

BARRETT MARTIN

Barrett Martin's recent creative endeavors include a book and a related album.



DRUMMER'S DIY JOURNEY CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

Many musicians who thrived during the alternative-rock gold rush of the 1990s have, by now, hopped onto the nostalgia circuit to cash in on their past glories. Others, however, have sought out new lands and new interests. Henry Bogdan, former bassist for neo-metal quartet Helmet, has carved out a comfortable niche as a guitarist for traditional Hawaiian music ensembles and old-time jazz groups. And John Frusciante, ex-guitarist for Red Hot Chili Peppers, now tests the outer limits of electronic music as a solo artist.

Few, though, have ventured as far, physically and musically, as Barrett Martin. Best

known in the rock world for his drumming on the last two studio albums by Screaming Trees and post-grunge supergroup Mad Season, the 52-year-old has spent the majority of his life traveling the world, seeking enlightenment and new musical terrain to cultivate. Those journeys have included government-sponsored jaunts to Cuba, explorations of the Peruvian rainforest and recordings with Brazilian singer Nando Reis and with tribes in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

Martin's travels and studies have led to two professional titles on his resume: educator and author. For the past seven years, he's

taught music and theory classes at Antioch University Seattle. In addition to writing a blog for The Huffington Post, he has penned two books—*The Singing Earth: Adventures from a World of Music* (2017) and the recently released *The Way of the Zen Cowboy: Fireside Stories from a Globetrotting Rhythmologist*. (The latter book includes a free download of the Barrett Martin Group's new album, *Songs Of The Firebird*.) Martin has filtered his ongoing interest in ethnomusicology, his own personal studies and his many stories from the field into smart, edifying prose meant to open up fellow curiosity-seekers to the possibilities of sound and culture.

"At the end of the day, it's just one person telling a story to other people," Martin said during a phone call from his home in Port Townsend, Washington, situated on the Olympic Peninsula just west of Seattle. "Music's the same thing. I studied a lot of linguistics, because within music is a language. And what a lot of people don't realize is that music itself is a language. We hear it in European classical music and we hear it in jazz. There's a lot of very old, world instrumental music and it's all a form of dialogue. It's a form of communication."

The most direct route into what Martin seeks to express is through any of the seven studio albums he's written and recorded with his namesake ensemble. The free-flowing band is a perfect outlet for its leader's growing interests, eschewing the heavy attack of former projects—such as the Screaming Trees and his early '90s stint in the noise-rock band Skin Yard—and focusing instead on club-ready rhythms, jazz fusion and fearless world-beat jams. Sonically, things get particularly interesting when Martin and his cohort start blending those genres together, creating a vibe that works like small electrodes firing into joints and muscles. Listeners can't help but move to them.

The Barrett Martin Group has honed that aesthetic on the ambitious *Songs Of The Firebird*, a double album with 20 tracks that were crafted to reflect some of the themes of *The Way of the Zen Cowboy*.

"At the same time as I was developing these songs," Martin recalled, "I was also writing these stories. I realized that they're coming from the same being, and they're really two sides of the same coin: a body of music and a body of stories. [The music] sounded like a soundtrack to the stories, and the stories gave me inspiration to come up with the song titles. As I was completing the two, I would embed the song titles within the story as little secret clues."

While the two releases complement each other well, the book and the album each can stand on their own as accomplished works of art. *Firebird*, especially, feels like a perfectly singular statement, driven by Martin's fluid, splashy playing—augmented throughout by percussionists Lisette Garcia and Thione Diop—and a compositional style that flows between genres with ease. The versatile, 10-member ensemble can mesh the jerking beats of drum 'n' bass with post-bop horn figures or generate a Steve Reich-like pattern played on marimba and kalimba to fuel a gentle samba.

Firebird also stands out because Martin recruited a few high-profile guests who happen to be his pals from the Northwest music scene. One memorable track, the psychedeli-

cized post-rock tune "Requiem," features an electric guitar line played by Soundgarden's Kim Thayil and a steady acoustic strum from R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck, with whom Martin has collaborated in the band Tuatara.

Also joining the festivities is jazz keyboardist Wayne Horvitz, who adds squelching solos to two *Firebird* tracks. (Horvitz and Buck also played on the Barrett Martin Group's 2018 album, *Transcendence*.)

