

Dino Saluzzi Group

Juan Condori

Dino Saluzzi: bandoneon; **Felix ‘Cuchara’ Saluzzi:** tenor and soprano saxophones, clarinet; **José Maria Saluzzi:** acoustic and electric guitars; **Matias Saluzzi:** double-bass, bass guitar; **U.T. Gandhi:** drums, percussion

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“Everything flows together. Like clear water.” – Dino Saluzzi

Dino Saluzzi is a unique musical storyteller. The fact that he is also, by general consensus, the outstanding bandoneonist of his generation, is for Dino almost an incidental distinction. “I don’t want to be a competitor in a championship world of music making. If we think like that we lose much, including our understanding of our culture, including our memories.”

Saluzzi writes his music to hold onto these things: “If we don’t take responsibility for our memories, who will? As a musician, I’m the servant of my memories, but my memories also help me.” Consider the title track here: “Juan Condori was one of our friends from childhood, who grew up with us in the same village”, the village of Campo Santo in Northern Argentina. “My first picture of him is when I was three or four... now we go back almost 70 years... this picture is inside of me like a dream. But when we play the music I remember more clearly – and I am together with him again.” “Juan Condori”, the composition, is a portrait of a man from one of the Amerindian families of the Salta province, “who had a real sense of humanity and a magical relationship to the whole context of nature. He preferred to live outside, in the countryside, in touch with birds, animals, fish, insects, plants. A wise, funny, warm-hearted man...”

‘Warm-hearted’ or ‘tender’ can serve as a fair description of this project as a whole. Musicians of many cultures have played with Dino Saluzzi. The present recording is concerned very specifically with roots, the shared roots of the Saluzzi family, and “memories also of our ancestors who sing through us.” Dino is heard with his brother, saxophonist Felix Saluzzi, his son José Maria Saluzzi on guitar, Felix’s son Matias Saluzzi on bass, and a new friend and honorary family member, Italian drummer U.T. Gandhi, who makes his ECM debut here. The Dino Saluzzi Group, which has also toured as the Saluzzi Family Project, has been a much loved group on the international touring circuit for a long time. It has been fifteen years since Dino last recorded a family album, 1991’s “Mojotoro”. Like that disc, “Juan Condori” was recorded in Buenos Aires, “because that’s the place where this kind of playing can be more readily captured... The music industry is centralised now, but music making is still regional, still local, even if we are all reaching for the ‘universal’.”

Dino and Felix have played music together since childhood. “We’d gather around the dinner table with instruments. It was like a game originally. We have been doing it for so long we don’t have to talk about it much. It really is a shared language. Sometimes my brother will play something, a phrase and I remember it from long ago and realise it’s something I once heard sung, by the Indians.

“In another context, musicians might be able to play my pieces ‘perfectly’ in an academic sense and still be unacceptable to my ear. The question is always: how do we get from the notes on the paper to the reality that’s happening in the moment. I don’t have to explain this

to the players in the family, I don't have to tell them *how* to play my melodies, not even the young guys, and it's not that it's something I've 'taught' them. My son: he learnt from other players, not from me. He has a different life experience, but we do have things in common. So if one of the goals is 'communication' –and that is a big word – on records like this one we want to show you a glimpse of places far away, places you don't know. That is one of the things this group can do. We work on the music as a family. The music is coming from my ideas but everybody has freedom of expression and I am open to the changing of harmonies, intonation, rhythm as the pieces are developed.”

José Maria Saluzzi first played percussion and drums – he was the drummer at 16, on “Mojotero” – before turning his attention to piano, electric bass and then guitar. He studied with Walter Malosetti and Anibal Arias and later had some lessons from Ralph Towner. He's been heard on 1996's “Cité de la Musique” and 2001's “Responsorium” as acoustic guitarist; “Juan Condori” is the first of the ECM Saluzzi releases to include also his more jazz-aligned electric playing. The new disc also includes Jose's composition “Soles”, which segues into his father's tribute to his home town, “La Camposanteña”.

