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BLUENOTE

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"Clarinetist/conceptualist extraordinaire **Don Byron** has crafted one of his most immediately alluring "pure jazz" works since 1991's *Tuskegee Experiments*." – Billboard Magazine

Featuring **Bill Frisell, Drew Gress** and **Jack DeJohnette** and includes The Beatles "I'll Follow The Sun" and Ellington's "A Mural From Two Perspectives."

LIVE! THE KNITTING FACTORY OCT. 17 with **Steve Lacy, Mark Helias** and **Billy Hart**

Harris

Figure

"**Stefon Harris** is a fresh voice with an old soul.

Black Action Figure positions him as a post-bop master, one with a strong sense of tradition, a definitive sound, and a clear, modern vision." – Vibe Magazine

Featuring **Greg Osby, Jason Moran, Gary Thomas, Steve Turre, Tarus Mateen** and **Eric Harland**.

LIVE! THE VILLAGE VANGUARD OCT. 19–24 with special guest **Jacky Terrasson**

Hart

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RHYTHMS

Cosmic Jazz in a River of Groove!

The pianist's Blue Note debut features **Russell Gunn, Antonio Hart, Abraham Burton, Eric McPherson** and **Nasheet Waits**.

LIVE! SWEET BASIL'S OCTOBER 26–31

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MUSIC

The Rusty Underside of Noise

MUSIC TURNED INSIDE OUT

BY KYLE GANN

BORBETOMAGUS

Tonic September 25

If it's true, as I've heard, that there are too many masochists in the world and not enough sadists to go around, that might explain the enthusiastic crowd Borbetomagus drew at Tonic a couple of weeks ago. Not to say that I don't like Borbetomagus, just that they fall into the class of pleasures I can rarely afford to indulge. I used to make a Texas chili so hot that after eating it I couldn't walk the next day (God's truth), and there are some exquisite Polish vodkas to which I bade a tearful goodbye when I turned 40. Similarly, Borbetomagus—as much as I savor the startling fact that they exist at all—are simply too rich for me to take in more often than every 12 years or so.

Which is, in fact, how long it had been since I heard them live, and they hadn't played New York in the last two years at all. But they're celebrating their 20-year anniversary as the world's knottiest noise band, and their faithful following were thrilled to don earplugs

up and down in counterpoint, raspy pulses added an inconstant beat, even pipe organs seemed to barrel down on us with Phantom of the Opera maliciousness. Focus on the roaring mass, and the inner flux called for your attention; try to isolate an element, and the noise would congeal back into a roar. It's the perfect experience of the Wall of Noise, a paradigm that has attracted little attention in mainstream musical discourse, but has been a Holy Grail in the underground for 30 years.

Iannis Xenakis may have been the Wall of Noise pioneer (in *Orient-Occident, Bohor*), and lots of little-known electronic composers have tried out the idea on tape; Maryanne Amacher is a louder, more recent advocate. Glenn Branca achieved it with electric guitars, but has seemed less interested in it literally than as metaphor, most tellingly in his *Symphony No. 9*. The conceit is to hear music from the inside, to be so pervaded by the noise that you can't remain separate from it; the total sound mass changes, and you barely notice how. It's a foreground/background reversal, music turned inside out. To make it literal, the noise must be



CARLA GAHR

DONALD MILLER OF BORBETOMAGUS: A CAGEAN HELL

on the millennium's last summery Saturday afternoon to endure them. They were one person down since the old days, but not a decibel short. Jim Sauter and Don Dietrich draped microphones inside their saxes and blew to their hearts' content, while Donald Miller scraped his electric guitar strings with a file, plied them with e-bows, and slapped at them with assorted objects. Add a floorful of god-knows-what effects units revving up feedback and distortion, and you had a behemoth of a noise-drone passing overhead of which we heard only the rusty underside.

Perhaps this is what the world would sound like if you developed an ailment that caused you to hear all sounds at once. On one hand, Borbetomagus's concept is as pure as a La Monte Young drone installation: the superficial effect was a deafening and almost unchanging thickly octaved hum. Within that hum, though, a Cagean hell broke loose: the saxes wailed a vaguely ethnic complaint, roaring noises ripped

inside your head and unescapable. Only Borbetomagus has dared go that far, and they've been doing it for 20 years.

It seemed too classic to not have been planned that a few minutes into the set, smoke began streaming from one of the sound monitors, filling the room with a faint smell, as club personnel rushed to disconnect the smoldering box. The first "set" (actually just a continuous roar) lasted 42 minutes, the second a merciful 15; it differed from the first by seeming to flip more often between high- and low-frequency masses. I sat close up without earplugs for as long as I could stand, then fled to the back for a while, then finally added the earplugs. Like John Cage standing next to the jet engine, I really want the experience, for no other noise has ever been so ineffably complex and multidimensional. Eventually, though, you sacrifice your high-frequency hearing for the pleasure, and I think I'll prefer, for another 12 years now, to simply be glad that Borbetomagus is out there. ▣