

m a t h i a s r ü e g g ' s

Vienna

Art

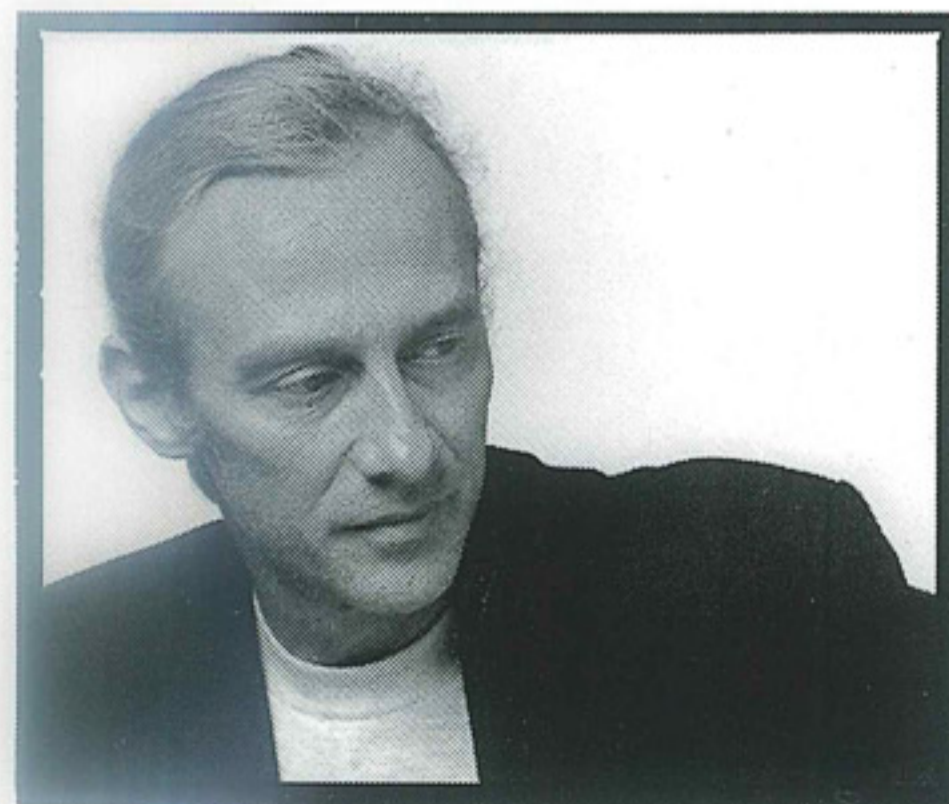
Duke
Ellington's
sound of Love

Or

chestra

History in Brief – **Vienna Art Orchestra**

The Vienna Art Orchestra – Europe's leading international "big band/jazz ensemble" – was created in 1977 by mathias rüegg. Since its international breakthrough in 1981, the jazz orchestra has made guest performances in over 40 countries, including the USA and Japan, as well as in numerous other countries in Asia and Africa. Nearly 100 of these performances have been at international jazz festivals. The orchestra has made more than 30 recordings, many of which have been singled out for awards. For its special brand of contemporary jazz music, which is innovative yet which pays due respect to the European and American traditions from which it comes, the Vienna Art Orchestra has also received acclaim as Best Big Band in numerous countries, including in 1984-85 from the American press.



mathias rüegg

Vienna Art Orchestra presents **Duke Ellington's Sound of Love**

A concert as picture puzzle: Everything is there, the whole Ellington, and yet not totally there. But where it's not totally there, it's almost more totally there. Or nearly.

Red Garter, was the opening number on the Vienna Art Orchestra's Ellington program. However, who knows this almost kitschy cantilena for trombone that Ellington wrote in 1958 and that has hardly ever been played? This must be the unknown Ellington (although this piece happens to be by Billy Strayhorn, Ellington's musical twin brother), but you can look forever in the original version and never find this braying trombone interlude that suddenly blares out and sounds so much like Ellington. Or take **Smada**, another rarely-played Ellington composition, a leisurely feature number for clarinetist Russell Procope, transformed by the VAO into quick sweeping motion by Arkady Shilkloper, the Russian master among the world's horn soloists. Ellington sound, but totally in the style of the 1990s.

