



33. MANFRED EICHER & ECM

When reached at his office in Munich, ECM Founder and President Manfred Eicher is reminded of the theme of this month's special issue. "Yes, whatever 'cool' is," he replied, philosophically.

In terms of his 45-year-old label, "cool" is having a catalog of nearly 1,400 releases in which every album is identifiable by its distinct cover and even spine. Listeners can also hear a few measures of any given ECM track and peg it as one of Eicher's projects.

Serving in both A&R and production capacities, Eicher has been a champion of improvisational, free and, since 1984, classical music. He continues to introduce audiences to new talent, notably European artists to North American ears.

"Often it has to do with the sessions. I meet people in the studio who are members of bands or a guest on some recording we were doing," Eicher revealed. "I get to know them and their music and invite them back to make their own album."

"For me, it's important to find new and creative musicians who offer some kind of personal statement," he added. "We started with young musicians, like Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett, who were not very known in their early years."

Historically, ECM has boasted an impressive roster of guitarists. It released first (and many subsequent) efforts by Pat Metheny, Bill Frisell, John Abercrombie and Ralph Towner.

Pianists are enjoying a renaissance of late. Craig Taborn, Giovanni Guidi, Aaron Parks and Vijay Iyer have all made their ECM debuts as bandleaders since last April.

Colin Vallon is part of the next generation of ECM pianists. The Lausanne, Switzerland, native's first album on the label, *Rruga*, came out in 2011.

"Manfred contacted our former drummer [Samuel Rohrer], who recorded for ECM already with a Swiss singer, Susanne Abbuehl," Vallon said. "He read about a concert we did in Switzerland. It came from out of the blue, which was a nice surprise."

"I was obviously listening to a lot of music from this label already," he continued. "For me, it has this purist quality. The aesthetic was something I liked about it—minimalist and poetic images with very reduced text."

ECM's lineage of pianists was an influence on Vallon, whose trios strike a balance between delicate playing and assertive declarations. In his late teens, he bought a CD of a solo Jarrett concert in Tokyo. He then worked backwards to Jarrett's quartet recordings with Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden and Paul Motian as well as works by Bobo Stenson and Christian Wallumrød and also early Dave Holland and Kenny Wheeler sides.

"ECM has a really strong identity, and I can relate to that in the music I do," he said. —Yoshi Kato

THE GREAT JAZZ FESTIVALS

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MOERS, GERMANY

35. MONTREAL JAZZ
FESTIVAL, CANADA

36. MONTEREY JAZZ
FESTIVAL, CALIFORNIA

37. NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL,
RHODE ISLAND

38. NEW YORK WINTER
JAZZFEST, NEW YORK CITY

39. UMBRIA JAZZ FEST, ITALY

40. FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL
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