



> E PRESS KIT

With his 28-year association with celebrated jazz label Songlines Records, Canadian clarinetist [François Houle](#) presents an exciting International collaborative project with some of Canada's most celebrated expatriates, and colleagues from New York City, Paris, Basel and Berlin.

François Houle, un des clarinettes Canadiens les plus reconnus sur la scène internationale de musique créative, fonde un remarquable groupe réunissant des figures de proue du jazz d'avant-garde pour ce nouveau projet. Avec son collègue de longue date, le remarquable pianiste François Benoît Delbecq, et de fréquents collaborateurs venant de la Suisse, de New York, et New Haven, il explore de nouvelles compositions préparées dans le but de mettre en lumière la virtuosité et l'originalité de chaque membre du groupe. Réunissant son penchant pour les musiques créative, la musique contemporaine, et le jazz, François Houle nous tisse une toile vibrante de couleurs, pleine d'audaces et d'astucieuse procédure compositionnelle. Ses influences majeures, tel qu'Antony Baxton, Steve Lacy, Jimmy Giuffrè et John Carter, sont ressenties.

“The music’s quality is a given, but the musicianship and commitment are second to none. The sextet has crafted another wonderful disc but also a statement of intent, transcendence and ultimately of celebration.”

—Marc Edwin, [pointofdeparture.org](#)

FRANÇOIS HOULE GENERA SEXTET

François Houle	clarinet	Vancouver, CAN
Marco von Orelli	cornet	Basel, SUI
Samuel Blaser	trombone	NYC-Berlin-SUI
Michael Bates	double bass	CAN-NYC, USA
Harris Eisenstadt	drums	CAN- NYC, USA
Benoît Delbecq	piano, bass station	Paris, France



“For this band and body of tunes, Houle cites late, great figures and bandleaders John Carter and Steve Lacy as influences in his thinking and compositional/improvisational plotting. Material-wise, Houle's writing works across boundaries and embraces ideas about voicing and structure from classical to jazz and back. On the jazz tip, he plots spiky-dissonant courses and Thelonious Monk-ish lines,…” —Josef Woodard, Downbeat

“The sextet...has immediately established itself as one of the most exciting new bands on the international jazz scene. In addition to its carefully constructed compositions, virtuosic soloists, and huge ensemble sound, the group brings surprising warmth to the stage, and its Ironworks set was among the most impressive of the entire festival.” —Alexander Varty, The Georgia Straight

> PERSONEL

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Composed of some of the Jazz world’s brightest lights, François Houle’s GENERA Sextet features original creations, a treasure trove of exhilarating compositions guaranteed to excite and wow audiences everywhere. Led by Houle, the band walks the line between composition and improvisation, with a strong bend on the jazz vernacular.

GENERA Sextet was formed in 2011 as a brainchild of Houle and Ken Pickering, who was founding Artistic Director of the *Vancouver International Jazz Festival*, a position he held for over 32 years until his untimely passing in the summer of 2018.

The band’s first album called GENERA (Songlines, 2012) was nominated for a JUNO Award. The group toured Canada and the USA extensively, and performed together in the fall of 2018 to celebrate the memory of Ken Pickering.

The band’s second album, In Memoriam (for KP), was recently released on Portugal’s prestigious Clean Feed label.

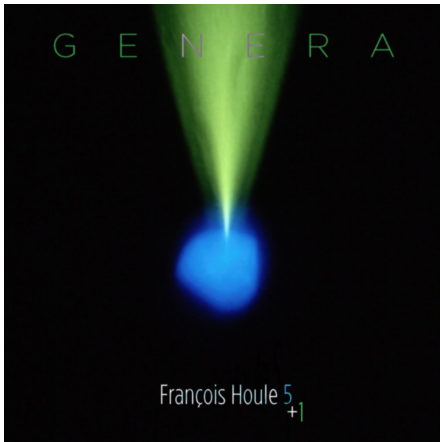


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> GENERA

- **Promotional** CDs available upon request to François Houle fmhoule@gmail.com
or Tony Reif treif@songlines.com

- Promo video Link [Google Drive Downloadable Link](#)
- YouTube Link <http://www.youtube.com/user/Houliganism>
- Website www.francoishoule.ca
- Project pages <https://www.francoishoule.ca/genera-sextet>
- Clean Feed Records <https://cleanfeed-records.com/product/in-memoriam/>
- Songlines Records <https://songlines.com/release/genera/>



> BIOS

François Houle, clarinet

www.francoishoule.ca

Clarinetist François Houle has followed a musical path few others have travelled. He is a true innovator and pioneer of the instrument, opening sonic vistas in the most imaginative ways possible. François has released CDs on several labels and has toured internationally.

