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Andreas Schaerer – a truly 21st-century jazz singer

BY [PETER BACON](#) on [9 SEPTEMBER 2014](#) · ([0](#))

I've been listening quite a lot lately to albums by the Swiss vocalist

Andreas Schaerer.

Actually, he describes himself as a “composer and performer” and started out fooling about with tape decks and playing punk guitar, but as, to my ears, he

composes and performs mainly with his voice as the essential sound producer these days, I don't think he'll mind if I call him a vocalist.



Andreas Schaerer

thejazzbreakfast contributor Tony Dudley-Evans alerted me to Schaerer in [this review](#), and I've also been lucky to receive copies of various recent albums of his. What excites me is Schaerer's mix of wit and astonishing technical prowess, conveyed with a kind of nonchalance that is cool and energetic at the same time. It all makes for fascinating music which might even appeal to those jazz fans I know who avoid singers like the plague (yep, I know who you are).

Schaerer's latest release is a duo album with drummer **Lucas Niggli**, called *Arcanum* (Intakt CD 232). It's a fine example of Schraerer at his most iconoclastic and experimental, the opening *Pipe Tomahawk* showing him electronically tweaking shouts, grunts and squawks in a furious battle with the drums. Elsewhere on this album he sounds like he is a West African speaking in tongues

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(*How To Shoot A Medieval Longbow*), whispers impressions of breezes (*Longbow* again), delivers ancient monkish chant (*Arcanum*), or performs falsetto scat a la Bobby McFerrin (*Adansonia digitata*). Sometimes his vocal/electronic sounds are so close to percussion sounds that it becomes difficult to decide who is making which sound.

The instrumental range is expanded in Schaerer's trio with two Austrian musicians, trumpeter **Martin Eberle** and guitarist **Peter Rom**. Their latest is 2013's *At The Age Of Six I Wanted To Be A Cook* (Unit/Jazzwerkstatt UTR/JWR 4567) and it is preceded by *Please Don't Feed The Model* (UTR/JWR 4321) from 2011. Both explore an original mix of improvisation and riffs heavily influenced, especially in Rom's playing, by African music. Schaerer here sounds close to someone like Richard Bona. With the other two playing melodic instruments Schaerer can explore his percussive, beat-box side with great freedom, and both albums are striking for the way in which the listener can almost forget there is a singer involved – most near conventional singing is wordless and these are to all intents and purposes instrumental albums. There are exceptions – the mock chanson *At The Age Of Seven I Wanted To Be Napoleon* from the most recent one being a prime example.

Also from last year – Schaerer is as prolific as he is inventive – is the latest album from the vocalist's sextet **Hildegard Lernt Fliegen**. It's called *The Fundamental Rhythm Of Unpolished Brains* (Enja/Yellowbird YEB-7740), and is my favourite of them all. The band is saxophones, trombone, bass and percussion, and in addition to singing and beatboxing Schaerer shows his extraordinary ability to mimic a trumpet. In amongst the brass section you'd probably not spot it – even solo he sounds remarkably like the real thing.

There are more lyrics on this one, blended in with a band that sounds like a contemporary wind quintet one minute, a cabaret band the next; sometimes the combination of horns and marimba together with circling riffs give a minimalist nuance, and when they get a little more eccentric, the ghost of Frank Zappa smiles overhead. When setting lyricist Brigitte Wulliman's words over a wayward, long lined melody, Schaerer reminds me a little of Jack Bruce singing Carla Bley/Paul Haines' *Escalator Over The Hill* – and that's never a bad comparison!

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Pre & Post Sapients is a dark Germanic waltz enlivened by a Tango sensuality, *Knock Code IV* a frantic multi-tracked vocal-led interlude, while *Encore Mockbae* sets the horn players in a recorder trio over bass, kalimba and water-drop vocal sounds to exquisite effect – it's like a Japanese water garden in music. *Don Clemenza* has Schaerer imitating a classical alto over fidgety baritone and marimba, and *Sweet Sirsmaraecalee* adds a guest banjoist while Schaerer sings a mock ballad – the British experimental vocalist Phil Minton would applaud, I think. And *Zeusler*, with Schaerer's own lyrics and a memorable melody, is just great, and the closer is a graceful vocal showcase – gosh, he can go high! – with bandoneon and bass backing.

On all this evidence Andreas Schaerer is an immensely talented and creative musician. I imagine he is amazing to hear live, and you might be able to do just that as his website shows he is around during the London Jazz Festival in duo with Lucas Niggli. However there doesn't seem to be anything about it on the London Jazz Festival site at present. In the meantime read more about him and his live dates [here](#).

- To buy Hildegard Lernt Fliegen's *The Fundamental Rhythm Of Unpolished Brains* go [here](#).
- To buy Andreas Schaerer and Lucas Nibbli's *Arcanum* go [here](#).

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