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CD: Lautari - Vol 67, 2014 Live

Avant-folk riches from the heart of rural Poland

by [Tim Cumming](#) [1] Monday, 20 July 2015

Lautari Vol 67: Live 2014 features Michael Zak on clarinet, flute and shawn, with bassist Marcin Pospieszalski, fiddle player Maciej Filipczuk and the prepared piano and accordion of Jacek Halas.

That instrument list gives you an idea of the musical territory you're travelling through. Just as Jabusz Prusinowski Kompania, of which Zak is a member, specialises in antique Polish styles, so *Lautari* set about blowing wind, striking keys and drawing bows across a musical landscape of angular and contemporary arrangements of deeply rural tunes and dances.

Sonically, they shape-shift from antique village dances that rise from the skeletal to the fully fleshed, to contemporary European art music quartet – call it jazz, call it folk, call it what you like – the supple double bass sewing the complex rhythms like so many self-germinating seeds, the fiddle by turns pleading, leading and atonally screeching like some uprooted mandrake, drawing the flesh back on the original folk melodies, uncovering new layers of shape and rhythm as they go.

There are two taproots of source material for the album. The *Vol 67* in the title refers to 19th-century Polish folklorist and collector Oskar Kolberg's vast collection *The Folk: Its Customs, Life, Speech, Tales, Proverbs, Rituals, Superstitions, Games, Songs, Music & Dances*. They also draw from *Vol 23* – tunes from the Kalisz region of central Poland, and from the band's own field recordings. Instead of going into a studio to record these new settings for ancient songs and dances, they chose to use a bigger room and a live setting – Lodz's Philharmonic Hall – to debut and record this striking 60-minute set.

The CD comes with extensive notes and artwork, providing useful context for the music. For "Owijak Zapustny", for instance, the source text reads: "On the Shrovetide, the maidens were plucking sprigs because they hadn't got husbands last year", and it's illustrated by what looks like a prepubescent figure roughly carved from spruce, sporting an enormous erection rising up to the chest. The kind of folk art that makes the Chapman Brothers look tame.

At the heart of the set is "Blaszane Mordy", featuring 1950s field recordings of two Polish traditional singers laid over mournful, lyrical, slightly gritty music. Rising and falling around

deep cuts like this comes a range of seasonal, ritual and magic-infused tunes – songs and sounds that were created to make things happen in real life, in the communal and inner life. The closing "Do Tego Tu Domu Wstepujeny" has the same thrilling, primitive riff as The Stooges' "I Wanna Be Your Dog" and The Fall's "Elves", and features a life-size rooster made of clay. Drawing on musical modernism as much as specific rural folk traditions, Lautari deliver a compelling contemporary account from one small corner of the European folk tradition's amazing legacy.

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9th August 2015

An excerpt of a larger article:

The village sings, the village dances

The land beyond the city does not yield many musical secrets these days, but it still inspires artists.

The dream village

(...)

I have never understood why Polish jazz – this colourful, diversified pageant of excellent composers and improvisers – has so rarely drawn from the local musical traditions. Of course, there is Namysłowski. One may add Urbaniak, or even Komeda, but all in all, jewels cut in the folk style are such a rarity in the huge treasury of Polish jazz that it is easy to believe the popular stereotype that Polish musical tradition is a flawed foundation for improvisation. Well, perhaps it is indeed hard to swing to the rhythm of *mazurek*, but the very fact that American jazz does not present itself well when dressed in *sukmana* and decorated with *parzenice* does not prove that Polish traditional music cannot be successfully exposed to creative freedom and bold reinterpretations.

