

History

Rova Saxophone Quartet, the acclaimed all-saxophone ensemble, has fundamentally extended the horizons of music since forming in 1977. In the beginning, there was only the band and the enthusiasm to try and get at something new. Most of Rova's music in this period was composed by its members, as the compositions were often tied directly to research and development that occurred during rehearsals. During these years, Rova toured in the US, Canada and Europe, and also collaborated with the Margaret Jenkins Ensemble and the Kronos Quartet, among others. In 1983, also before the founding of Rova:Arts, Rova 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 stations throughout the U.S.

In 1984, Rova collaborated for a week of concerts with the Kronos Quartet in San Francisco. It was during the run-up to this event that David Harrington of Kronos encouraged Ochs and the others to become a non-profit in order to facilitate tour productions, like the one to the USSR, as well as present local concerts and educational events, and commission compositions for the quartet.

Two years later, Rova formed its official non-profit organization called **Rova:Arts** as an umbrella organization for the saxophone quartet. The purpose of the organization was to assist the advancement of adventurous music through presentation, commissioning and education. With the help of its first Board of Directors, Rova:Arts began a series of concerts called *PreEchoes* that ran from 1986 until 1990. These groundbreaking events featured the first United States presentation of the Russian jazz group the Ganelin Trio, the first San Francisco performances of both John Zorn's game pieces and Lawrence Butch Morris's large ensemble conductions, as well as other Rova collaborations with musicians such as Fred Frith, Henry Kaiser, Richard Teitelbaum, Anthony Braxton, and Terry Riley.

In 1999, Rova:Arts began presenting *Rovaté*, a series of special collaborations between Rova and guests that continues to the present day. A list of many of these shows is on this site under both *Rovaté* and *Collaborations*, the latter category being a list of active, exportable projects. Collaborating artists have included Sam Rivers, Wadada Leo Smith, Gerry Hemingway, Satoko Fujii, Natsuki Tamura, Nels Cline, Scott Amendola, Devin Hoff, Otomo Yoshihide,

Ikue Mori, Carla Kihlstedt, Lillevan, Shinichi Iova-Koga, and many others.

Other avenues for augmenting the quartet have been the *Art of the Improviser* series—evenings of free improvisations with invited guests, and special programs featuring *Orkestrova*, the Rova expanded-ensemble configured on a project-by-project basis to perform compositions by Rova and guest composers. The most noteworthy *Orkestrova* ensemble has been the *Electric Ascension* band, performing a radical reworking of John Coltrane's *Ascension* to great acclaim at festivals world-wide.

Rova:Arts has also commissioned more than forty pieces for saxophone quartet and extended ensembles from notable composers including Terry Riley, Alvin Curran, Henry Threadgill and Jack DeJohnette as well as pieces by members of the quartet. Rova:Arts educational activities have included workshops and residencies in the U.S. and Europe, as well as the Improv:21 series of talks with master improvisers in San Francisco.

All this illustrates how Rova:Arts has enabled the Rova quartet to greatly expand its impact and activities, helping the quartet members to realize an ambitious agenda that furthers the advancement of adventurous music in the San Francisco area and around the world.