

Franz Hautzinger: Everything in one

By Ken Weiss

interview at Slought Foundation

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Franz Hautzinger, born March 11, 1963 on an Austrian farm, had his world turned upside down while attending a Marvin Hannibal Peterson concert during his youth. Determined to play Jazz trumpet, he schooled at the Art University in Graz from 1981-1983 and practiced relentlessly until his lip was blown, requiring an end to the trumpet for years. In 1989, he revisited the instrument and found that he could make non-traditional sounds and started to aggressively explore the horn again with great intensity. With time, he recovered enough lip strength and improved his playing technique to develop into a star on the European creative music scene. Utilizing a hand build quartertone trumpet, he reaches sounds and moods that are uniquely his own. This interview took place on March 6, 2014 at Philadelphia's Slought Gallery. Hautzinger was on a short American tour, playing in partnership with French clarinetist/vocalist Isabelle Duthoit.

Cadence: You play an unusual instrument – the quartertone trumpet. How does that differ from the standard trumpet we're used to hearing?

Franz Hautzinger: I can use it as a normal trumpet but it has a 4th valve so, in addition, I can play quarter tones. By pressing the 4th valve, the air has a longer way to go and with that air, I can reach quarter tones.

Cadence: When you play, how often are you using your trumpet in the standard way?

FH: [*Pauses*] More or less never [*laughs*]. I got a new [standard] trumpet two years ago and I missed the quarter tones, I missed the melodic possibilities so I went back to my quartertone because, of course, the quartertone is a quartertone [*laughs*].

Cadence: So all you play these days is just the quartertone?

FH: Yeah, if I play Jazz music, which in the last years is more and more, which I like very much, and had very nice adventures with Hamid Drake and Jamaaladeen Tacuma and Keiji Haino. It was fantastic for me to play Jazz with the masters.

Cadence: How were you introduced to the quartertone trumpet?

FH: It was by chance about 20-years-ago, a trumpeter friend of mine in Munich said, "You know there's a guy who has a quartertone trumpet that he wants to sell." So I called the guy and it turns out that he had a friend who was a trumpet maker and he, himself, had an Arabic girlfriend and he wanted to play Arabic music so he got the trumpet maker to build him this instrument. It took years and when the trumpet was ready, they were split and he didn't want to play it. The idea of playing Arabic music was now an enemy for him so he sold it. He sent it to me in a plastic bag by post in the hope that it would be destroyed but the post guys saw that it was a trumpet in a plastic bag and took special care of it so I got it. I started to play it and I found out that it's very good for me but I had to learn to listen very carefully in a chromatic way and then in quarter tone way. It was very interesting for me and a challenge, especially for my ears in the beginning.

Cadence: So it wasn't possible for you to go the music store and buy a quartertone trumpet?

FH: No, was not possible, it's a unique instrument that you cannot get. [NOTE: The quarter tone trumpet is now commercially available] Back in the '60s, we remember that Don Ellis had a quartertone trumpet made for him by the Holton company. Fantastic! I don't know how he got it but he was playing with a lot of East European guys.

Cadence: The quartertone trumpet goes naturally well with Arabic music.

FH: In the beginning, I thought, 'Oh, I have a quartertone trumpet so I can play Arabic music,' but, of course, there is never exactly a quarter tone in Arabic music, or even in the Balkan/Slavic music. You have different tunings. You have to hear, you have to listen and understand the tuning, more or less. It's not just a matter of pushing a valve. The button doesn't do anything. If you understand the music, you have help with the 4th valve. My trumpet is a construction, it's not a natural quarter tone because the quarter tones in the Turkish, Persian and Arab music are very different. Sometimes they are a little more high or more low, so there is no exact measure with the technique.

Cadence: What other known artists play the quartertone these days?

FH: My first favorite was not Don Ellis, he was my favorite in Jazz, but there was Nassim Maalouf, he's still alive. He's a classical trumpeter from Beirut and he was a student of Maurice Andre who was a great French classical trumpeter and a big star. Maalouf played Arabic music and there is still one record you can find called *Improvisations Orientale*. His son, Ibrahim Maalouf, also plays and he is now a big star in France. He plays real Arabic music with the trumpet and he's fantastic. Also, in contemporary classical music there are some trumpeters that use this such as Markus Stockhausen.

