Tide is dedicated to all places and all situations that appear to have passed away, but then make something of a rebirth. Here the violins join in again with flageolet-like sounds. A flowing transition leads to *Loops*, where minimalist patterns played over a tricky groove intertwine and overlay themselves, until the strings soar into a collective theme interspersed with saxophone and piano solos. *Ritual* is initiated by a bass cadence from John. The strings play pizzicato here, inspired by the song and dance of the Aka Pygmies. *Chacaglia* is accompanied by a drum cadence that sounds as if there are several drummers playing at the same time. The title is a word-play on Chaconne and Passacaglia; a short theme is almost always present. Achim plays a piano solo over the whole thing, and segues with a cadence into the last section. *Weave* starts off with a single pulsating tone that wanders through the orchestra, can be interpreted this or that way metrically—interferences—then it rocks, the soloists come in once again, a lot of repetition, and a virtuoso violin phrase leads to the dynamic climax, a steep crash, and a short fade-out.



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Discography
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As a leader

- 2012** Jürgen Friedrich: **Monosuite** (Jürgen Friedrich, composer, conductor · Hayden Chisholm, as · Achim Kaufmann, p · John Hébert, b · John Hollenbeck dr · Sequenza String Orchestra) · **PIT3064**
- 2009** Jürgen Friedrich: **Pollock** (Jürgen Friedrich, p · John Hébert, b · Tony Moreno, dr) · **PIT3039**
- 2006** Jürgen Friedrich: **Seismo** (Jürgen Friedrich, p · John Hébert, b · Tony Moreno, dr) · **PIT3017**



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**Biography**
Jürgen Friedrich

Jürgen Friedrich was born in 1970 in Braunschweig, Germany, and grew up in the Northwestern German state of Lower Saxony. He currently lives in Cologne. Friedrich is known for his work as composer and leader of numerous groups, from small ensembles on through to large bands and orchestras. He studied piano and composition at the Cologne Music Conservatory. Friedrich recorded the first album under his own name with trumpeter Kenny Wheeler as guest. His piano trio with bassist John Hébert und drummer Tony Moreno has played together on both sides of the Atlantic for over 15 years. The trio has recorded five CDs up until this point, including two for Pirouet, *Seismo* from 2006 and *Pollock* from 2009. Friedrich's project Bits & Pieces combines interactive electronics and acoustic instruments employing composed and improvised music. Taking on the role of pianist and conductor with the Cologne Contemporary Jazz Orchestra (CCJO), Friedrich has presented a new program every month at the Cologne Stadtgarten over the last several years. Jürgen Friedrich is professor at the Mannheim

University of Music where he is in charge of master studies in composition and arrangement. He has played with the likes of David Liebman, Kenny Wheeler, and Nils Wogram. Friedrich has worked as a composer, arranger, and conductor with the Sunday Night Orchestra, Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra, NDR Big Band, HR Big Band, Bujazzo, the Würzburg Philharmonic Orchestra, and guest artists Michael Brecker and Lee Konitz. He has played concerts throughout Europe, Brazil, the USA, and in various festivals, including Moers, Trytone Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Enjoy Jazz Mannheim, the Cologne Music Triennial, and the Prague Piano Festival. Friedrich has received various national and international awards. In 1997, he was the first European to win the prestigious Gil Evans Award for Jazz Composition. In 1998 and again in 2002 he won the Julius Hempill composition Award. In 2000 he won the city of Cologne's Jazz/Improvised Music Award, and in 2001 and 2005 he received Lower Saxony's Jazz Prize.





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Biographies

Achim Kaufmann

Achim Kaufmann was born in 1962 in Aachen, Germany. After periods in Cologne and Amsterdam, he currently lives in Berlin. As one of the most important pianists in Europe, he is especially active in the intersection between jazz free-improvisation and New Music. Kaufmann's lyrical play is enriched through his careful use of prepared pianos as well as through electronic distortions. Kaufmann has been active in the music scene since the 1980's, and in 2001 was the winner of the SWR (South West Radio, Germany) Jazz Prize. Kaufmann has received broad recognition through his own duo, trio, and quartet projects, and work alongside such musicians as Tobias Delius, John Hollenbeck, Peggy Lee, Simon Nabatov, Jochen Rueckert, John Schröder, Henning Sieverts, Chris Speed, Tomáš Stanko, and Steve Swallow. Kaufman is constantly touring, playing clubs, concerts, and major festivals with his band projects together with clarinetist and alto saxophonist Michael Moore in their Duo Kaufmann/Moore, in the Trio Kamosc (Achim Kaufmann, Michael Moore, Dylan van der Schyff), and in Gueuledeloup Quartet (Achim Kaufmann, Michael Moore, John Hollenbeck, Henning Sieverts), as well as with the trio Kaufmann/Gratkowski/de Joode. "Tonally, possibly the most daring German jazz pianist" (Frankfurter Allgemeine Newspaper), Kaufmann has recorded two trio CDs with Valdi Kolli and Jim Black on Pirouet, *Kyrrill* (2008), and *Verivyr* (2011). bislang zwei CDs bei Pirouet.