There's no doubt that the program mathias rüegg put together for the Vienna Art Orchestra to celebrate Duke Ellington's 100th anniversary is not simply a plagiarized reproduction. rüegg doesn't deliver us the

reproduction. rüegg doesn't deliver us the original Ellington; he shows us his own, highly personal, continually new and surprising transmutations and reflections. rüegg has produced these adaptations and revivals of 20 compositions with loving respect and admiration, but also with the self-assurance of a musical uncle who has his own history, his own profile and his own place in modern jazz.

rüegg left the piano accompaniment out completely and he replaced Ellington's powerful blues and strident chords with the light and almost sketchy guitar work of Wolfgang Muthspiel. Elsewhere, he transformed Ellington's solo-piano into big band format; for instance, by re-orchestrating as big band numbers three compositions that the master recorded in 1952 in trio with drummer Max Roach and bassist Charles Mingus for the famous **Money Jungle**. rüegg turned **Very Special** – a traditional blues built on a single riff – into a slalom course for alto saxophonist Harry Sokal, marked out by the brass. The ballad **Warm Valley**, he orchestrated with flutes, a warm saxophones and variously-muted trumpets to produce a whole range of impressionistic moods for saxophonist Andy Scherrer. **Little Max**, that was once batted ping-pong style between Ellington and Max Roach, was transformed by rüegg into a smooth

crescendo arching between the winds and the drumming of Mario Gonzi.

For a selection of Ellington piano pieces that are atypically rough, almost unruly, with almost the modern feel of a Thelonious Monk, rüegg demonstrated his own artistic virtuosity as an arranger. Again, everything is there, the Ellington tricks, the refined dovetailing of three brass lines, the whole palette of intricate sound colorations, the growl and wah-wah effects of trombone and trumpet, as well as the lasciviously drawn out ballad-*portamenti* of the saxophone. But none of this comes from Ellington. rüegg took the liberty of filling out the minimal piano trio with brass embellishments totally of his own invention. The result is amazing. The scores sound so much like Ellington, you'd almost think he wrote them himself.

Often it's just little touches? rüegg generally modernized the harmonies somewhat, brushing off the light layer of dust that had collected over the years on the Ellington Sound. Sometimes his revamps were even bolder. In the famous **Rockin' in Rhythm**, for instance, he cut in a longer passage from one of his own earlier compositions.

These are the types of playful tricks and refinements that mainly excite Ellington fans

and rüegg aficionados, but that even appeal to normal listeners who may be less in the know. In this vein, rüegg took several of the most famous classics, ones that have been played to death over the years by almost every mainstream group but that naturally belong in any Ellington tribute – and he reduced them into some of the smallest formats; duos, trios or quintets. It's these catchy numbers – the kind that stick in your head and that you feel you've known forever, inside and out – that rüegg subjects to the most radical distancing from the originals, thereby endowing them with whole new dimensions.

In **Mood Indigo**, the brothers Muthspiel wield their guitar and trombone like a couple of street musicians, pulverizing this ballad into the free sound of noise-music.

Take the A-Train – a tune that has been played thousands of times and ranks as the Ellington Orchestra theme song appears as a high-speed duo by bass clarinetist Klaus Dickbauer and the young, super-virtuoso bass player Georg Breinschmid who just left the Vienna Philharmonic for the jazz branch.

The ballad **Blood Count**, for its part, underwent a radical purification cure, making the delicate melody, filled out with words by Anna Lauvergnac and paraphrased

rather sparingly by Andy Scherrer, sound much more fragile and moving than the original, with its almost excessively plush brass background. This is reduction to the basics, a jettisoning of all the excess ballast that you sometimes find in Ellington's ballads.

