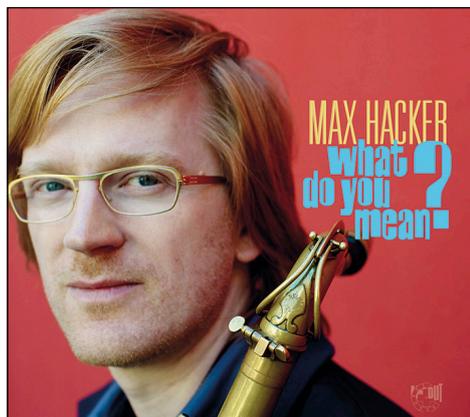




PRESS RELEASE



MAX HACKER WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IOR CD 77127-2



1. Conclusion
2. What Do You Mean?
3. After The Rain
4. Le Coucou
5. Equinox

6. Dear Lord
7. That's Another Story
8. Touching Skin
9. Fifth House

Max Hacker - tenor sax, bass clarinet, alto flute
Lars Gühlcke - bass
Roland Schneider - drums

MAX HACKER WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

(IN + OUT Records)

What Do You Mean is the third album by Max Hacker, a Berlin-born, New York City-inspired reeds player, composer and bandleader. The title is perhaps an appropriate or even inevitable question to pose to a still-young musician regarding such maturely accomplished, entirely beautiful sound. But first one should listen.

Hacker, along with drummer Roland Schneider and bassist Lars Gühlcke in what he calls his "stem cell" trio, takes the repertoire and approaches of tenor saxophonists John Coltrane and Joe Henderson, especially, as reference points for appealingly spontaneous collective creativity. Recorded in the best of circumstances at the superbly designed Radio Berlin Brandenburg studio and completed without overdubs, edits or unusual processing, What Do You Mean is a glowing example of what musicians can create when listening intently to one another, shaping expression as if of one mind.

For examples from Hacker's original compositions, hear the trio pivot seamlessly from the rubato introduction of "Conclusion" to an evenly distributed, very deep sense of swing. The three men are in extraordinary agreement on the syncopated phrasing of "What Do You Mean" and handle the tricky, broken-time theme of "Le Coucou" with ease. They take "That's Another Story" at a brisk tempo without any sense of pressure. "Touching Skin," on which Hacker plays bass clarinet, could hardly be more intimate.

Furthermore: Daring as it is to delving into compositions by John Coltrane, the trio earns its right to do so by delivering luscious renditions that are reverent towards the originals yet personalize them. In "After the Rain," Max uses his bass clarinet to etch a soundscape that may seem freshly drenched, drying as Lars and Roland become increasingly active and the sun seems to rise. They treat "Equinox" to an exquisitely slow 5/4 tempo, Max's alto flute stating the melody and expanding on it with sensuous feeling that turns marvelous soft. Their version of Trane's "Dear Lord" is also exemplary, with Max evoking a wondrous sense of acceptance and devotion, if not explicit spirituality, on his tenor sax.

"That song really touches me," Hacker says, adding he has "not the slightest religious inclination. I hoped it would be a little more raw or less sweet without a chordal instrument." Mission accomplished.

Although every moment of every track on What Do You Mean rings true as the trio's very own, one might still wonder about the affinity of any instrumentalists outside the African-American lineage, its time or place, for this music. Where does the trio's preternatural calm come from? Do the songs they've inscribed here bear the same or rather different connotations as in their initial formulations some 50 years ago? Prior to "What do you mean" should we question "How did this happen"?

Hacker was born in the early '70s in West Berlin. His parents are visual artists. The apartment he grew up in was also his father's studio and gallery. Max recalls people coming by at all times, talking about culture and politics. Music didn't run in the family, but his parents were supportive of his creative attempts. "I benefitted a lot from the fact that as a kid everyone around me was creative on a day-to-day basis, he says. "Also, artists then were very political, and it showed."

Max became interested by jazz and the sax in his German/American high school. At age 16 he traveled alone -- his parents sent him! -- to the U.S. to research colleges. "After some weeks in Boston I had ten days in New York and boom! I knew this was the place I wanted to be the rest of my life!"

That course wasn't quite set in stone, but enrolled in Manhattan's New School Jazz program, Hacker studied with masters including guitarist Jim Hall, bassists Reggie Workman and Buster Williams, and pianist Richie Beirach. The milieu felt natural to him, though he says he wasn't a quick study. "Maybe I'm aware of more things in this music, which makes my comprehension of it a little slower. Luckily my learning process hasn't stopped. I play a lot, both jazz and -- mainly out of necessity but very much to my advantage -- other kinds of music, too. I've traveled with several bands, for which I'm grateful, but this trio is my musical center."

Roland Schneider was also studying jazz at the New School when he met Hacker in the early 1990s. Both musicians returned to Berlin in '97 and '08 respectively, but sustained their New York states-of-mind diving into the jazz fray. They found themselves frequently playing with Lars Guehlcke in various instrumental combinations. "At one point we purposely stopped hiring other guys," Max says, "just to work on our own, and wow, what freedom! Our communication was so direct, and each of us had a defined part -- rhythm, melody, bass. Each of us could do anything and the others would react, so a tune would turn out differently each time because one or the other of us took an initiative."

What Do You Mean is the first product of their sterling compatibility. As such, it's an advance over the saxophonist's solid 2005 debut *Who The Heck Is Max Hacker?* with his compositions and three songs by Billy Strayhorn performed by his Jazz Quartett, as well as *Deconstructing: Max Hacker With Strings* of 2008, with Max playing his piece in both quartet and with a violinist, violist and cellist, in arrangements invoking some attributes of minimalism.

Having absorbed what art is all about, having learned his jazz lessons well and putting them into practice as a focused professional, Max Hacker has gained the experience and met soul mates to attain a new sense of his music and no doubt himself. He's reached a level of accomplishment -- call it his groove -- marked by self-assurance and modesty, power deployed with graceful understatement and emotional content that must be true, that can't be faked, that is only available if it exists within. Lucky for the listener who discovers music of such genuine feeling, as it conveys us into our own inner thoughts, feelings, fantasies and realities, too.

Perhaps Max Hacker and his partners in this recording asked themselves the titular question while making it, and came up with an answer that's clear on every track: This is what we mean, this. What do you mean?

Howard Mandel
(president of jazz journalist association)

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IOR CD 77077-2
WHO THE HECK IS
MAX HACKER?



IOR CD 77093-2
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