



In tribute to a positively eccentric nanny

[The New York Second “Room for Other People” - review].

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Vivian Maier was not recognized as a great photographer, but she ultimately gained fame and recognition posthumously. Working as a nanny in New York and Chicago, she photographed the streets of those cities from the 1950s. Her photos captured the spirit and people of those cities in time. After her death, a documentary was made about her and a tribute album, *Room for Other People*, recorded by the Dutch band The New York Second.

Room for Other People

Two days ago you could read here about a Danish jazz guitarist fascinated by Amsterdam (I mean Kristoffer Vejslev and his [Red Gazelle Trio](#)), today, however, there is a text devoted to a Dutch pianist who has been fascinated by New York for years, which he decided to emphasize by giving his band an appropriate name. This is Harald Walkate, who has been the leader of the group (although it might be more accurate to say: project) The New York Second for a decade. Walkate was born in 1970. When he was ten, he started playing the piano; when he was twenty, he started composing. However, he could not break into the mainstream for a long time; he managed to do so only in the second half of the previous decade – thanks to the band mentioned above. Its line-up is constantly evolving. So far, each album has been recorded with a different line-up.

When the band debuted in 2017 with the album *Bay of Poets*, it was a quartet co-created by saxophonist Frank Paavo, Polish double bassist Paweł Pastuszka (a graduate of the Amsterdam Conservatory) and drummer Max Sergeant (the only musician who has remained by Harald's side to this day). Walkate recorded his second album, *Emergo* (2019), as a quintet, with Paavo, Sergeant, double bassist Marijn van de Ven and guest trumpeter Teus Nobel; and his third, *Music at Night (and Other Stories)* (2021), as a septet, with Max, Teus and German flautist Marc Alban Lotz, tenor saxophonist Jesse Schilderink, trombonist Vincent Veneman and double bassist Thomas Pol. How much of a surprise it must have been for fans of the Dutch pianist to hear The New York Second's fourth album, *"After the Hours, the Minutes"* (2023), on which the group shrunk to a trio: Walkate, Sergeant and Lorenzo Buffa (an Italian double bassist who now lives in Amsterdam).

If, after its release, someone dared to bet with a bookmaker on the line-up of Harald's band to record the next longplay, they would have to be an exceptionally fierce gambler. And an incorrigible risk-taker, to boot. Because they probably wouldn't get it right. The line-up that Walkate gathered in March last year at the Fattoria Musica studio in Osnabrück, Lower Saxony, was... an octet. There was no shortage of new faces in it. The leader and constant drummer, Lotz, Nobel, Veneman and Buffa were joined this time by tenor saxophonist Tom Beek and American-Norwegian vibraphonist Rob Waring. Each of the instrumentalists who make up the current incarnation of The New York Second is an artist with a considerable creative output. It is therefore not surprising that they easily found common ground, especially since the music composed by Harald referred to the tradition of

American jazz under the banner of Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, Cecil Taylor and Elvin Jones. This became the foundation of perfect understanding.

While the band's earlier albums could be considered American in spirit, the latest one, "Room for Other People," is American squared! This is primarily due to the person who inspired Walkate. It's about Vivian Dorothy Maier (1926-2009), who gained great fame overseas - unfortunately, only after her death - thanks to the black-and-white photographs she left behind of the streets of New York and Chicago. Although she was not a professional artist, she was... a nanny for children. Her father was Austrian, her mother French, but Vivian was born in the States. She began taking amateur photographs in the early 1950s. She took tens of thousands of photos, which she did not publish. When financial problems befell her (at one point she even became homeless), she stored undeveloped rolls, negatives, and prints in rented storage units, which she was no longer able to pay for after a few years. At that time, her "estate" was seized and sold at auction.

In 2007, it became the property of the Chicago auction house RPN Sales. When John Maloof – a writer, photographer, and documentary filmmaker – looked at Maier's works, he was mainly fascinated by the photographs from the 1950s and 1960s. Vivian was still alive at the time, although she was already over eighty. In 2008, she had an accident: she slipped on a frozen puddle and ended up in hospital. It seemed that she would get better with time, but due to her age, her body began to weaken, which led to her death a few months later. Maloof, together with Charlie Siskel, paid tribute to her by making a documentary film four years later, "Finding Vivian Maier". And now Harald Walkate decided to add an album inspired by the American's photographs, the premiere of which was announced for February 1, 2025, the ninety-ninth anniversary of the birth of the "photographic nanny", as she was called. It is a powerful portion of music. Honestly: there's even too much of it. Instead of almost eighty minutes, fifty would have been enough, an hour at most. But apparently the author decided that not even one sound could be wasted.

The album includes ten compositions, not counting the miniature that crowns it ("Room for Other People (Reprise)"). Seven of them last over seven minutes, only one does not exceed five. This tests the listener's patience to a great extent. Not because any of the Dutchman's works lowers (or lowers) the level and it is difficult to listen to them; after a certain point the album simply starts to get a bit boring. Especially since Walkate composed it - to put it symbolically - in one exhalation. The pieces are similar to each other, have a similar structure and are based primarily on solos by the pianist and vibraphonist, less often by members of the brass section. What is additionally striking to the eye (or rather ears) is the reduction of improvisation to a minimum. On the one hand, this may be - I mean such a meticulously thought-out construction of each piece - a reason for even greater admiration for the Dutchman, but on the other hand it makes the album lack breath, space. It wouldn't be felt so much if the "Room for Other People" longplay was three, maybe even four tracks shorter.

I admit that it is hard for me to write this, because taking each of the compositions separately, it is impossible not to admire them. Each is a masterpiece. But as a whole – willingly or unwillingly – they overwhelm. That is why I would suggest that the new work by The New York Second be taken in parts: for example, twenty-five minutes each. And then the appetite for the next ones will gradually grow.

What dominates the album? Above all, the romantic, contemplative mood, repeatedly emphasized by dialogues between the piano and vibraphone (see "983 Third Avenue", "The Collectors Corner", "The Class Photograph", "The White Dress" or "Location & Date Unknown"). There is also no shortage of soloists' duets with other instruments, such as the piano ("Florida 1957", "Location &

Date Unknown") or the vibraphone ("The Class Photograph") with the double bass. Of the brass section members, the flautist is given the most freedom (see: "983 Third Avenue", "The Collectors Corner", "Safety Service Comfort", the film motif in "The White Dress"), with solo performances by the saxophonist ("983 Third Avenue", "The Collectors Corner", "View of Isle St. Louis") and the trumpeter ("Room for Other People", "The White Dress") being less common.

In general, the brass instruments are mainly used to create an atmospheric background. It is a pity that the natural power inherent in them was not used. The band presents itself best in those songs in which all the musicians have a say, when their joint playing gains intensity and becomes "dense" with sounds. Such moments appear in "983 Third Avenue", the ending of "Florida 1957", "View of Isle St. Louis"; in turn, the penultimate on the list of songs "Downstairs for Incoming Trains" surprises with a strong groove of the double bass and drums. So as you can see (and hear, provided that you reach for the record), the fifth album by The New York Second is able to provide many positive emotions. However, you have to be properly prepared, create a favorable atmosphere and - if you are not listening to "Room for Other People" in an intimate atmosphere with someone close to you - do not forget about the "commercial break".

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Composition:

Harald Walkate – piano, music

Mark Alban Lotz – flute

Teus Nobel – trumpet, flugelhorn

Tom Beek – tenor saxophone

Vincent Veneman – trombone

Rob Waring – vibraphone

Lorenzo Buffa – double bass

Max Sergeant – drums