

As Was

The **Rova Saxophone Quartet** was founded in the San Francisco Bay Area in October 1977 by Jon Raskin, Larry Ochs, Andrew Voigt and Bruce Ackley. The ensemble performed its first concert at the 3rd Annual Free Music Festival at Mills College in Oakland, California, in February 1978. Inspired by a broad spectrum of musical influences—from Charles Ives, Edgard Varese, Olivier Messiaen and John Cage to John Coltrane, Anthony Braxton, Steve Lacy and Ornette Coleman—Rova began writing new material, touring, recording (its first album *Cinema Rovaté* was released on Ochs' Metalanguage label) and collaborating with such like-minded colleagues as guitarist Henry Kaiser and Italian percussionist Andrea Centazzo. Early in its history, Rova performed both at the Vancouver New Music Society (1978) and the Moers International Festival of New Jazz in Germany (1979).

Over the next few years Rova performed widely throughout North America and Europe, and in 1983 it became the first new music group from the U.S. to tour the Soviet Union. *Saxophone Diplomacy*, a documentary video of the tour, was aired on PBS throughout the U.S. 1983 also saw the release of the landmark recording *Favorite Street – Rova Plays Lacy*. In 1986, Rova (which had incorporated as a not-for-profit organization the previous year) hosted the Ganelin Trio, the first Soviet jazz group to appear in the U.S. The trio performed with Rova in the first of the Pre-Echoes series of collaborative events, which would later include concerts with Anthony Braxton, John Zorn, Terry Riley and others. The Pre-Echoes series ended in 1990 with the installation piece *Occupancy*, a collaboration with architect Howard Martin. Founding member Andrew Voigt left Rova in August 1988 and was replaced by Steve Adams, formerly with the Boston-based Your Neighborhood Saxophone Quartet. Rova returned to the USSR in November, 1989 and released a CD of music recorded on the tour, *This Time We Are Both*.

Highlights of Rova's prolific career in the '90s include appearances at the Yokohama Jazz Promenade in Japan; the Vancouver Jazz Festival; the San Francisco Jazz Festival and the Festival Internationale Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville (Quebec, Canada); the Documenta IX International Art Exhibition in Kassel, Germany; a piece created for performance in the Ludwig Wittgenstein Museum, Vienna, Austria; concerts with Alvin Curran in Switzerland, Croatia, Germany, Portugal and the U.S.; appearances in Chicago, Milwaukee and Toronto for the New Music Across America Festival; a twentieth anniversary celebration presented by SFJAZZ; creation of the piece *Resistance* for sax quartet

and four DAT machines for ORF, the Austrian National Radio; and the triumphant 30th anniversary presentation of John Coltrane's *Ascension* in San Francisco. Quartet members were also commissioned to write music for Rova by both Meet the Composer and Chamber Music America.

In 1999, Rova's nonprofit support organization, **Rova:Arts**, began presenting two annual events in the San Francisco Bay Area. *New Music on the Mountain* presented three or four acts outdoors at Mt. Tamalpais every September through 2005. Artists performing there included the Tin Hat Trio, Pauline Oliveros, Wadada Leo Smith, Vinny Golia and Bert Turetsky, Cheryl Leonard, Fred Frith, and Joan Jeanrenaud.

Our continuing series, *Rovaté*, began as a festival but evolved into a collaborative event. Collaborating artists have included:

- 1998 – performances by What We Live, the Tiny Bell Trio (Dave Douglas, Jim Black and Brad Shepik), Actual Size and John Schott's Diglossia Ensemble
- 1999 – *Maelstrom* with Sam Rivers, Doug Matthews, Anthony Cole and a big band of San Francisco musicians.
- 2000 – Collaboration with Gerry Hemingway
- 2001 – *The M'ad Din* with Wadada Leo Smith a string ensemble of San Francisco musicians and a performance of Rova compositions by John Schott's Diglossia Ensemble
- 2002 - *An Alligator in Your Wallet* with Satoko Fujii, Natsuki Tamura, Carla Kihlstedt, Darren Johnston, Mike Vlatkovich, Tom Yoder, Ken Filiano and Scott Amendola.
- 2003 – *Electric Ascension* with Nels Cline, Chris Brown, Ikue Mori, Carla Kihlstedt, Jenny Scheinman, Otomo Yoshihide, Fred Frith and Donald Robinson and Steve Lacy's *Saxophone Special*.
- 2004 – *The Hear and Now* with Min Xiao-Fen, Kyaw Kyaw Naing, Jiebing Chen, Shoko Hikage, Sang Won Park, Jim Santi Owen and Gino Robair
- 2005 – *The Mirror World* with Gino Robair, William Winant, and a large ensemble of San Francisco musicians
- 2006 – *Glass Head* with dancers Shinichi Momo Koga and Yuko Kaseki and visual artist Eric Koziol
- 2007 – *Eye Music for Ears* with Joan Jeanrenaud, Theresa Wong, Mark Dresser, Mark Trayle, Fred Frith, Ches Smith and Devin Hoff performing graphic scores by Steve Adams, Jon Raskin, Fred Frith and visual artist Amy Trachtenberg