Cadence: Do you know of other musicians in the Jazz or creative music scene using this trumpet?

FH: No.

Cadence: Why isn't the instrument more popular?

FH: I don't know but the 4th valve means it's more heavier and exhausting to play. If I were to ask someone to make me a new one, I have very clear ideas [on adjustments]. I'm on the way to create a new one but it's not so easy. It's costly. I don't know why it's not more popular, [perhaps because]there are easier and lighter instruments.

Cadence: Your interest in pursuing music came about as a child while attending a Hannibal Marvin Peterson concert in Austria. What was it about his performance that attracted you?

FH: It was super. I think it was 1974 at the Jazz club in Nickelsdorf which was completely in the countryside. They had just started to make concerts there and I was just beginning to play in that area in a Czech brass band and my cousins said, "Hey, Franz, you have to see different music!" So I came there and I remember when Hannibal came on stage, it was the first time that I saw African-American people live. We had a TV at that time, it was black and white, and I had no idea. I was eleven and my cousins said, "You know, his trumpet bag is made out of the skin of an elephant's penis." I said, 'Wow!' I was really totally attracted, and then he came and played like incredible. I remember very well. He played the music, I would say now, in the spirit of John Coltrane's music. Really inspired and in the first second, I was inspired too. I knew this is what I had to do too because

it was so strong at that time. He came and played like 40 minutes solo and then the band came. I have never seen before or after, such a trumpeter, it was incredible. I was born on a farm in a village with no music, just brass music. There were no books or education so for me, this concert opened a real world. It was an initiation or something. It was clear that I should go this way but at the same time, it was also my death too because when I saw him, I thought that this was the way someone has to play trumpet. I went home, the next day I got really lucky. I went to the next village and they had a record store with a record of him! I mean, you cannot imagine this [laughs]. So I bought this record but there was no record player, so for 2 years I had this record always with me. I was a Jazz fan already but I couldn't play it so whenever I was somewhere that I could play the record, I would play it. I heard what he did and I said, "Oh, that's how you play. You play it like a saxophone." Of course, 8 years later, I started at the university to study trumpet and I started really to practice and 2 years later I was completely kaput. My lips were done. I had no breathing technique, I had no knowledge, I had very bad teachers, and I had a strong will. I practiced and within 2 years, my lip was finished for, more or less, 10 years. So it was an initiation and death, all in one.

Cadence: Your website biography notes that you have, "Taken long and bendy detours and turned to many dead ends." Would you elaborate on that? You're referring to the lip palsy?

FH: Yeah, it was really tragic for me. I had no other special wish in life, no career plans, I just wanted to play this music that I thought was really something great. So I had to stop. I started to compose but I knew that I'm not a composer, so I started to write arrangements for any kind of music for 2 years. I made some money and there was a chance to survive but then I stopped and said, 'No, there is another way.' Every Monday at 3 o'clock, I practiced. Sometimes it took 20 seconds, one tone, "Pfffffffff," finished. I was frustrated but I was sure that this trumpet is my instrument, music is my destination, you see. So I started and stopped. I tried to play bass but it wasn't mine, flute, no, composing, no. At that time, I finished composition study and I never gave up. I had one octave, I went back on stage- very bad! I was already 30 [laughs], that's really late for something like this. Finally, I made a tape in the late '90s without the conventional trumpet sound and I gave it to a guy in Berlin who said, "You must make this CD, it will change your life!" So we put out this record [*Gomberg*] and suddenly I played like 70 solo concerts a year. I realized that music and art has lots to do with knowledge but it's not the only case, it's the musicality, the ideas, it's what you do with something. I was really thankful that art gives a chance if you have an idea, you can do it. You can play on a matchbox. I was in Vienne, which is a city very strong in classical music, on each corner you have a string quartet playing. It's very clear how the trumpet sounds in classical music but I did the complete opposite. I worked with air, it was my survival.

