

EUROPEAN SCENE

By Peter Margasak

Jazz's roots in Europe are strong. This column looks at the musicians, labels, venues, institutions and events moving the scene forward "across the pond." For questions, comments and news about European jazz, e-mail europescene@downbeat.com.

Piano Trios Herald the Future of Continental Jazz

In the last few years, a wave of young piano trios has pushed away from the sounds we expect from this instrumental format. Repertoire, rhythm, structure and dynamics have all been challenged in various combinations and degrees, pulling the rug out from the hard-swinging approach we might expect from someone like Bill Charlap or Mulgrew Miller. This cluster of European groups has, above all, a marked preference for restraint. The austere chill pioneered by ECM fits into this new activity, but it doesn't explain it all.

A few years ago groups like Sweden's E.S.T. and Norway's Tord Gustavsen Trio were attracting most of the attention, but more recently some younger trios have been honing a more focused, rigorous sound. Late last year Norway's In The Country released its second album, *Losing Stones, Collecting Bones* (Rune Grammofon), using jazz as one ingredient in a concoction of sources; pop melody, country twang and the funereal pace of Morton Feldman's compositions seem as important as anything else.

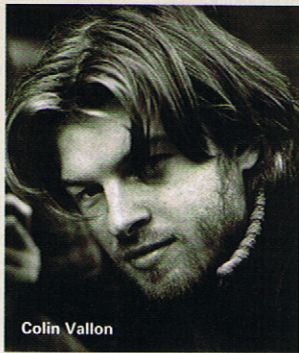
New records by Norway's Anders Aarum Trio and Switzerland's Colin Vallon Trio aren't necessarily aping the developments of In The Country, but they can be heard as fellow travelers.

Although it's a more swinging, loose-

limbed affair, *First Communion* (Jazzaway), Aarum's second album, suggests that he's digested a few of In The Country pianist Morten Qvenild's ideas. Aarum has worked extensively in more mainstream, hard-driving contexts, playing keyboards with the swinging Jazzmob and more recently working as a sideman for a couple of albums by American alto saxophonist Sonny Simmons.

While his third trio outing—the band is rounded out by bassist Ole Morten Vågan and drummer Andreas Bye—sticks to more conventional structures and harmony-based improvisation, the way Aarum's spiky piano glides over the clattery grooves of his cohorts on a tune like "Why Be Sacred Of A Hat?" or the crawling "And Then She Left ..." allies them with In The Country, albeit with the rougher sound heard on the latter's debut. Yet even when the group is more propulsive, it avoids sounding conventional.

The young Swiss pianist Vallon veers even closer to this sound on his recent second album, *Ailleurs* (Hatology). He, like Qvenild, uses prepared piano for atmospheric rustling, and the trio tackled



Colin Vallon

JO JANNOWSKI

"Zombie" by the Irish rock band The Cranberries, smothering the original's bombast with a calibrated sense of restraint. You can get a slight whiff of ECM-style pastoralism here, but it seems like Vallon, bassist Pat Moret and drummer Samuel Rohrer are more concerned with pop concision and meticulously

registered emotion than atmospheric. Each phrase and pattern is followed by a deep inhalation, as if each statement demanded a pause.

Rhythmically, the music can be forceful and swing deeply, but more often it embraces the same slow-burn roil of In The Country. Their unlikely take on "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" employs a blues crawl, with Rohrer regularly dropping double-time rolls or space-filling clatter, while a gorgeous rendition of Jacques Brel's "Je Ne Sais Pas" manages a lovely hovering quality without succumbing to the temptation to spin meaningless puff. Moret and Rohrer do a nice job of simulating motion, and jab Vallon without tripping him up.

DB

Ordering info: jazzaway.com; hathut.com