Just like Ellington, rüegg has a special feel for playing up the strengths of his soloists. The examples are many: the dizzying high-altitude excursions of Bumi Fian, who shoots lightning bolts from his trumpet into the microphone like an angry Zeus; the exalting escapades of saxophonist Harry Sokal; Klaus Dickbauer's effervescent garlands on the clarinet; the clear sax lines of Andy Scherrer; the glisten and glow of trumpeter Matthieu Michel. rüegg gives each musician his rightful place in this Theater of Ellington. No one can beat Florian Bramböck at wringing the heart out of **After All**, a ballad written by Ellington for the soul-stirring alto sax player Johnny Hodges. And the astute singer Anna Lauvergnac – who shows true virtuoso mastery of the minute but telling difference between full identification and perfect imitation – would have pleased woman-lover Ellington just as she pleases woman-lover rüegg, with her sultry interpretation of the ballad **I'm Just a Lucky So and So**.

Finally, along with bassist Breinschmid and

Gonzi, saxophone player Herwig Gradischnig deserves special mention. It's plain to hear in the feature number **Circle in Fourths** that Gradischnig, who is as electric as he is electrifying, stands out as a new virtuoso among the young European saxophonists.

Numerous Ellington tributes will appear to mark his 100th birthday. Many of these will also be brilliantly recorded, have exceptional soloists and display a high level of technical expertise. But mathias rüegg's Ellington tribute amounts to something even more: It's a successful, intelligent and informative encounter with the music of one of traditional jazz history's most important composers. He handles Ellington's music like a heirloom lamp, rubbing it, buffing it, making it shine.

This program was commissioned by Giselher Smekal and the Jazz Department of the ORF to commemorate the 100th birthday of Duke Ellington.