I can now show off like this because I already know *Vol. 67* – a breathtaking, one-hour-long flight by Lautari, running on the rocket fuel of traditional folk tunes from Kalisz and Sieradz regions collected in Oskar Kolberg's miscellany. It usually begins innocently enough from a theme played in unison by the fiddle and the clarinet (or the flute), then the piano joins in and the track develops magnificently, only to disintegrate, still more magnificently, into virtuosic improvisations. Here and there, there are shreds of field recordings, either dug out from archives, or collected by the band themselves, and one has to admit that these chants, as in the track "Blaszane mordy", add diversity to the material. There is one more thing that makes Lautari stand out from many other musical projects that use rusty rusticity as a starting point for modern artistic explorations. It is that while listening to *Vol. 67*, I never have an impression that it is a plunder or a division of the spoils – or, at best, of the inheritance from long-deceased and hardly remembered ancestors. Lautari are simply credible as a folk band, no matter how profoundly educated they are or in how big cities they live.

(...)

Jarek Szubrycht

www.wyborcza.pl

http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,18222914,Nowe_plyty__Lautari_jak_Kolberg__Ludowa_kultura_narodowa.html

24th June 2015

New albums: Lautari like Kolberg.

National folk culture

[REVIEWS]

Vol. 67. Live 2014, Lautari, published by Wodzirej

(Translated from Polish)

The folk-jazz band Lautari gets inspiration from the work of folklorist Oskar Kolberg and brings folk music to the philharmonic. This is not an ordinary music album; it is an enthralling story of the peasant's life captured in 19th century melodies.

Lautari, a Poznan-based ethno jazz trio (with the guest appearance of the bassist Marcin Pospieszalski) up to now mostly focused on the world music of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and even Caucasus, now joins in the musical discourse about Poland exactly where Oskar Kolberg, last year's national cultural honoree, left off. The outstanding 19th century Polish ethnographer published the results of his research on folk culture in a multi-volume work *The Folk*. Now Lautari follows Kolberg's lead in the regions of Kaliskie and Sieradzkie.

The context – typically Kolbergian detailed information "around music", i.e. about dialects, customs, geography, and the placing of a particular music piece in the ritual calendar – became an inspiration for the album. It is very fortunate that Lautari, unlike most performers on the ethnic music scene, uses the prepared piano – the very instrument for which Kolberg transcribed the folk songs collected in Volume 67 of *The Folk*, published as late as the 1980s. This is not the only inspiration, though; among the album's sources, there are also research materials and recordings collected in recent years by the band members themselves, as well as museum archival materials.

This is why *Vol. 67. Live 2014* is such a singular story and such a vibrant performance. The lyrics of the opening track, "Powolny", say: "Make more space! Those that can't dance – stay by the fence!" It sounds like real instructions from a folk bandleader, although *Vol. 67. Live 2014* was recorded at a concert in Łódź Philharmonic. In the world of Lautari, folk culture constitutes a vital part of the national culture. This is exactly what Kolberg did: he treated folk musicians' songs as

part of the national identity. He used musical notation and the piano as a sound system to amplify the tunes of peasant musicians of old.

Lautari (the band's name refers to Carpathian music) is not afraid of enriching these tunes with jazz improvisations and their own inventiveness; they draw experience from all their years of playing with 21st century rural musicians. There are very energetic moments, but there is even more meditation and melancholy, as in the prominent track "Blaszane mordy", where, beside Lautari's instruments, we can hear a recorded song from 1959. It is old, with a humming noise. This tarnished sound, like the buzzing noise of vinyls in hip hop tracks, marks the distance in time and, at the same time, the closeness in the mental space. This is ours, this is where we belong.

Besides, there is the exquisitely beautiful presentation package.

Jacek Świąder

3rd July 2015

MOULDING JAZZ AND FOLK TOGETHER

Lautari comes back to freshen up the Polish ethno jazz scene, and to remind us that in this genre, they are beyond compare. Although the band, stretched between Lublin, Poznan, and Czestochowa, only features three to four musicians, they cause as much commotion as if they were an entire orchestra gone wild.

The main reason is that their new album, *Vol. 67*, is a fascinating, engaging avant-garde deconstruction of traditional tunes. The way in which the opening track, "Powolny", disintegrates, just to return to the already-known theme after that momentary decomposition into prime factors, is only a hint of still more advanced experiments with folk tunes that Lautari perform later on the album. However, these disintegrations are not always as frantic as in this prelude, because the band actually draws from all available genres and techniques of 20th century musical composition, from trance minimalism (played on one note, as in "Owijak zapustny") to atonality, the emulation of the sounds of nature, and free jazz.

