



20 years of ACT 1992 - 2012

“After nearly twenty years as a top executive for Warner International, I finally decided to realise my biggest ambition of all - to form my own record company recording the kind of music I loved – jazz!” With this statement, Siggı Loch ended his high-flying career as an executive within the international music business, and started again as boss of an independent record label. At the age of fifty it was a major midlife career change, but with the launch of the ACT label it was the realisation of a dream that had taken him into the music business in the first place.

The establishment of ACT took place at a time when the internet was beginning to take-off. In the subsequent decades the international music business would be eroded by CD burning and later illegal downloading, and the market would shrink by half. In contrast to this trend, ACT has become one the most “most critically acclaimed and internationally respected independents of the current era“ (Jazzwise).

Twenty years later, the project that started in 1992 is a huge success story: “Music for people with open ears and an open mind,” says Siggı Loch and with this guiding principle in place, he set off on his chosen path. The beginning was a truly an adventure, as working with innovative and unconventional music is always a challenge and of course a big financial risk. But it is only when artists and listeners are open to new sounds that ‘magic moments’ are born, of which there are many in the twenty years of ACT history with artists like Nguyễn Lê, Esbjörn Svensson, Nils Landgren, Michael Wollny, Viktoria Tolstoy, Lars Danielsson, Wolfgang Haffner and Youn Sun Nah inspiring and changing the music world. Twenty years of magic musical moments across more than 350 releases. Twenty years in which European jazz



Siggı Loch - ECHO Jazz award “jazz label of the year 2011”

became a major force in the world of music, with the ACT label playing a major part in this process.

Jazz is equally at home in Europe as it is the USA, and European jazz is certainly no less rich in musical talent. Yet in order to unearth the depth and breadth of its potential the casual listener might need a navigational aid, and ACT has proved itself to be a reliable compass for audiences who are searching for new jazz, as well as those with an ear for exciting music influenced by European folk music, classical music or other cultures. A good example of this is the very first ACT recording “Jazzpaña” (ACT 9212-2). In 1992 in Cologne’s WDR studio, Siggı Loch and Wolfgang Hirschmann brought together some of the best Spanish flamenco players with jazz greats such as Michael Brecker and Al Di Meola. “Jazzpaña” was arranged by Vince Mendoza, and resulted in a wonderfully multicultural musical statement; flamenco meets jazz, blues from old Europe combined with blue notes from the new world. The album turned out to be a great success - it was nominated for two Grammys and received a German Jazz Award, and a further collaboration between ACT and Vince Mendoza, 2008’s Blauklang, proved yet again to be a winning formula with another Grammy nomination.

During the live recordings for “Jazzpaña” Siggı Loch met guitarist Nguyễn Lê, who became the first artist signed exclusively to ACT. Raised by Vietnamese parents in Paris, his musical biography developed into an exciting search for identity between Jimi Hendrix, the ethnic melting pot of Paris and traditional Vietnamese music. Lê’s debut album “Million Waves” (ACT 9221-2) was released in 1995 and right up to the present day he has stayed true to the ACT family with a substantial discography of 14 albums.

Another critically acclaimed ACT success was the jazz symphony of “Europeana” (ACT 9804-2) which combines the rich tradition of European music with the language of jazz. This 1995 release was written by the English composer and arranger Michael Gibbs and won the annual German Record Critics’ Award. The album featured Joachim Kühn, Jean-François Jenny-Clark, Jon Christensen, Django Bates, Klaus Doldinger, Richard Galliano, Christof Lauer, Albert Mangelsdorff and Markus Stockhausen – the cream of contemporary European improvised music, accompanied by the Hannover NDR Radio Philharmonic Orchestra.

ACT’s releases are often an antidote to the idea many people have of jazz – that it is intellectual and inaccessible. Take Bugge Wesseltoft’s “It’s Snowing on My Piano” (ACT 9260-2) for example. This 1998 solo piano album of traditional Christmas songs was the biggest commercial success in ACT’s history. One reason for its popularity maybe is its timelessly beautiful melodic structures that work like a soothing balm against the pushy, abrasive kitsch of modern times.

“My philosophy has always been to find not merely musicians, but rather figures in art, who are extremely independent. In addition, they have to possess the absolute will to captivate the audience,” says Siggı Loch. This credo also applies to Nils Landgren, the trombonist, bandleader, and singer from Sweden, who has been a part of the ACT family from the very beginning. Nils embodies the spirit of funk, but he also sings ballads with real emotion, and is equally at home with big band projects and playing cool Scandinavian music. In addition to his own projects (the latest his exquisite vocal album “The Moon, The Stars And You” (ACT 9505-2)), he also acts as a producer and a source of inspiration for the people he works with. Talking about his close friendship to Siggı Loch, Nils says, “Siggı has given me strength to outdo myself. A lot of the energy I put in is also floating back to me.” Thanks to this rich association with Sweden and

