

Biography



Adrien Varachaud was born in Strasbourg (France) in 1977. He made up his mind to become a professional saxophone player after listening to Hal Singer play at the Café des Anges in Strasbourg in 1994. Three years later he joined the « Jazz Contrast » big band and met Archie Shepp in 2000. Archie Shepp became Adrien's teacher and his friend and introduced him to well-known musicians like Mal Waldron and Ted Curson.

In the summer of 2002, Adrien went to Dakar to study and play with famous drummer Doudou N'Diaye Rose, an opportunity for him to improve his skill and develop his own sound. In that same year he was in the recording of one of Alain Aurenche's cds, with Christophe Brillaud as his piano accompanist. Later he visited Abdellah El Gour (Master Gnaoua musician) to study and play with him and his Gnaoua group.

In 2007, at the age of 30, Adrien caught the attention of the Alibi-Mal Waldron/Archie Shepp Jazz Club's manager and set up his own groups, first a trio with pianist Katy Roberts and trumpet player Rasul Siddik, and then a duet with pianist Tom McClung.

He set up the Unity 5tet in 2009 and gave a performance in Paris. His first record "Strange Horns" was issued in 2010. His drum player, Douglas Sides, invited him to play with saxophonist Peter King and pianist Steve Melling in London, and later, he was invited by Barry Altschul, another famous drummer, to join the "Fab Trio" (Joe Fonda, Barry Altschul, and Billy Bang) for a gig in Basel.

Adrien was to meet Barry Altschul again in New York for the mixing of "Strange Horns," his first recording which was widely acclaimed by critics. *"His music openly recalls blues, it is full of rage and lyricism. His unconventional career which owes nothing to academic tuition displays an extraordinary craving for playing. This first record is really a master stroke". (Jazz Hot - september 2011).*

After a gig with the Nu Band (Mark Whitecage, Roy Campbell, Joe Fonda and Lou Grassi), he formed a trio with Lou Grassi and Joe Fonda.

At a gig in April 2011 Adrien met again pianist Christophe Brillaud, a former pupil of Aldo Ciccolini, and they decided to form a duet and to compose their own music.

That same year, Adrien was invited by Hal Singer, a living jazz memory, to join his 5tet for a gig in Chatou and the two saxophone players met on a regular basis after that. It was Adrien's turn to invite Hal Singer, on the occasion of his 92nd birthday, to join his Unity 5tet for two unforgettable gigs in Strasbourg. Hal Singer became Adrien's mentor, in the same way as Archie Shepp was his teacher. As an open-minded musician, Adrien is not afraid of taking risks. He plays bold phrases in the grand tradition of Afro-American jazz, and is very open and available.

He has just recorded his new album, "Time to see the light," with pianist Kirk Lightsey whom he has been playing with since 2007, bassist Darry Hall, Famadou Don Moye, the Chicago Art Ensemble drummer, and a very special guest, Archie Shepp in person.

Arlette Singer (text updated by Jean Buzelin) Photo by Philippe Lévy-Stab