"Barrett fits in this tradition of artists who were well known in the rock scene and who have gone on to do great things and been really supportive figures," said Horvitz, one of the founders of the jazz-centric Seattle music venue the Royal Room. "So many [musicians from] other cities with a scene like they had in the '90s would have taken off to New York or L.A. [But] all the big bands from the Seattle scene have stayed true to Seattle and invested in it. I see this project as being part of that vibe."

Nowadays, Martin is fully committed to a DIY approach. His albums and books are released through his imprints, Sunyata Records and Sunyata Books. For the Barrett Martin Group albums, he handles everything: paying for studio time and paying his musicians, as well as designing the packaging and filling orders for distribution. He does the same for his books, overseeing the design and printing, and then distributing the titles via companies like Amazon and Barnes & Noble, or even shipping out copies himself.

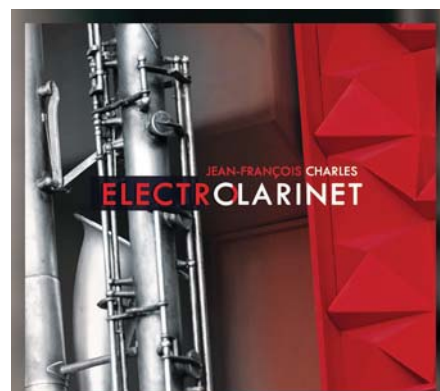
Martin's need to control the means of production is, in part, a result of his uneasy experiences working with record labels as a member of Screaming Trees, Mad Season and Tuatara.

"The Trees toured all over the world and didn't make any money," Martin said. "Then Tuatara did our first record [1997's *Breaking The Ethers*], and the president of Epic at the time loved it. That president got immediately fired and Tuatara got dropped in 1998. We were just abandoned. So, I thought, 'All right, I'm going to start my own label.'"

In the years since that decision, Martin has endured some bumps in the road—like losing all of his physical product held by a distributor in the early '00s. But today, his small machine runs smoothly with the help of a dedicated group of folks who handle the business activities that he doesn't do himself, such as publicity and radio promotion.

"They're all old-school professionals who have adapted to the new business models and refined their approach," Martin said of his business collaborators. "We're all these old veterans who keep going because we love music. I mean, some part of us must love the music business or we wouldn't keep doing it."

—Robert Ham



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CÉLINE RUDOLPH



Céline Rudolph, shown here with collaborator Lionel Loueke, says her upbringing readied her to embrace a global vision of music.

A PASSION FOR BORDERLESS MUSIC

Berlin-based singer-songwriter Céline Rudolph grew up immersed in multiculturalism, surrounded by different languages, the grooves of several continents and the tones of various instruments. Her mother taught her French and introduced her to the melodic richness of *chanson*. Her father taught her German and presented Rudolph with the compelling grooves of African drumming and the soft sweetness of Brazilian vocal jazz. And later, at Berlin University of the Arts, she studied jazz under the tutelage of several prominent American instrumentalists: vibraphonist David Friedman, drummer Jerry Granelli and pianist Kirk Nurock.

"It's a gift being raised with two languages, because then your ear is very open to all different sounds," Rudolph said in a recent phone call to discuss her latest release, *Pearls*, newly launched on her own label, Obsessions. "The ear is my tool—everything comes in through the ear."

The distinctive aural impressions of Rudolph's upbringing find expression on the album, more than a dozen tracks of original songs, jams and radio edits. Recorded in

Brooklyn with an impressive assemblage of protean musicians—guitarist/singer Lionel Loueke, pianist Leo Genovese, bass clarinetist John Ellis, bassist Burniss Travis and producer/drummer Jamire Williams—these individualistic compositions don't land easily in any one bucket.

Rudolph, however, is clear about what defines her sound. "My main approach to music is through jazz—always from the point of view of a jazz musician," she said. "So, in my music, the cultures blend and meld together, and the music doesn't fall apart. [Instead], the different genres are very inspiring to me and lead me to new horizons."

One of these new horizons was the 2017 formation of the Obsessions label, undertaken in large part to self-release a duo album of the same name, recorded with likeminded musician Loueke. Born in Benin, trained at Berklee College of Music and the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, and now residing in Luxembourg, Loueke's musical interests reflect Rudolph's—French *chanson*, African rhythms, American jazz. So, the fit seemed natural. "Céline is indeed my musical soulmate,"

Loueke wrote in an email while on tour in Europe. "We are connected when we play, and our vision of music is very similar."