its artists, Siggı discovered the talents of Esbjörn Svensson, who was the keyboardist of Nils Landgren’s Funk Unit at the time. With e.s.t. Svensson became one of the most highly regarded young pianists in jazz. The 1999 e.s.t. debut on the ACT label “From Gagarin’s Point of View” (ACT 9005-2) astonished the jazz world with a vision of jazz piano trio jazz that was fresh and vital. Due to their intense, genre breaking performances the Esbjörn Svensson Trio reached out to audiences beyond the usual jazz constituency. One of the trio’s early successes was to be the first European band to appear on the cover of the American Downbeat magazine, and with the phenomenal rise of e.s.t. Siggı Loch’s vision became reality – “jazz is cool!” Jazz wasn’t necessarily being relegated to a mere footnote in the music world, but was filling big venues, and as if to underline this the concert recording “Live in Hamburg” (ACT 6002-2) became a modern milestone, chosen as the best jazz album of the decade by the London Times in 2009. Although Svensson’s tragic death in 2008 left a huge gap that was almost impossible to fill, his pioneering work in the field of contemporary European jazz continues to live on.

In addition to Landgren and Svensson, several other established jazz stars from the north have turned ACT into the most successful label promoting Swedish jazz artists, including Lars Danielsson, Viktoria Tolstoy and Rigmor Gustafsson. In recognition of Siggı Loch’s far sighted vision in promoting Swedish jazz, Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden conferred a knighthood (Knight 1st Class of the Order of the Nordstjärneorden) on Siggı Loch for his services to Swedish culture in Germany in 2010.

“Jazz made in Germany” has also been very close to Siggı Loch’s heart. In 2005 he heard the young pianist Michael Wollny on a demo tape and was extremely impressed. Wollny’s debut on ACT “Call It [em]” (ACT 9650-2), the trio with Eva Kruse on bass and Eric Schaefer on drums collectively dubbed [em], was the first album released in the ‘Young German Jazz’ series. In addition to [em], Wollny performed in critically acclaimed duo recordings with Heinz Sauer and Joachim Kühn as well as solo projects. The British jazz writer Stuart Nicholson named their latest album “[em] Live at JazzBaltica” (ACT 9668-2) “the best jazz album of the last 25 years”, while The Hamburger Abendblatt called Wollny “the strongest (jazz) personality in Germany since Albert Mangelsdorff”. Other new jazz talents like Julian & Roman Wasserfuhr, Matthias Schriebl, Jan Zehrfeld’s Panzerballett or the latest discoveries Three Fall and Mo’Blow have all found their

way into the spotlight thanks to Loch's pioneering work with the 'Young German Jazz' series.

Established German jazz musicians have also found their home at ACT: the country's most sought-after drummer, Wolfgang Haffner, is the most successful German artist on the label. His 2006 album "Shapes" (ACT 9603-2) was another ACT best seller, receiving the German Jazz Award, while his 2008 album "Acoustic Shapes" was called, "a superb example of European jazz at its best," by the British jazz magazine Jazzwise. With these albums, Haffner joined a distinguished roster of his fellow countrymen on the ACT label like Joachim Kühn, Heinz Sauer, Jens Thomas and Christof Lauer.

According to the English broadsheet *The Guardian*, "ACT is on a mission to introduce the world to Europe's rising new jazz pianists," and looking back over the last's twenty years the label has become home to some remarkable jazz piano talent including Joachim Kühn, Esbjörn Svensson, Iiro Rantala and the Grammy nominated Vijay Iyer, as well as younger virtuosos such as Yaron Herman, Gwilym Simcock and Michael Wollny. Very recently the Polish pianist Leszek Możdżer has gained huge acclaim for his homage for the forefather of Polish jazz, Krzysztof Komeda. Shortly after its release, his solo album "Komeda" (ACT 9516-2) went to Number One in the Polish pop (!) charts, leaving world-conquering stars like Sting and Beyoncé far behind.

Since 'The Swedish-German Friendship Concerts' in September 2008, a favourite location for live ACT recordings has become the remarkable Schloss Elmau, a unique hotel complex and cultural hideaway in the Bavarian mountains. Schloss Elmau has hosted concerts featuring ACT artists such as Nils Landgren, Michael Wollny, Viktoria Tolstoy and Lars Danielsson that were dedicated to the memory of Esbjörn Svensson, who had died just three months before. These concerts were released on "Magic Moments @ Schloss Elmau" (ACT 9480-2), and inspired a whole series of further recordings at this magical place. With recordings by Gwilym Simcock, Joachim Kühn & Michael Wollny, Danilo Rea & Flavio Boltrio, Vladyslav Sendek and Dieter Ilg, ACT has established the name of Schloss Elmau as a trademark for outstanding chamber jazz.