He has been listed on multiple occasions by Downbeat magazine as a “Talent Deserving Wider Recognition” and was hailed as a “Rising Star” in Downbeat’s Critics’ and Readers’ Polls. He is “a spectacularly versatile clarinetist who appears to have no limitations stylistically or sonically” (*Mark Swed, LA Times*)

Samuel Blaser, trombone

www.samuelblaser.com

Earning serious attention and enthusiastic praise over the last few years for his daring virtuosity and engaging improvisations, Swiss-born and New York-developed brassman Samuel Blaser is a prolific talent with a truly collaborative spirit. In listening to his spectral trombone playing you hear tradition, finesse and questing innovation. Recent sidework has found the trombonist sharing the stage with Oliver Lake, Gerry Hemingway, Hal Galper, Paul Motian, and Marc Ducret, among other such luminaries.

Marco von Orelli, cornet

www.marcovonorelli.ch

Marco von Orelli: The focus of his artistic work is mainly improvisation in all its facets. Especially the genre of improvisation, which is related to composing music in the field of contemporary music and creative jazz. Bert Noglik, noted jazz journalist and critic, writes about him: „Here comes forth a musician, who makes his own ways through the contemporary soundscape (...). Music from a trumpet player who has an unmistakable tendency to melos and at the same time is fully aware that you have to break with tradition if you want to come up with an authentic melody.“ Numerous CD recordings document his work a.o. his releases on HAT HUT Rec. (hatOLOGY & ezz-thetics) under his own name, as well as the record of Big Bold Back Bone in Search Of The Emerging Species on Shhpuma/Clean Feed. Marco joins the band for the 2020 season, replacing esteemed colleague Taylor Ho Bynum, who appears on Genera’s first CD.

Michael Bates, bass

www.outsidesources.org

As a composer and musician, Michael Bates “serves up melodic modernism and contrapuntal elegance” (“Time Out, New York”) and his influences range from Shostakovich, Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman to Bad Brains, Wayne Shorter and John Zorn. Known as a both a leader and double bassist in several collectives, he has performed with Quinsin Nachoff, Russ Johnson, Chris Speed, Michael Blake, Gerald Cleaver, Dan Weiss, Ziv Ravitz, Jeff Davis, Kevin Turcotte, George Garzone, John Stetch, Scott Dubois, Ohad Talmor, Michael Attias, Michael Sarin and several other creative musicians.



Harris Eisenstadt, drums

www.harriseisenstadt.com

"Harris Eisenstadt, a drummer and composer originally from Toronto, takes a fixer's approach to music making, looking for ways to fit the pieces together. He works along jazz's progressive fringe but doesn't generally set out to make a ruckus. He is considered "one of the most creative and skilled musician/composers incorporating traditional material to create new and vital improvised music" (Robert Iannapolo, *All About Jazz - New York*). He has performed all over the globe, earned commissions from organizations such as Meet the Composer and the American Composers Forum, and appeared on more than 35 recordings over the past decade. His recordings have received rave reviews, and recent honors include nomination for up and coming artist of the year by the Jazz Journalists Association (2009), and rising star in the composer category of the Downbeat International Critics Poll (2009).

Benoît Delbecq, piano (prepared piano, bass station)

<http://delbecq.net/bd/bd2.html>

Musicien inventeur et indocile, Delbecq se produit de par le monde en mêlant l'âme du jazz avec le piano préparé cher à John Cage, tout en s'acoquinant à l'occasion des outils électroniques d'aujourd'hui. Il a été l'un des activistes des collectifs Hask (1992-2004) et Astrolab (1994-1999), deux incontournables regroupements artistiques parisiens ayant significativement contribué à vitaliser la scène Parisienne de musiques créatives qui se regroupait aux Instants Chavirés de Montreuil sous Bois dans les années 90. Ses musiques et projets comportent également nombre de collaborations avec le théâtre, la danse contemporaine, la littérature, les arts plastiques et cinématographiques. Il se produit dans le monde entier dans les plus importants festivals. Il a publié un cinquantaine de disques en leader ou co-leader parmi une discographie comptant plus d'une centaine de disques. Depuis le milieu des années 90, il reçoit l'approbation de la critique internationale, et son approche à "multi-vitesses" ou "poly-vitesses" de son jeu au piano influence désormais nombre de musiciens des nouvelles générations.