Cadence: Have your lips totally recovered?

FH: Never, but as I practiced relaxation exercises, a little sound came and I could feel it more and more, and I started to practice conventional trumpet and my sound started to come back. I realized that my lip was not completely kaput so I built it up more and by the end of the '90s, I found I had a sound but no power. I am still working on it, going to teachers. I found a good teacher, French trumpeter Jean-Luc Cappozzo, he helped me to set up breathing technique, so more and more it's coming. I cannot say it's coming back [totally] but there is some sound, power and embouchure and now I am coming back to my old love, Jazz, so whenever it is possible, I go to the free Jazz people.

Cadence: What kind of Jazz were you playing before you had the lip issue?

FH: Of course, I was strongly connected with Hannibal Marvin Peterson, along with George Adams, Don Pullen, this kind of music. I don't know how you call this music but I call it spirit Jazz music.

Cadence: So, in the later '80s, you left behind your trumpet training and began to explore the instrument in a radical way. What was your knowledge of experimental music?

FH: When I started back I had no idea of experimental music, I didn't know, is this free Jazz? I had no idea. I liked Miles Davis and also Woody Shaw, Wilbur Harden and Chet Baker, Fats Navarro, Louis Armstrong, Booker Little, Lee Morgan.

Cadence: If your lip strength was back to normal, what would you be playing now? Who would you like to sound like, besides yourself, of course?

FH: It's the same as what I'm working on. It's about the phrasing of the music, the quarter tone systems of different scales, all the noise, all the modern sound. Good question. I have too many influences including John Cage and Morton Feldman along with the history of Austrian music from Mozart on. Anton Webern was very strong for me. He played very reduced music, a very strong influence for me. I love ethnic music and have played lots of things with Arabian people. Now I'm with the African, before I was with the Latin people, so everything in one. I never say this is my music and all the other music styles are not interesting. I'm mainly an experimental guy, anything I do, I do it different, so I have not to think how it would be, only how to integrate everything I like. Dogma is not good for me and my heart is strong for music and the other musicians. There is no music that can involve everything I feel. For many years, I was in the strict experimental, reduced, non-emotional [playing style] but it didn't feel well for long, especially when I listened to John Coltrane. In Vienna especially, I play lots of different music, including with a singer songwriter, which took me awhile to learn how to play with.

Cadence: You noted earlier that you are playing more with Jazz musicians now. How do you change your playing when performing in a Jazz setting?

FH: The melodic, of course. Each music has an idiomatic essence and I like melodic. Take the traces of someone like the great Roy Campbell, if you hear him, you know exactly from where he comes, what tradition. In Europe, with the Jazz players, often it's not clear. They don't want to be labeled as connected to a certain tradition, but it's nice that in the States, the musicians are happy to be known as connected to a line of past musicians. I like the traces. If you play a really abstracted music, you can hear from where it is. I have great respect for these players and you cannot avoid your traces because it is your existence. I come from Austria which means I have in my DNA, a strong line of composers. We grew up with Mozart and Schoenberg every day on the radio.

Cadence: Your playing is heavily improvised and uses advanced extended techniques. How do you explain to people what it is that you're doing when you perform?

FH: I think if they see me, they understand that the guy's no joke. He plays music which is straight from the heart. I've never had a problem with understanding or misunderstanding, it's very rare that you have the completely wrong audience. Maybe 20 years ago in Europe you could have the wrong place but now the audience understands and the others are not [in attendance], which is a little bit of a pity for me. The people know what they want.

Cadence: Other sound experimentalists have added electronics to their performance but not you. Why have you steered away from using electronics?

FH: I found that in the mid-'90s, when the big electronic hype came in Europe, which had lots to do with the technology of the computer, when I play acoustic, and just with the microphone, not using electronics, I'm more an electronic player than if I use it. It took a long time to find this out and how to use the mic. I played with the electronic guys for many years as the acoustic guy. I had to learn how to build a sound, how to manipulate, and vary all this stuff. I found that when I use electronics, it's not that strong, it's less clear. It's somehow more romantic.

