

Indie artists impress with Vodou-Jazz releases

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MARKUS SCHWARTZ & LAKOU BROOKLYN EQUINOX

"Tanbourineur-extraordinaire" Markus Schwartz follows up his critically acclaimed 2008 Vodou-Jazz release "Tanbou Nan Lakou Brooklyn" with his new album, "Equinox". The 6-song long release is the product of a collaboration between the artist and New York based Soundkeeper Recordings.

You may have had a chance to hear Markus work his hand-made Haitian "Tanbous" into a frenzy backing artists like Emeline Michel, Buyu Ambroise or Mozayik in years past. The Haitian world was exposed to the talent of this gifted artist for the most part on Mozayik's classic releases - "Mozayik and Rhythmic Reflections". For an artist with native roots in Europe and musical grounding in Jazz, Markus has adopted himself to the rigors of Haiti's Vodou drumming traditions like one who was born on one of the lively hills surrounding Port-au-Prince. Ah, how those hills come alive once a day's work is done and the sun's rays fixate on the moon.

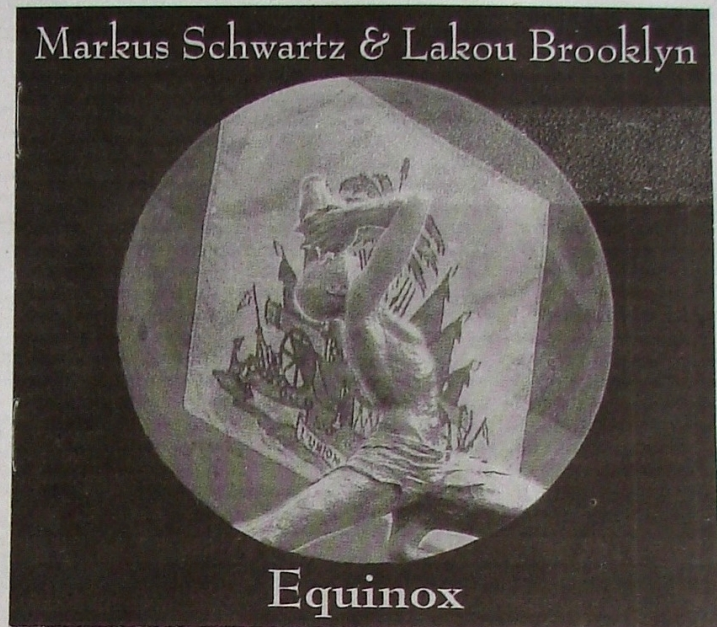
"Equinox" is a celebration of the folk music of Haiti. The album starts off with folk standard, "Kote Moun Yo" in an arrangement that harkens to the time of Bois Cayman-the ceremony preceding Haiti's slave revolution. The song begins with a melodic exchange between conch shells, then spastic drumming, joined by the rhythmic-clinking of metals and finally a robust invocation comprised of the voices of Markus, Trumpeter Jean Caze and Guitarist Monvelyno Alexis. Jean Caze leads masterfully on Flugelhorn in a remake of Frantz Casseus' classic "Yanvalou" and his delicate touch sets a calm environment for Monvelyno's ethereal elaborations on guitar as well as Markus dramatic yet subdued performance. The album's most soulful and sophisticated performance occurs in "Seremoni Tiga" dedicated to the celebrated artist and philosopher Jean-Claude Garoute (Tiga) who was among the founders of the St. Soleil painting tradition in Haiti.

The burgeoning Haitian-Vodou Jazz movement is well served by releases like Equinox that have a distinct identity and a cosmopolitan edge. The album is deeply rooted in Haiti's native music and brings the genre's standards to a new generation of listeners. The commitment of the participating musicians is evident in the power of their execution on every track. Listeners will enjoy the masterful way Paul Beaudry fills the rhythm section on his upright bass as Jean and Monvelyno react to the call of Markus' confident drumming. The album was recorded in the fashion of Jazz's early days, where multiple takes of songs were recorded until a satisfactory version was achieved. No overdubbing and no multi-tracking were used for this album and a listener is made to feel a part of the entire experience. Well done Markus!

You should definitely have this album in your collection. Please reach out to www.soundkeeperrecordings.com for a copy. Support our indie-artists, Ayibobo!

MONVELYNO KOUZEN AZAKAMEDE (KOD AK PO PROJECT)

We welcome a new addition to the current school of musicians manning Haiti's Vodou Jazz tradition-the singer, guitarist and composer Monvelyno Alexis. In this spirit, we celebrate his first release,



, "Kod ak Po" or "Strings and Skins". The album is a 13-song independent effort.

The Port-au-Prince born Monvelyno was destined for a life in the arts. He studied classical music at an early age in Haiti and by age 18 made the switch from wind instruments to guitar. While learning guitar, Monvelyno had the good fortune to befriend and study with Saxophonist Thurgot Theodat, founding member of the legendary folklore group, Foula. The meeting with Theodat led to more acquaintances with established leaders of progressive Haitian music - men like Boulou Valcourt, Lesly Marcellin, Claude Carre and more. These artists deepened Monvelyno's understanding of the music that hides

and breathes in the fortress of mountains that span Haiti's share of the Island.

Monvelyno - who currently calls New York home - showcases the fine fruits of his studies in "Kouzen Azakamede". This guitarist's conceptual genius is evident in insightful arrangements like, "Anmwey", a sparse but powerfully versed composition with a melodic progression that effortlessly blends American and Haitian melodic tendencies while backed by masterful rhythmic support on drums and bass as a Rhodes keyboard unveils the chords that frame the song. The masterfully executed, "Mwen Anvi" invests the whole of its seductive charm on the quality of its off-beat melody and the distinct secrets of Monvelyno's vocals as a lonesome piano, a stinging trumpet and reverberating drums lend the composition an unusual yet romantic mood. The haunting "Kouzen" which airs the plight of Haiti's poor, starts off with a moving invocation that ascends into a playful groove featuring great abstractions on guitar as repetitious lead and backing chants merge to enliven the piece. I'll stop here ladies and gents to afford you the honor of struggling to find words to describe the many other great songs on this album!

"Kouzen Azakamede" is a revelation hinting at a universe of interesting possibilities for practitioners of Vodou Jazz in times to come. It is one of those rare releases that bring to mind first hearings of artists like "Foula" or Miles Davis' "Kind of Blue" or perhaps Coupe Cloue's "The Preacher". In true Foula fashion, Monvelyno is comfortable taking chances with Haiti's revered and celebrated folk standards as

well as his own material. Each song is manned by five musicians or less and this insistence unveils not only the skeletal beauty of each arrangement but the skill it took to make these spartan pieces sound whole. Monvelyno is an artist in the throes of developing new ways of hearing, playing, writing and singing Haitian folklore. We can't wait to see what other ideas he has in store!

This is one of those releases that must be in any serious collection. Please support this important work with a purchase by visiting: www.monvelynoart.com.