Lautari's compositions are notable for their improvisation and their free flow of musical thought. Indeed, the air of freedom and spontaneous play with European music traditions can be heard clearly, especially in this live record, punctuated with applause. However, there is much self-control in this freedom, especially since another characteristic of Lautari's music is selectiveness. Their style is minimalist; particular instruments often appear in solo parts. What is remarkable is the use of classical instruments as traditional folk instruments, e.g. when the fifths played by the piano form the drone basis for a tune. It is all a reminder of Paderewski's ideas – just as he did, Lautari introduce folk into musical salons (however different they look today than they did in the days of the author of *Album tatrzańskie*). It is only that – I will risk a statement verging on blasphemy – Lautari do it better.

Along with purely acoustic means, Lautari also employs music-sampling techniques. The track "Blaszane mordy" is particularly enchanting as it features a field recording played in a

loop, around which, on the *ostinato* foundation of the accordion, other instruments – the clarinet, the piano, and the double bass – create new forms, orbiting the recorded voice like planets. There is also something deeply moving and melancholic in this track. Not only because of the minor key, but perhaps mostly because this track is the most distinct example of mixing tradition with modernity – the very foundation of Lautari's existence.

The theme of ethno jazz is inexhaustable, as both traditional music and jazz are hugely flexible and capacious. In *Vol. 67*, Lautari proves how multidirectional the development of this genre may be. Additionally, they show once more how folk music and jazz can coexist without either of them being treated in a servile way. Quite the contrary, ethno-jazz appears here as a living, organic and fully moldable form.

Kaśka Paluch

Focus and satisfaction

The band Lautari has been closely connected with Poznan for years; two of its members still live here. I emphasize this because it is really enjoyable that they have released a fabulous album, which has had its premiere at Ethno Port in Poznan.

The band Lautari follow a rule which is fairly unusual these days: that one should release an album only when the content is well prepared and thought out; when the record contains a story which is coherent, engaging and new. This is why, despite having been on stage for several years, they have only so far released two albums; however, each of them was a true artistic breakthrough. Even if we add two other records released in recent years by the band's leader Maciej Filipczuk, as they fit the context of the last album, the count of the band's releases are still low. Fortunately enough, music is not about statistics, and each new accomplishment by Filipczuk and his colleagues is worth waiting for, no matter how long.

Volume 67

The two already-mentioned albums recorded by the band's leader in recent years were expressions of his fascination with Polish traditional music, especially with the accomplishments of one of its greatest masters – the fiddler Kazimierz Meto. I am mentioning this because Lautari's new album is in some way a continuation of this narrative.

The band has gotten its listeners accustomed to expecting each of the new albums (recorded in changing line-ups) to refer to a different inspiration. Whereas the first record drew from Carpathian music (to the greatest extent Romanian), the second one was mostly a fabulous journey to the east, towards the Armenian tradition. Now, as I mentioned before, the artists focused on Polish traditional music, but they perceived it from an unusual perspective. The main inspiration was Volume 67 (hence, obviously, the album's title: *Vol. 67*) of a monumental work by Oskar Kolberg *The Folk: its Customs, Life, Speech, Tales, Proverbs, Rituals, Superstitions, Games, Songs, Music, and Dances*.

The volume contains piano arrangements of folk music. Therefore, it is in itself a temptation for further individual artistic pursuits, a bit of an artistic excuse or justification for improvising on traditional themes. As Lautari not only includes expert instrumentalists, but also wholeheartedly devoted enthusiasts of traditional music, the result of this pursuit is a new, outstanding quality, a fruit of the reverential immersion in tradition, first filtered through the 'piano-wise' perception of this tradition, and finally reinforced with the musicians' own sensitivities and bold artistic visions.