> REVIEWS FOR GENERA

A longtime figure in both contemporary classical and left-of-center jazz worlds in Canada, clarinetist François Houle headed over to Hoboken, N.J., to record his latest project, and culled parties from different locales and artistic outlooks. In the quintet are Canadians-in-New York Michael Bates and Harris Eisenstadt on bass and drums, respectively, Taylor Ho Bynum on cornet and flugelhorn, Swiss trombonist Samuel Blaser and a more than casual or cameo-like "+1," the impressive French pianist Benoit Delbecq.

For this band and body of tunes, Houle cites late, great figures and bandleaders John Carter and Steve Lacy as influences in his thinking and compositional/improvisational plotting. Material-wise, Houle's writing works across boundaries and embraces ideas about voicing and structure from classical to jazz and back. On the jazz tip, he plots spiky-dissonant courses and Thelonious Monk-ish lines, and the range of ideas includes the 12-minute, modular "Guanara" to the epigrammatic two-minute "Old Paradigm." Chemistry and contrasts within this particular gathering of players are partly what make the ensemble sound as intriguing and flexible as it is. At the risk of generalizing, it could be said that Houle and Blaser are "straighter" players on the front line, while Bynum and Delbecq veer more persuasively into zones where abstraction and abandon rule. Delbecq, in particular, has several captivating featured moments, tugging at the ear and brain as a strong individualist worth checking out further.

With "Piano Loop (for BD)," Delbecq – the "BD" in question – is first showcased in a spare and lyrical prepared-piano passage, into the angular ostinato "loop" portion of the program, over which dreamy washes of the ensemble float and amble. (3 1/2 stars)

—Josef Woodard, *DownBeat*

"Houle's Gil Evans influences can easily be felt in the ensemble writing, making this sextet sound like an even larger group. Genera is a challenging and bracing listen, which always stays on this side of tonality and lyricism even in the freer moments."

—Richard Moule, *Signal to Noise*

"Genera is a very fine record that displays excellently Houle's writing and the ability of his chosen ensemble to both strut their stuff and express composed vision, and is well worth investigating – especially for those unfamiliar with his work."

—Clifford Allen, *Point of Departure*

"'Essay #7' put the first big smile on my face. It starts right out of the gate with a great groove supplied but the near telepathic rhythm section of Harris Eisenstadt on drums and Michael Bates on bass. Benoit Delbecq, (piano and the +1 in the 5+1) masterfully plays over this groove until he gives way to a back and forth discussion between Taylor Ho Bynum (cornet and flugelhorn) and Samuel Blaser (trombone).

"Clocking in at a little over 12 minutes, 'Guanara', the longest track on the album, demonstrates Francois Houle's (clarinet) ability to choose his musicians wisely. This is a great ensemble piece where everyone hits their mark every time. A slow burner where everyone gets equal time to contribute to the song's evolution, time well taken



advantage of as none of it is wasted. This is a tempo where structure and free jazz meet and fall in love. Houle also chooses his notes wisely as well. He plays without grabbing all the attention and that is a real strength. It forces the listener to go to him and not get hit in the face with a backhand of sound.

"Delbecq gets to play around by himself at the top of 'Piano Loop (for BD)'. It is moments like these where he really gets to shine and can easily keep the pace once the rest of the band eases their way into the track. Solos mix with rhythmic elements and back out again in a tapestry of give and take. It ends with very deep rumblings from Blaser." (4 1/2 stars)

—Philip Coombs, [Free Jazz blog](#)

> 5 + 1 CONCERT REVIEWS

"The sextet...has immediately established itself as one of the most exciting new bands on the international jazz scene. In addition to its carefully constructed compositions, virtuosic soloists, and huge ensemble sound, the group brings surprising warmth to the stage, and its Ironworks set was among the most impressive of the entire festival."