That vision is, in a word, global—and according to Rudolph, this global vision is not one that many recording companies share. "I started the label to be independent and to make my music heard internationally," she said. "A lot of labels—especially European labels—don't think that way. So, you can record a lot of albums and stay in your country, but it's hard to get heard outside of that. This is a step toward promoting [my music] outside of Germany—in other European countries and in the U.S.—I have this freedom now."

It's hard to doubt Rudolph's expertise in the matter, given her years of experience working with some of Europe's best labels.

She released *Salvador*—in both French and German versions—in 2011 on Verve/Universal Music; *Metamorflores* in 2009 and *Brazaventure* in 2007 on Enja Records; and *Book Of Travels* in 1996 and *Paintings* in 1994 on Nabel Records. And on the Swiss imprint ZeroZero, she released *Berlin*, 1999 and *Segredo*, both in 1999.

Loueke concurs with Rudolph's assessment of the challenges that polyglot, polymath musicians face in their efforts to reach an international audience. "The major labels are in crisis these days, as we all know," he asserted. "I truly believe that it's time for us musicians to own our music, and I think that Céline is doing the right things for her career. She's a positive voice in the music community, and she is making a great impact as a singer and independent label owner."

With label ownership comes new responsibilities, however, especially regarding international promotion. Last year, Rudolph and Loueke toured seven West African countries with *Obsession* on behalf of the Goethe-Institut—Rudolph would like to devise a similar jaunt to promote *Pearls* throughout the United States.

"I've started touring the album in Europe already, and I'm looking for partners in the States because I know it's going to be really difficult to organize a [U.S. tour] from here," she said. "My wish would be to find a partner who could [sponsor] the band, maybe with some of the original lineup."

As she contemplates her next steps as an indie artist, what drives Rudolph—as ever—is her passion for borderless sounds. "I'd love to perform [the album] worldwide," she concluded. "This music is my way of loving life."

—Suzanne Lorge

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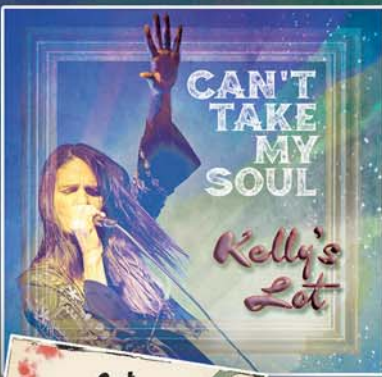





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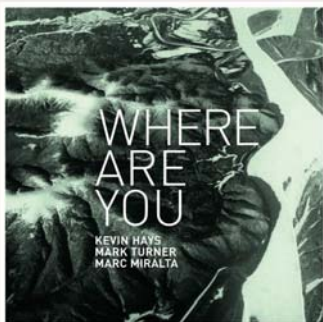
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DELMARK RECORDS



Julia A. Miller (left) and Elbio Barilari run Chicago's Delmark Records.

DELMARK FOCUSED ON NEW ERA OF CREATIVITY

After six decades as the overachieving offspring of founder Bob Koester, Delmark Records was purchased in May 2018 by Julia A. Miller and Elbio Barilari. One year into their ambitious five-year plan to bring the label into the 21st century, this labor of love has been “everything and more” they expected it to be, said Miller, Delmark president and CEO. “And we’re even ahead of our expectations for the first year.”

Interviewed at Delmark’s combination Riverside Studio, offices and warehouse on Chicago’s Northwest Side, the two musicians, educators and radio hosts admitted that Koester and his wife, Sue, have proven tough acts to follow. At the same time, they bring a different perspective than the octogenarian Koester, who often remarked that jazz and blues fans are unlike other music consumers in that they prefer physical products in the form of CDs or LPs, rather than streams or downloads. Not that the new owners aren’t exploring retro formats.

There are 782 products now offered on the Delmark website, most of which are available digitally. But while the site proclaims “A New Era for Delmark Records,” the label is wooing audiophiles with reel-to-reel reissues of classics from its catalog, starting with albums by Junior Wells, Jimmy Forrest, Magic Sam and Sun Ra. Prices range from \$139 to \$400, Barilari said.