2008 – *The Celestial Septet* with the Nels Cline Singers (Nels Cline, Devin Hoff and Scott Amendola)

2009 – *Fissures, Futures (for Buckminster Fuller)* with visual artist Lillevan and musicians Carla Kihlstedt, Charlotte Hug, Joan Jeanrenaud, Lisle Ellis, Thomas Lehn and Kjell Nordesen.

2010 – *Pandaemonium* composed for Rova by Carla Kihlstedt

Some of these projects have had ongoing lives as separate projects. *Electric Ascension* has been performed to great acclaim at festivals in Europe and the U.S. with the original band when possible, but with other musicians as well, including Andrew Cyrille, Trevor Dunn, Tom Rainey, Lisle Ellis, Natsuki Tamura, Peter Evans, Eyvind Kang, Jason Hwang, Marina Rosenfeld, Thomas Lehn, Zeena Parkins, Andrea Parkins, Elliot Sharp, Peggy Lee and Wayne Horvitz, among others. The sextet version of *The Mirror World* with two drummers has been performed in Europe and Japan with Paul Lytton and Raymond Strid, Michael Vatcher and Tony Buck, Vladimir Tarasov and Fritz Hauser, Fabrizio Spera and Cristiano Calcagnile, and Samm Bennett and Tatsuya Yoshida. *An Alligator in Your Wallet* has had compelling realizations in Japan, Switzerland, France and Finland with local musicians.

Rova has had other notable collaborations, including a quintet with Anthony Braxton, as recorded on *The Aggregate*; a quintet with Steve Lacy; a sextet with Fred Frith and Tom Cora; an octet with four Turkish percussionists; the saxophone octet *Figure 8* with Tim Berne, Glenn Spearman, Dave Barrettt and Vinny Golia; and joint projects with bands including Mr. Bungle, the Splatter Trio and the Hub. Rova also performed Jon Raskin's *Telegraphing the Temescal* with the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra. Our new project is the *Celestial Septet*, with the Nels Cline Singers.

Some highlights of the last decade include performing with *Yo! Miles* at the Fillmore in San Francisco; our second tour of Japan with a performance on NHK, the national radio network; performances at festivals such as the Tampere International Jazz Festival, the Festival Internationale Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville, Jazz em Agosto in Lisbon, the Leipzig Jazz Festival, the Zomer Jazz Fietstour in Groningen, Holland, the Ulrichsberg Festival in Austria, Novara Jazz in Italy and the Rive-de-Gier festival in France. Rova's American tours have taken us to venues including Merkin Hall in New York, the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, FL and the Redcat Theater in Los Angeles.

The list of composers who have written music for Rova is long and illustrious: Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill, Jack DeJohnette, Terry Riley, Alvin Curran, Marty Ehrlich, Mark Dresser, Tim Berne, Annie Gosfield, George Lewis, Fred Ho, Muhal Richard Abrams, Robin Holcombe, Wadada Leo Smith, Lindsay Cooper, Fred Frith, Henry Kaiser, David Lang, John Carter, Chris Brown, Pauline Oliveros, John Butcher, Satoko Fujii and Barry Guy among others. Rova:Arts has also commissioned up and coming local composers to write original music for Rova including Ben Goldberg, John Schott, Dana Reason, Gino Robair, Myles Boisen and Miya Masaoka. In June 2002, Rova was the featured guest at Meet the Composer's national event held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, entitled *The Works* — a two-day festival of live music and discourse. This honor was presented to Rova as the group most often awarded funding to commission new works. Rova's members have written extensively for the group themselves, and have also created collaborative pieces such as *Radar*, an improvisational piece based on a system of hand gestures.

We also have the *Art of the Improvisers* series, where Rova partners with guests from the local and international community of improvisers for evenings of free improvisations. Guests have included Vijay Iyer, Mark Izu, Lisle Ellis, Sara Schoenbeck, LaDonna Smith and Vinny Golia.

Rova has been active as an educational force, advocating for improvisational and creative music, with residencies at M.I.T. and the University of Iowa, and workshops at schools and universities including San Diego State University, the University of Denver, Indiana University, the University of Colorado, Northern Illinois University, the Eastman School of Music, Rollins College and Full Sail University.

Having passed our 30th year as a group, Rova is still excited about investigating both new and familiar worlds of art-making and performance, and we look forward to you joining us for the ride.