Cadence: Your website bio also notes that you are re-discovering "musical sensualism." What is that?

FH: This is what I was talking about earlier. When I do one style of music, I have only one emotional plane, so by doing many different styles, it gives me all the senses, all the feelings back. I found that listening to the music of John Coltrane gives a feeling that no other music can give.

Cadence: With your extended techniques, what determines a great performance versus an off performance for you?

FH: If you are able to do a super dramaturgy [NOTE - a dramatic and comprehensive exploration] of a concert. If all the possibilities of dynamics, of short and long, are explored, if all the timing and movements are there. I never play alone, I play with and for my audience. For a long time, there was a question for people, whether what guys like I do, is music or not, but music is this dramaturgy and the people understand if it's developed right. I used to say that my performances are improvised but now I say they are interpreted because I am working off things that I've learned in the past and evaluated. For me, you have to manage the dramaturgy, and for me, a good improviser has to know what music is, in different styles, so how you build up something, how you break a pulse, when you change the context or the rhythm. When I listen to the great masters like Cecil Taylor, he knows the dramaturgy, how music works so he can vary it. You have to be conscious at every moment and open your ears.

Cadence: As someone dealing with sound more than melody, when is sound music and when is it noise?

FH: I don't know if there is a difference. A good example might be if you were listening to a Mozart symphony and a car comes and you say, 'No, it's noise! It's disturbing.' But if I drive a car and do music with the noise, it's not noise anymore. So noise for me is like a sinus wave, it's all sound and there's thousands of sounds that are used in music. Noise is a word for a pool of sounds. Twenty years ago you couldn't say this, but noise is used for music. So I have no noise [laughs].

Cadence: How much of an influence was Bill Dixon for you?

FH: Oh, yes, he was like a father. I had heard about him a long time ago and once he came to Nickelsdorf. I saw that he was coming and I asked if I could be his driver. I spent 4 days with him, he liked me very much. I didn't say I play trumpet and at the end, he was so nice he gave me a CD and I said, 'Mr. Dixon, you know I play trumpet too. I have a CD.' He really shouted at me - "You didn't say this to me before!" So when he got home and played the CD, he wrote me a 4 page letter about my music and from this time on, he was like a poppa, an uncle, and always wrote me letters. He was super. We need such people. Also I found out, he wasn't such an easy personality. Whenever he was in Vienna, we met at coffeehouses.

Cadence: His music must have been liberating for you?

FH: Absolutely, the more I learned about him, the more I learned how important he was for trumpet and for myself.

Cadence: I had the opportunity to interview Bill Dixon right before he died [his last major interview] and I asked him why before playing, he sometimes announced that he was going to play the trumpet in a non-traditional way. He said he wanted to give people a chance to leave the room. Do you ever feel an obligation to give a warning like that?

FH: I don't know why he did this, even in a situation where you think all the people will not like it, it's not necessary, never. For me personally, there is nothing to explain. The music and personality on stage explains it. With his music, he had nothing to explain. In my experience, the more strange you play the trumpet, and they see it's not by chance, that you're not just trying something and can't reach, the more they see that you are able to manage this, the more they feel it is something they have never seen before. If someone wants to leave, absolutely, they can leave. We're not always in the mood to hear music. If they shout, sometimes it can be very funny [laughs]. People aren't screaming from the audience anymore like they did 20 years ago unfortunately, there's no interference anymore, which is a pity because it is good to have critics in the audience.

Cadence: Why is that a pity?

FH: There's no one screaming anymore.

Cadence: If someone's yelling at you from the audience, it's not bad?

FH: I understand it as the positive process. Of course, I'm wild, I'm not happy because someone disturbs my performance but generally, people have the right to do it if they pay. I don't want one kind of listener. I see it in a more sociopolitical way. If you have this type of music, just these people come. If you have another type of music, just these other people come. The audience is not mixed anymore. Sorry, this is what I mean to say [laughs]. I'm not happy if people are yelling at me. What I'm referring to is back when free Jazz was on, lots of people told me that they played and the listeners were really excited and fighting over it. Maybe you know the stories about Arnold Schoenberg and that when his music was played, there were fights in the audience. Now there's no reflection.