Contact

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home-page: www.vao.co.at

Order of solos

Red Garter

Trumpet solo by Bumi Fian

Very Special

Soprano solo by Harry Sokal

Blues in Blueprint

Clarinet solo by Klaus Dickbauer

Mood Indigo

Duo by Christian & Wolfgang Muthspiel

Smada

Frenchhorn solo by Arkady Shilkloper

Warm Valley

Tenor solo by Andy Scherrer

Circle in Fourth

Baritone solo by Herwig Gradischnig

Take the A-train

Duo by George Breinschmid and Klaus Dickbauer

After All

Alto solo by Florian Bramböck

I'm Just a Lucky So and So

Trumpet solo by Thomas Bansch & vocals by Anna Lauvergnac

Blood Count

Solos by Anna Lauvergnac & Andy Scherrer

Rockin' in Rhythm

Alto solo by Florian Bramböck

Little Max

Drum solo by Mario Gonzi

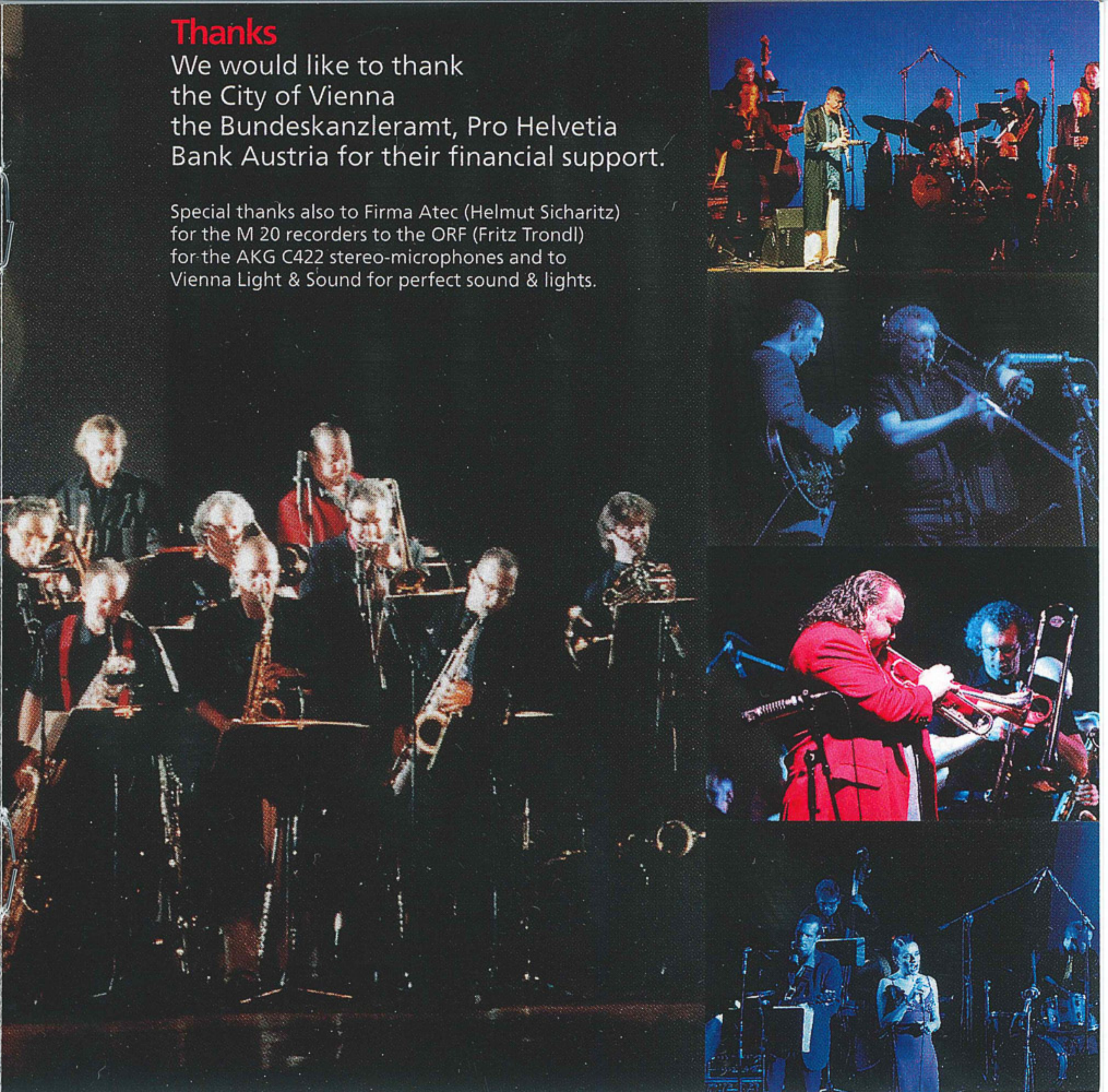
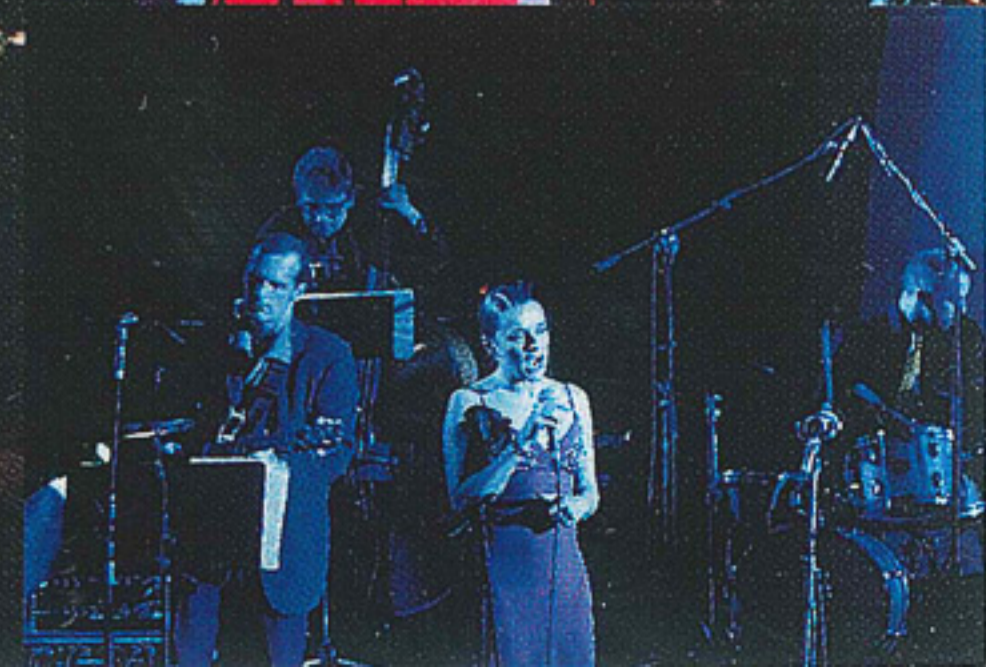
Sophicated Lady

