

barbican

Sat 7 Oct, 2017

7.30pm
Arto Lindsay

8.45pm
Justin Strauss – clubstage

9.05pm
Kid Creole and the Coconuts

10.20pm
Justin Strauss – clubstage

Arto Lindsay guitar, vocals

Marivaldo Paim percussion
Cinque Kemp drums
Paul Wilson keys
Melvin Gibbs bass

Kid Creole and the Coconuts

August Darnell – The Kid
band leader

Roos Van Rossum coconut
Sarah McGrath coconut
Charlotte De Graaf coconut
Toby Goodman drums
Oroh Angiama bass
Lorne Ashley guitar
Tim Vine keys
Barnaby Dickinson trombone
Edgar Jones sax
Tom Walsh trumpet

Produced by the Barbican in
association with Como No



Kid Creole and the Coconuts + Arto Lindsay

+ Justin Strauss

Jane Cornwell takes us on a trip back to Downtown NYC in the 1970s and '80s as she speaks to three musicians at the apex of a cultural scene that gave birth to some of the 20th century's most lauded creative minds.

New York City. The late '70s, early '80s. Graffiti and glitter; safety pins and shoulder pads; torn jeans, Lycra, big bouffy hair. Musical genres swirling and fizzing: Punk and Jazz, New Wave and No Wave, Pop, Electronica and a myriad sounds from elsewhere. At the city's dirty Downtown heart beat clubs like the Mudd, the Ritz and Area, which along with Midtown's showy Studio 54 saw artists such as Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat mingling with the musicians like Arto Lindsay and August 'Kid Creole' Darnell, their encounters soundtracked by DJs including the then ubiquitous Justin Strauss.

They're here tonight. In the flesh: Lindsay, Strauss and the Kid. The rest are here in spirit, but particularly Basquiat – a preternaturally talented renegade who threw his net wide, drawing inspiration from Bebop and Hip Hop, architecture and performance, screen and street, and whose work is currently being celebrated in the Barbican Art Gallery.

'Jean-Michel was a loyal friend, sure of himself from the beginning, rightfully aggrieved, always generous,' says Lindsay, himself a man of many things. Singer, songwriter, composer. Producer, curator, artist. Purveyor of hip. Icon of cool. A Brazil-born lover of Samba and song with a voice like streaming silk and a knack for floaty, hummable tunes that tell of love and life. He's also a New York Punk experimentalist open to confrontation, abstract noise and using chaos as a spice.

A former member of Punk and No Wave outfits DNA, The Lounge Lizards and the Golden Palominos, a theatre graduate who collaborated with cutting-edge thespians The Wooster Group, for a long time Lindsay fronted his own group, Ambitious Lovers. In the 1990s, assisted by friends Laurie Anderson and Brian Eno, he released a clutch of solo albums including 2004's revered *Salt*. His current, wildly acclaimed *Cuidado Madame*, his first release in 13 years and blends No Wave and Tropicalia with the rhythmic drum patterns of the syncretic Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion. Duality should really be his middle name.

'I like to play things off against each other,' he says. 'Light and dark. Sound and silence. Brazilian and American.'

Basquiat enjoyed hanging around the musos on New York's small and vibrant underground scene. He'd design T-shirts, draw sketches (several likenesses of Lindsay were made on index cards); his experimental band Gray opened a handful of times for Lindsay and DNA: 'Gray had a sharp sense of theatre which kept your attention from lingering too long on any one of them or on the music itself,' Lindsay recalls. 'Jean-Michel was often a wild card, in an overcoat, an observer at his own spectacle.'

Basquiat was also an exceptional writer, a poet. 'Remember, the Beat Poets were still in our ears when Rap came along. And Jean-Michel' - who in 1983 produced and did the artwork for *Beat Bop*, a classic Hip-Hop record featuring K-Rob and Rammellzee - 'had his own Caribbean sources too.'

Justin Strauss still has the copy of *Beat Bop* that was given to him by Basquiat. 'It's one of my favourite records,' says the DJ who was at the decks of nearly every club you'd wanted to go to, beginning with the legendary Mudd Club. His distinctive sound, with its singular remixes, underscoring the vibe that back then, anything was possible.

Strauss often saw Lindsay and DNA playing at the Mudd and other dDowntown venues, later remixing a track for Ambitious Lovers. He caught Kid Creole & The Coconuts at the Ritz ('Where they played more times than probably any other band'), and remixed their single 'The Sex of It', which was co-written and co-produced by Prince.

Kid Creole & The Coconuts delivered spectacles. Zoot-suited and self-assured, sporting high-rise collars, two-tone shoes and a pencil moustache, the Kid burst onto the scene in the early '80s, having graduated from Dr Buzzard's Original Savannah Band, a Soul/Disco quartet he'd fronted with his brother. Kid Creole and his glamorous trio of Coconuts were part Soul revue, part sideshow, the oh-so-fabulous focus of a Latin-leaning big band with deep roots in the Bronx and an outward-looking, cross-cultural aesthetic.

The Kid's alter ego, August Darnell, called it mongrel music: 'I grew up in an inner-city ghetto where you had Italian Arias next to Caribbean Reggae and Calypso. You had the Salsa of Puerto Ricans next to the Funk of James Brown. At home, it was Carmen Miranda, Cab Calloway and Frank Sinatra. I wanted to try every combination.'

He'll play the hits: 'Stool Pigeon'. 'Annie, I'm Not Your Daddy'. Just don't ask him to remember the '80s.

'It's all a bit of a blur,' says Darnell, a theatre graduate like Lindsay. 'I lived in Manhattan, in a New York that doesn't exist anymore. That New York was special. It was a cultural meeting point for every artistic vision imaginable.'

'Or rather, I lived in mid-Manhattan and my voyage to Lower Manhattan was the real eye opener. Lower Manhattan was where I'd run into Basquiat and Arto and grow to appreciate the alternate universe.'

A smile. 'It was this juxtaposition of Midtown Studio 54 glitz and Downtown Mudd Club dirt that also made me appreciate the power of eclecticism. And that has been my saving grace! Amen!'

Amen, indeed.

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Camille

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Long Read: Basquiat and Downtown

To coincide with the first major retrospective of Jean-Michel Basquiat's work in the UK – currently in our gallery – we explore the part he played in the famed music scene of the New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s on our blog.

barbican.org.uk/basquiatdowntown