John Hébert

John Hébert is originally from New Orleans, and currently lives in New York City. He is much in demand, and was named a "Rising Star on Acoustic Bass" bass three years in a row in Downbeat Magazine's critic's poll. He has worked with John Abercrombie, Paul Bley, Uri Caine, Marc Copland, Jürgen Friedrich, Mary Halvorson, Fred Hersch, Ingrid Laubrock, Lee Konitz, Paul Motian, Greg Osby, Maria Schneider, Bill Stewart, and Kenny Wheeler. Hébert and Tony Moreno have been part of Jürgen Friedrich's trio for over fifteen years. Over this time they have recorded five albums together.

Hayden Chisholm

Hayden Chisholm was born in 1975 near Auckland, and raised in New Plymouth, New Zealand. Today he calls Cologne and Barcelona home. He has visited and studied cultures worldwide, and thereby perfected his ability to play microtones on the saxophone. He became well-known in the 1990's, especially through his work with Nils Wogram's Root 70. His debut album, *Circe*, was released in 1996. He plays with the action artist Rebecca Horn and the computer musician Marcus Schmickler, directs his own festival in the Cologne Loft, and has formed his own music label. Chisholm has also worked as saxophonist, clarinetist, and keyboard player on albums by Burnt Friedman, Jaki Liebezeit, David Sylvian and Sebastian Gramss' Underkarl.

John Hollenbeck

John Hollenbeck calls both New York City and Berlin home. Through his experiences in jazz, world music, and modern compositions, he has developed a unique musical language that is both sophisticated and accessible. His impressive career encompasses not only various projects as drummer; he is also an accomplished composer and teaches drums and improvisation in Berlin. He has worked with the Village Vanguard Orchestra, Bob Brookmeyer, Meredith Monk, Cuong Vu and Pablo Ziegler. Hollenbeck has been awarded numerous prizes and fellowships, including the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship. Hollenbeck's own projects include the Claudia Quintet with Chris Speed, Matt Moran, Ted Reichman und Drew Gress, John Hollenbeck's Large Ensemble, as well as an experimental duo with Singer Theo Bleckmann.

Press release

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The press on **Jürgen Friedrich**



Jürgen Friedrich
Pollock (2009)

There's an alluring sense of discovery about the trio of Friedrich (piano), John Hébert (bass) and Tony Moreno (drums). The group, a serendipitous accident, continues its exciting chemistry on this second Pirouet album...

(Ray Comiskey, The Irish Times)

German pianist Juergen Friedrich tips a hat to the American painter with Pollock... Leaning toward the pensive and cerebral, *Pollock* is a gorgeously spare and spontaneous work. (Dan McClenaghan, All About Jazz)

The trio has a way of playing that gets to the heart or crux of the matter... Engineer Jason Seizer has done a masterful job capturing all of the rhythmic ticks, keyboard tics, and sensitivity inherent to this project's material.

(Doug Simpson, Audiophile Audition)



Jürgen Friedrich
Seismo (2006)

It is fabulous what the pianist Jürgen Friedrich achieves on this Trio-CD. (...) *Seismo* is an almost painfully sensitive meeting, with indications being sufficient on many occasions in order to disclose fragile beauty which is possible by a combination of a piano, drums and bass. (Jazzthing, Germany)

The communicative mood, permanent color changes, waiting and starting off, combining and rejecting, continuous interchange and an unendingly deep harmony can be heard long after the end of the CD, however. A tremendous disk! ...

(Werner Stiefele - Rondo Magazin, Germany)





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Monosuite—that's what this fascinating work with its sparkling, shimmering sounds is called—music that bursts out in a powerful, clear tonal stream. The listener is immediately pulled into a maelstrom of undiscovered beauty. This is music for a 22 piece string orchestra and four masterful soloists from the contemporary world of jazz. These great musicians interact with the Sequenza String Orchestra in lively, elastic, and amazingly organic piece of jazz artistry—inspired music played with creative discipline.



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