Miller said she and Barilari have complemen-

tary skills that served them well during the transition. “I have five music degrees, guitar performance and composition degrees, and it’s been a learning curve,” she said. “We bring different things to this partnership. As the president of the business, if I didn’t take on those responsibilities of organizing things, the business would implode. A lot of people talk about Elbio as the Uruguayan composer, and he’s more than that. Having a female CEO and a Latino artistic director [and vice president] gives us a unique perspective. We’re more than the sum of our parts.”

Providing continuity as the third member of the team is Steve Wagner, Delmark’s label and studio manager. Widely respected for delivering a classic sound as engineer and producer on countless Delmark recordings, Wagner paused during a recent editing job to discuss the studio’s recent purchase of Pro Tools music production software. This addition to his toolbox, Wagner said, offers him greater flexibility. “Steve is also an archivist,” Miller said. “He knows all the technology, runs the studio and organized all the masters.”

Barilari and Miller said being musicians themselves helps, too, enabling them to relate to Delmark artists. “For example, we’d never ask a musician to sign a contract that we wouldn’t sign ourselves,” Miller pledged.

Blues and jazz artists in Chicago and beyond are on board. Veteran Chicago jazz singer Dee Alexander, who is recording her first solo disc for

Delmark, said, “That plays a big, important part, that they are actually jazz musicians themselves. They know what jazz musicians need and require, and know how to deal with temperamental musicians. We all care about the music and want to be treated with kid gloves, and that’s exactly what they do.” *It’s Too Hot For Words*, scheduled for an August release, pairs Alexander with the Metropolitan Jazz Octet for a deep exploration of the Billie Holiday catalog.

Willie Buck, whose latest Delmark release, *Willie Buck Way*, marks the dedication of a Chicago street to the bluesman, said he barely gave the ownership change a thought while working on the album. “I don’t see a lot changing,” the Mississippi native said.

An important benefit for Barilari and Miller in buying Delmark was finding a home for their own experimental jazz-rock group, Volcano Radar. For *Paquito Libre*, their recent Delmark release, Barilari recruited his old friend Paquito D’Rivera to play clarinet and alto saxophone. “We exemplify the breadth of the label with our playing,” Miller said. “We look at Delmark as a platform for creativity. Creative control and vision are really important to us, and that was what Delmark was really all about. In our market, we’re not a major-label thing. It’s a very specific creative and intellectual project, and we wanted it to be a joyous outgrowth of what’s happening with our label.”

—Jeff Johnson

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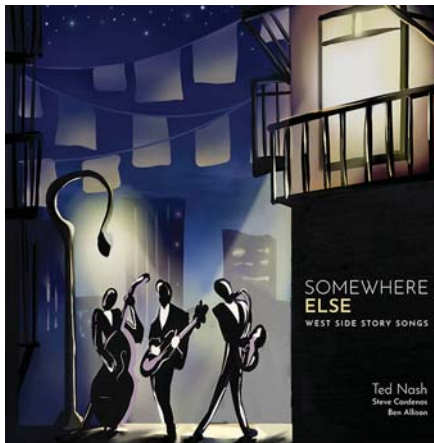
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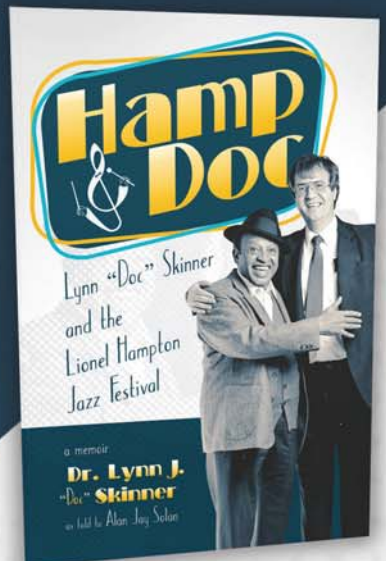
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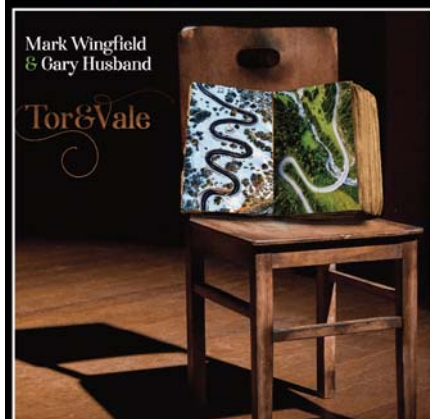
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