Other tunes are all Dino's, save for the Pedro Laurenz tango classic “Milonga De Mis Amores” and the spontaneously-created “Improvisacion”. As ever his pieces reflect upon things lived, seen, experienced. “La Vuelta De Pedro Orillas” bemoans “the turning away from the wisdom of the people who live on the periphery, the Indians.” “Chiriguano” is similarly dedicated to one of the last Indian tribes. (“When we were young we had a lot of contact to them. We'd go to their land by the river, go fishing with them, bring them salt and oil, spend weeks without any contact to 'civilization'.”) “Memoria” recalls the victims of the 1994 bombing of the Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires. “La Parecida” is concerned with the music's attempt to claim autonomy and freedom for itself, beyond service to the dance. “Los Sauces” is dedicated to Dino's “favourite tree”, the weeping willow, “with its branches like women's hair”. Saluzzi's memories fan out in all directions...

Felix Saluzzi's contributions on saxes, especially the full-throated tenor, have a rough-hewn quality that jazz observers may consider characteristically 'Argentinean'. It should be remembered however that it was Dino Saluzzi who guided Gato Barbieri back to his roots on recordings such as 1973's “Chapter One: Latin America”. Is there in fact a post-tango saxophone tradition? “No, no,” says Dino. “Or if there is, we started it. The important point for me is that the saxophone has its own diction, its own impulsion, and does not attempt to imitate the phrasing of the bandoneon. The same goes for the guitar and the bass. José and Matias – I have a lot of trust in them. They are very receptive and they take seriously the idea of creativity and finding your own way.”

Udine-based drummer U.T. Gandhi, born Umberto Trombetta, was brought to the group by producer Manfred Eicher, and has already toured widely with the Saluzzis. (So compatible has the combination proven that Dino is now playing in Gandhi's new group as well). In Italy the drummer is best known for his membership of Enrico Rava's Electric Five band. He has also played with Richard Galliano, Giancarlo Schiaffini, Gianluigi Trovesi, Tony Scott, Jack Walrath, Louis Sclavis, Stefano Bollani, and many others. Dino: “He's really one of the best. A very open and sensitive guy. He plays differently to us yet we work very well together. Everything flows together when this group is working well. Like clear water.”

Born in the North of Argentina in 1935, Dino has been leading bands since he was 14 years old. He began to play professionally while studying in Buenos Aires. It was in Buenos Aires, too, that he met and befriended Astor Piazzolla as the term “tango nuevo” began to gain currency. Though Piazzolla and Saluzzi always respected each other’s work, Dino has never cared to put a label on his own work. But he has stressed, in numerous interviews that his is not an “art music” but a music that comes out of life and attempts to express the emotions, thoughts and memories that accompany it. And this has remained as true of the work that stresses primarily his compositional endeavours – such as the ongoing “Kultrum” collaboration with the Rosamunde Quartett – as it is of work in which improvisation has a larger role to play, as on “Senderos.”

From his first ECM album, recorded in 1982, Saluzzi’s music has been very warmly received by the world’s press. Fanfare magazine was quick to conclude that “Dino Saluzzi is probably the greatest living master of the bandoneon.” Down Beat said, “Reworking elements of tango, South American Indian music, backwater folk tunes and other root sounds, Saluzzi’s breadth of feeling makes for remarkable listening.” The Los Angeles Times, in a best-of-the year survey in 2004 wrote that “Saluzzi is a writer of abstract music but a tanguero at heart; his compositions bring forth the unique sadness of tango. Nobody has stretched the genre’s boundaries to such a degree while retaining a remarkable clarity of purpose.”

Dino gives a lot of credit to the bandoneon itself, which so often sees us like an extension of his personality, reflecting nuances of mood and emotion. “This instrument means my whole life,” he says. “We are together, the instrument and me. Without it by my side I feel uncomfortable, incomplete. Nothing could ever take its place.”

The next year is likely to be an eventful one for Dino Saluzzi. In addition to his work with the family group, he will be touring widely with Anja Lechner, cellist of the Rosamunde Quartett. Lechner and Saluzzi who have played together, intermittently, for more than a decade recently completed a duo album which will be released in 2007 and supported by international touring, including a coast-to-coast tour of the USA in April.