Cadence: Miles Davis was another key figure for you. What have you taken from him that remains in your art?

FH: I always liked that you could always hear his heart, mind, and all his emotion. There was no interference. When I heard his first note, I said, 'Ohhh, it's straight from the heart!' Around '85, Miles Davis came to Vienna and I sat in the front row – we really had to pay [laughs] – and I remember the band was playing like fire and the Master came and bam!, double fire! He was right in front of me. I felt like 10-years-old, like the guru had come. It was fantastic. His sound was always from the heart, and such a strong, strict person, it's rare.

Cadence: You mentioned that you grew up on a farm in Austria near the Hungarian border. Are elements of that upbringing reflected in your music?

FH: I don't know. I think there must be because what is in your heart and head must come out.

Cadence: *Gomberg* was a very important recording for you. It was a groundbreaking work in 2000 for solo trumpet. Would you talk about the effort that went into that work?

FH: It made me free because at that time I could play a little bit of trumpet again, but when I played a G, it's a Miles Davis G, if I play an F, it's from someone else. At that time I realized I was completely influenced by others and it was very bad. I made the *Gomberg* recording and people told me it was unique, and in time I realized that they were right and that I was free to go on. I had found my way and with time I found that I could let out all my influences and things that I liked. Within a few years, I found that I could do all these things, such as Arabian or African music, without any problem.

Cadence: You got to record with Derek Bailey for a 2002 duo release. How did that opportunity come about and what was your experience with Bailey?

FH: When the *Gomberg* recording came out, suddenly I got an Email from him – “Dear Franz, I like your work.” I knew about him, of course, but he was really like a big guy [laughs], also in his physical size. He called me – “You want to come over to London and we make a record?” Of course, I wanted to but I asked some people and they said not to go because he never comes to the studio. He asks people but doesn't come. I went anyway and he came. At that time, I had a good idea about the level of a master musician such as him, and how someone in that category can play, and I knew that I was a beginner, but when we started, I found out that I was already ready. I was ready with my style, my material, my technique. At that moment I realized I was ready. It was a very simple session. Some guy put a very old amplifier down and said, “OK, we do.” We played for 63 minutes and took two breaks with English conversation, talking about tea, cricket, and the Vietnamese taxi driver who came very late. That's how we got the song titles for the recording. At the end, he said, “So Franz, is there anything else we want to do?” I said, ‘No.’ It was perfect and he was so great, whatever he played, I had the feeling we could record it. He knew how to make music, how to make sound and develop it, how to make dramaturgy. He played at the same level, whether there was an audience or not. I spent 2 hours with him and never met him again, although we traded greetings.

Cadence: Which country has been most supportive of your work? Where do you perform most often?

FH: At the moment, I play in France. I used to play in Poland, lots of gigs, but it stopped 4 years ago. I've played in Eastern Europe a lot. It changes every 6 years or so, I don't know why.

Cadence: You've been coming to America yearly now.

FH: Yes, I plan the tours myself by Emails and the people here are very open, very interested in my music, and very nice people. I'm really a fan of the States, the people, the mentality, and the musicians. I love the different music styles here.

Cadence: You're touring the USA now with free improvising vocalist Isabelle Duthoit. How does playing in duet with the human voice compare to playing with another instrument?

FH: I like it because there is no interface [laughs]. I like very much to play with Isabelle, we are also a couple. The material and the way we do music is very similar. We are very much together.

Cadence: You taught at the Vienna Music University from 1989 - 2008. What did you teach there?

FH: I taught composition, arrangement for any kind of music, structure analysis, and I had a big improviser's ensemble. I taught for abstract music, contemporary and experimental music. I stopped in 2008 because I had been at the University for 30 years, 10 years studying, 20 years teaching, and it was over. It was good. If you teach, you learn from your students but, at that point, my education, in terms of school, was over.

Cadence: What's the status of the Jazz and the creative music scene in Austria these days?

