

Big band and the DJ remix it up

By **MARKE ANDREWS**

The marriage of jazz improvisation and electronica-DJ culture has been a theme of this year's jazz festival, so it shouldn't be a shock that the esteemed Vienna Art Orchestra has also gone that route.

Shocking, no. Surprising, yes.

In its 25 years of existence, the VAO has been synonymous with improvisation. Two years ago, the band added an electric rhythm section to its acoustic rhythm section. And on the band's latest recording, the double CD *Art & Fun*, one disc features new compositions played by the band, and one disc involves remixes and sampling

worked around the band's live performances.

Is this a case of *If you can't beat 'em, join 'em?*

"Vienna is one of the capitals of Europe for remixes and electronic music," says Matthias Roegg, VAO founder-composer, on the phone from Austria. "There are so many DJ lineups

every night. There are few concerts any more. You might have 30 DJ lineups and six live clubs.

"It's all around, and I wondered if it's possible to mix a big band esthetic with a remix esthetic."

Guitarist Martin Koller, a member of VAO's electric rhythm section, did the remixes on the record. All solos are taken from the band's original recordings.

"It's a conceptual idea and not a commercial one," Roegg stresses. "I insisted that the first [orchestra only] CD be the main CD, and that the [remix] CD be a kind of bonus."

Keeping things interesting is important to Roegg, who hates seeing musicians in jazz and classical orchestras looking bored on the bandstand. He once said "there's nothing worse than a band in a bad mood."

In his group, "everybody has to be quite busy on stage."

Jazz has to move in a new direction, says Roegg. Otherwise, the music stagnates.

"The history of jazz is a closed chapter," he says. "It's not an innovative music any more, it's a reproductive music like classical music. That doesn't mean the music is dead. The music of Mozart, Brahms and Haydn is alive, and the music of Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker is alive."

"When I look back, Louis Armstrong and others all invented the vocabulary. We just use it. Improvisation today is a combination of existing patterns."

The VAO started a quarter-century ago as a duo, which grew into a trio, a quartet and then a small orchestra.



AT THE JAZZ FESTIVAL

"I didn't have a single expectation for this band when we started," says Roegg. "The band really started by chance. There was one concert, then there was a second, then by chance a third. There was never the intention to play for such a long time."

Roegg says he learned to plan a year at a time, and before he knew it, "it's 25 years."

Roegg and saxophonist Harry Sokal have been together for a quarter-century, and trumpeter Bumi Fian joined the orchestra in 1979.

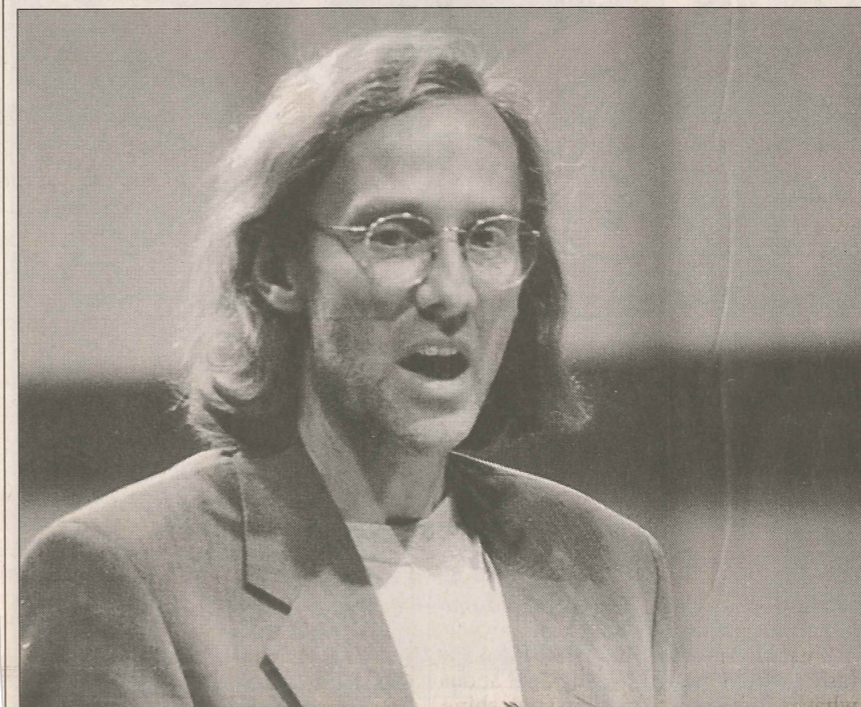
"Until 1991, the band was more or less like a family — always the same players. Then I realized that this concept doesn't work any more."

"At a certain point you start to lose respect. You need fresh blood to keep things interesting. There was a second generation from 1991 on, and for every program, for stylistic reasons, I would choose a different rhythm section. Since 1998, it's been a big band lineup."

The 21-member Vienna Art Orchestra plays the Vogue Saturday, 8 p.m., along with the Scandinavian trio E.S.T.

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Vienna Art Orchestra founder Matthias Roegg is determined to stay fresh.