In 2010 Siggis Loch celebrated three milestones; on the 26th of January, MIDEM in Cannes honoured his 50-year career with a special 'jubilee night', on the

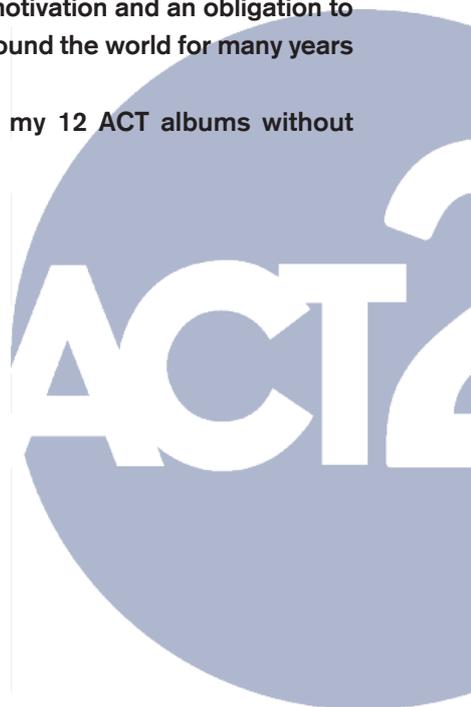
6th of August he celebrated his 70th birthday and that same year his autobiography was published. His memoirs prove that Loch's enormous wealth of knowledge and personal experience would not have been enough on their own to deal with sensitive musicians. In order to bring a label like ACT to life and take it forward, one needs a spirit that is burning for music; one that is constantly seeking new opportunities yet at heart remains a genuine fan of the music.

In its twentieth year, ACT has finally come of age, secure, confident and willing to back real talent. Korea's Youn Sun Nah, currently one of the most successful jazz singers in Europe, made her breakthrough on ACT with "Same Girl" (ACT 9024-2). In France she is already a star, and in Germany she was presented with the ECHO Jazz award for Best International Singer in the spring of 2011. Upcoming American jazz star Vijay Iyer saw his future with ACT and was followed by the American Alto Saxophonist of the Year (Downbeat Critics' Poll), Rudresh Mahanthappa. With the ACT debut "Samdhi" (ACT 9513-2) in the autumn of 2011 he explored the fields of electro-acoustic jazz and Indian music to stirring effect.

Although ACT is twenty years young this year, it nevertheless remains hugely respectful of the life-long achievements of the older Munich label legends ECM and Enja.

Siggis Loch and his team consider the anniversary as an intermediate stop for the future. It allows them and their fans to look back with pride on what they have achieved so far, but at the same time their huge achievements act as a motivation and an obligation to inspire the audiences around the world for many years to come.

"I could not have done my 12 ACT albums without



Siggi (plus 5 as a co-leader) & I will never thank him enough for that. He is the man who brings the artists' dreams to reality, transforming a musician's gift into a world-wide recognition. A real producer, who feels the streams of the music world & leads his ship brilliantly. A real music lover, who reminds me of Nietzsche's words: 'without music, life would be a mistake'."

Nguyễn Lê

"For me and all my colleagues at ACT, Siggi Loch was the key for our international success. He took notice of us, listened to us and gave us the strength to go beyond our boundaries and this in every respect - musically, mentally yet very realistically."

Nils Landgren

"If you have worked for even only a few weeks with the one and only Siggi Loch and his team (the best, friendliest, fastest, most dedicated, professional, sympathetic and unbeatable team in the whole world by the way!), you can't help but come to the conclusion that ACT is probably the greatest gift for a jazz musician today. In this sense I am at least as grateful for your work today, in the seventh year of our friendship, as I was at the very beginning. The biggest compliment I can make: if it wasn't for you, someone would have to create someone exactly like you.

Thank you and HAPPY BIRTHDAY ACT!"

Michael Wollny

"For me to meet Siggi Loch and to have the opportunity to join ACT ment very much to me. Not only because it was a totally new step in my musical career, but also because it was a great inspiration to make new music."

Lars Danielsson

"ACT is a label that really cares for the artists. The love for the music is always in focus. Without ACT I wouldn't be able to do the music that I really burn for."

Viktorja Tolstoy

"I signed with ACT in the fall of 2002. The company has given me opportunities that I really doubt any other company would have given me, especially during the last years when the whole industry is going down. It seems like ACT is still standing strong, and I like to believe that it's because of that the company is built by a leader, staff and artists who are convinced music and art can make a difference in this world."

Rigmor Gustafsson

"For me, Siggi Loch is the act at ACT. He is one of

the few who are really mad about music that the music world really needs. To build up ACT, out of nothing, with its wonderful staff and discover great new artists on top of this, is a great art. My career is directly associated with Siggi. Without him, things would have been quite different, probably worse and it's been like this for 37 years now. I will be eternally grateful to him for this."

Joachim Kühn

"I'm with ACT since 7 months and in this time they did much more for me than the so called major companies during the last 15 years."

Iiro Rantala

"I met Siggi Loch late in 1991 during a project I was recording with the WDR big band at the time. He expressed interest in the combination of big band textures with Andalusian musicians, but in a way that resonated more with the styles and attitudes of the Spanish musician. Not too long after that we decided to meet in Spain, be with some great musicians and witness some truly inspiring concerts. With that trip I began a 20 year education in Flamenco. Along the way, of course we made some recordings that I think truly exemplify the communication of the language of Jazz with Flamenco music. And it illustrates the love and commitment that Siggi has for the Art, Music and community of musicians that has been part of his label all of these years. And I am grateful to have ACT as part of my creative life for 20 years."

Vince Mendoza