Guitar Solo by Wolfgang Muthspiel

Thanks

We would like to thank
the City of Vienna
the Bundeskanzleramt, Pro Helvetia
Bank Austria for their financial support.

Special thanks also to Firma Atec (Helmut Sicharitz)
for the M 20 recorders to the ORF (Fritz Trondl)
for the AKG C422 stereo-microphones and to
Vienna Light & Sound for perfect sound & lights.



mathias rüegg's

Anna Artor chestra

Duke
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sound of Love

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1 Red Garter (Duke Ellington) | 4:07 |
| 2 Very Special (Duke Ellington) | 3:24 |
| 3 Blues in Blueprint (Duke Ellington) | 4:46 |
| 4 Mood Indigo (Duke Ellington) | 5:53 |
| 5 Smada (Billy Strayhorn) | 2:36 |
| 6 Warm Valley (Duke Ellington) | 6:29 |
| 7 Circle in Fourth (Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn) | 3:23 |
| 8 Take the A-Train (Billy Strayhorn) | 4:50 |
| 9 After All (Billy Strayhorn) | 5:52 |
| 10 I'm Just a Lucky So and So (Duke Ellington) | 4:43 |
| 11 Blood Count (Billy Strayhorn) | 7:37 |
| 12 Rockin' in Rhythm (Duke Ellington) | 4:49 |
| 13 Little Max (Duke Ellington) | 3:40 |
| 14 Sophisticated Lady (Duke Ellington) | 3:05 |
| Total Time | 65:18 |

All arrangements by mathias rüegg, except Mood Indigo, arranged by Christian & Wolfgang Muthspiel, Take the A-Train, Blood Count, arranged by Anna Lauvergnac.

Anna Lauvergnac
Thorsten Benkenstein
Matthieu Michel
Thomas Gansch
Burni Fian

Klaus Dickbauer
Florian Bamböck
Harry Sokal

Andy Scherrer
Herwig Gradischnig
Arkady Shilkloper
Robert Bachner
Christian Muthspiel
Charly Wagner

Wolfgang Muthspiel
Georg Breinschmid
Marjo Gorzi
mathias rüegg

voice
lead tp
trumpet
trumpet
trumpet

reeds
reeds
reeds
reeds

reeds
frenchhorn
trombone
trombone
b-trombone

guitar
bass
drums
leader, arr

Produced for TCB by mathias rüegg & Peter Schmidlin

Executive Producer Peter Schmidlin - TCB

Recorded live on the VAO Spring Tour 99

in Graz, Vienna, Salzburg, Linz, St. Johann,

St. Pölten, Munic and Lucerne by Ronald Matky

Mixed and Mastered at Studio Powerplay,

Zurich, May 99 by Jürg Peterhans

Liner notes by Christian Rentsch

Translation by Karin Kaminker

Photos by Barbara Bruckmüller, Wien

and Eric Krügl, Feldkirch

Graphic artwork by Gigi Schmid-Huetiger

Printed and C 1999 by TCB Music SA

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