FH: Austria is not a Jazz country, although there are some interesting Jazz players. Our hero was, of course, Joe Zawinul. He used to come back often and he ran a club called Birdland. There are some good players like Wolfgang Puschnig and Wolfgang Muthspiel, who I studied with in school. It's not a Jazz country. The tradition is more experimental or going for something new. The super thing in Vienna is that you have an audience for anything. If you do something, people are interested, even if they don't like it, they come. People go out to theater and concerts, it's deeply in the Austrian mentality to have art.

Cadence: What's the working relationship like between Austrian and German musicians and how has the EU affected the European musical scene?

FH: The German culture and Austrian culture have always been very separated. Berlin is a point in Europe where things come together, a catalyst, although if you look at history, not much came from Berlin, but it's a point where everyone wants to go and you have freedom. It's a very free city compared to Vienna which has a lid over it. Before the Iron Curtain fell, and before Austria joined the EU, Vienna was at the end of Europe. It was the most eastern city of West Europe so no one went through it. The borders have been removed and now a wind comes through it. It's now an international city. You go from Berlin to Prague to Vienna to Budapest, and maybe in the future, Sophia and Kiev.

Cadence: The last few questions are from other artists.

Herb Robertson (trumpet) asked – “As one improviser to another, have you facilitated during your adventures as an artist any spiritual, philosophical, or psychological means towards your individualized approach in improvisation/compositional ideas and structure of your music?”

FH: I have to think. Before I answer, I have to say that I am an intuitive person. I do something and later, I understand what I did and why I did. I've been very fascinated by Zen philosophy. What's been very important for my music was that I used to go fishing by night because by night, it's quiet. You concentrate the whole night on a small light, it never moves unless there is a fish. It has a very much Zen philosophy and I learned to really be on for the moment when this light moves. You could wait the whole night and twice it moves. You miss the fish for sure if you don't look. You have to concentrate one hundred percent all the time just like you do when you are on stage. First listen and then think. Maybe this is a philosophical or spiritual approach which I found by my heart and by my feelings. I later understood that this is what the Zen Master tells you. There's been other times when I've felt that I connected with Zen. In the '90s, I played with Radu Malfatti, very reduced music, music where one sound of one second is two sounds for one hour. If you play this music just to play, no one wants to listen, but if you are ready for the moment and the hour, it can be something special. As I said, I grew up on a farm and we had no book except a cook book [laughs]. Is this an answer?

Mazen Kerbaj (trumpet) asked – “What about music and brotherhood?”

FH: First, the brotherhood of trumpeters, yes. In my younger years, every trumpeter was an opponent. Everyone acted like this at that time. Later, I understood that, no, the trumpeters are my best friends, my brothers, because they do the same type of thinking, 24 hours, 7 days a week, with the metal on the lips. They are very similar, very familiar, they are my brotherhood. I like trumpeters and I am proud to be one. I have respect when someone can play music and it means more if they are a trumpeter [laughs]. Generally, to play with someone is a very intimate thing. It must be a brotherhood because of the trust. It's the most intimate thing you can do, it's even closer than having sex with someone. You are giving everything.

Joe McPhee (multi-instrument) asked – “What non-musical discipline most influences your solo performance and how does that influence manifest itself?”

FH: I think going to fish by night and trying to catch a walleye fish. If it's a big water spot, they are just where the sand is, so if you don't know, you cannot find them. First you have to know where they are and then you have to find the sand. You have to know how they catch other fish and when. They are very sensitive so you have to know all about the fishing line, how small, how thin, and the right place to put the hook in the fish bait. You have to know all this to have a chance to catch a fish. So this precise knowing was for me the strongest influence. It built the concentration and precision I needed for my playing. I had to learn with my lips to follow my possibilities. You have to have patience and develop. I've seen lots of people in my time, highly talented, much better trumpeters than me, but they did not do this. I'm still playing and I'm happy. Music, for me, is a really serious and precious thing. You give all of your heart and your sound, one hundred percent. Thank you Papa Joe for this great question.

Hannibal Marvin Peterson (trumpet) did not have a question to ask of you but he wanted to share wisdom – “A gift of words more than a question of words – fear nothing!”