Within a single, few–minutes–long track, we may find a faithfully rendered folk dancing theme; a folk interpretation thereof, still in a dialogue with the original tune; and finally an improvisation, sometimes almost verging on free jazz. It is significant that the artists can abandon these torrential instrumental cascades in the nick of time and take up the previous calm, swaying tune again.

The Four

In recent years, I have heard many jazzmen's attempts to play folk music or traditional themes. None of them has been so thrilling, so coherent, and so filled with a common spirit, with traditional themes not being mere pretexts for clichéd solos, but remaining the compositional foundation at every moment of the track. It is not only the result of the musicians' skill and their respect for the folk repertoire. It is probably also because they do not feel ashamed just to play for people to dance sometimes, thus paying tribute to their masters and making their music more communicative and listener–friendly.

It should be mentioned who "they" are; I have an impression, verging on certainty, that it is the encounter of these four individuals that makes the whole thing so enthralling; that the unusual bond between them results in true musical synergy which makes the final outcome so excellent.

This original whole consists of: the fiddler Maciej Filipczuk; Michał Żak on clarinet, flute, and shawn; Jacek Hałas on prepared piano and accordion; and Marcin Pospieszalski on double bass. The album was recorded at a concert in Łódź Philharmonic, so on the one hand, it has the natural emotions of a spontaneous show, and on the other, it ensures the high quality of the performance.

The album is definitely played in earnest and required a constant focus and immense skills from the musicians. And yet, while listening, one has a relentless impression that the artists must have had a great time playing; it must have given them lots of satisfaction.

Last but not least, the album is accompanied with a beautiful, meticulously prepared booklet.

Hearty recommendations!

Tomasz Janas

^ **Lautari, Vol. 67**

^ **Publisher: Wodzirej**

Translated from Polish

Andrew Cronshaw on vol. 67 in fRoots 390.

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LAUTARI

Vol.67 – Live 2014

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Polish musicians delving into traditional music come not only from the folk revival but also, to some extent, from the classical world, and there's some bridging going on from both sides, in, for example, the work of percussion and piano quartet Kwadrofonik with traditional themes and singers, and Wołosi's meeting of village and classical musicians. Lautari is the quartet of Michał Zak of Janusz Prusinowski Kompania (clarinet, flute, shawm), Maciej Filipczuk (violin), Jacek Hałas (piano, accordeon) and Marcin Pospieszalski (double bass).

Vol.67 in the album title refers to one book in the huge collection of folk music, dance and custom gathered and published in the 19th Century from across Poland by Oskar Kolberg. Vol.67 contains Kolberg's own piano arrangements of some of the tunes. Inspired by that, Lautari make their own arrangements and developments of material from the regions Kalisz and Sieradz in central Poland, using as sources Kolberg's Vol.23 Kalisz and other written and recorded archives.

Coming in a slightly larger than CD-sized hardback pack (which qualifies it as a book, hence the ISBN number), there are fifteen pieces, all except one recorded live in concert at Łódź Philharmonic Hall.

Most start with a traditional tune, largely of the mazurek/oberek type, and lead into largely free-jazzish deconstructions. This would be fine once or twice, but it's a rather too frequent formula, and the deconstruction happens before there's been enough exploration of the tune itself. The audience applause after each piece breaks the musical flow, and chops up any chance of an overall album narrative, repeatedly raising the question "What did you think of that?"

The only place that doesn't happen is in the one track not recorded in concert, *Blaszane Mordy*, which features samples of 1959 recordings of two traditional singers, reflectively instrumentally enveloped in a way slightly reminiscent of Gavin Bryars' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (but not as hypnotically slowly unfolding, nor as long!). There have been other uses of archive recordings in the Polish revival and elsewhere, but even though these are borrowed voices from the past (and there are living traditional singers still in strong voice around Poland), they give a characterful root to the album, and the absence of applause makes that track a more rounded musical statement.

It's an album perhaps made too soon, but Lautari is certainly a band to watch, of creative musicians significant in the evolution of Polish music."

Andrew Cronshaw