—Alexander Varty, [The Georgia Straight](#)

"What was so surprising, throughout the whole set, was the perfectly intertwined and balanced coexistence, in a single piece, of utterly different jazz styles....The technical virtuosity and emotional force of Houle's group was based on a mix of peculiar musical identities, enhanced and increasingly singular and distinguishable within the band. It was a formation where the musicians' individual signatures could shine while, at the same time, connecting harmoniously. This may be one of the reasons why the group's two sets at Casa del Popolo were highly sophisticated and playfully ironic, and included onstage mirroring techniques and sudden jokes, like when Blaser satirically followed Bates' touchingly romantic solo, whispered con arco, with a slow and repeated note that sounded like a happy cow on a Swiss pasture.

"In the context of freedom, friendship and camaraderie in which this group thrives, Houle's mastery of the clarinet, the embracing quality of his tone and the gracefulness of his compositions became even more appreciable in the dialogue ignited within a group where all the musicians fit together like the perfectly matching pieces of a puzzle."

—Sara Villa, [AllAboutJazz](#)

"...there was a lovely balance between Houle's written material and the adventurous improvised departures of the page...As Houle and other like-minded musicians practice it, the integration of 'in' and 'out' jazz really appeals to me. In that middle ground are sounds that are grounded, earthy and grooving, snippets that sound like bop as it might be interpreted on Mars, and great, textural explorations. Music that embraces it all, as Houle's does, can make other very good music feel limited.

"I'll close by re-iterating that Houle is one amiable avant-gardist. While his music may venture to some less conventional places, Houle helps to frame and convey his show with as great deal of upbeat personality and banter between tunes. Of course, we're not attending to hear him do stand-up, but the way in which he sets an audience at ease so that it can more willingly follow his group's musical journey is revealing. In the end, the enjoyment of the art is shared between those who made it and those who heard it."

—Peter Hum, [Ottawa Citizen jazzblog](#)

"Even when working with extended techniques (of which he has a fair repertoire) there's a lightness in his music which



defies the drizzly, film noir CD sleeve; this is music by clear moonlight, and Houle's clarinet is a cool breeze.” -

—AllThatJazz.com

Next summer François Houle’s GENERA Sextet planning an extensive Jazz Festivals cross-country tour with my international band, to celebrate the group's second album, *In Memoriam* (for Ken Pickering). This album pays tribute to and celebrates the memory of Ken Pickering, who was founding Artistic Director of the *Vancouver International Jazz Festival*, a position he held for over 32 years until his untimely passing in the summer of 2018. Ken had a profound and lasting effect on the music scene in Vancouver and by extension, in building the Jazz Festival's reputation as a global tastemaker, the Canadian and world scene. My intentions with this tour is to present this original body of work with a truly unique international band that Ken and I put together back in 2012 (the year GENERA’s first album was nominated for a JUNO Award!).

The compositions were not intended as a suite but as the pieces emerged it became evident to me that there was a hidden narrative binding them together as a whole, such as a Requiem. As I composed the music, echoes of brass band marches, motets, masses, and the Blues wove their way into the sound fabric.

This Requiem of sorts is design to reach exactly the type of audience that is the earmark of the Toronto Jazz Festival with its elements of swing, hard bop, infectious melodies and sultry orchestration.



> PRESS QUOTES

"Mr. Houle is one of the best-sounding clarinetists in improvised music, strong in all registers, chalumeau to altissimo; commanding at the barest volume; and selectively interested in extended technique." - *Ben Ratliff, New York Times*

"...highly polished improvisers, responding to the unexpected as the vital current in their playing, yet maintaining extraordinary poise." - *The Wire*

"...a study in refined chamber improvisation." - *Cadence*

"a spectacularly versatile clarinetist who appears to have no limitations stylistically or sonically" - *Mark Swed, LA Times*

"First rate performance..." - *Ben Ratliff, New York Times*

"...one of the best new virtuosos, a musician with total control of contemporary techniques" - *Paul de Barros, Downbeat Magazine*

"François Houle brilliantly illustrates the care, craft, and attention to detail that are crucial to successfully negotiating contemporary improvised music." - *Art Lange, Fanfare Magazine*

"...he's such a seasoned, springy improviser on clarinet or soprano. As a composer, he's got his own rich synthesis. Angular melodies may recall Braxton or Lacy..." - *Kevin Whitehead, Downbeat Magazine*

"The musically virtuosic Houle can park his clarinet anywhere music is played -- a symphony hall, a new music auditorium, a jazz club, or an electronic music studio." - *The Chronicle-Herald/Mail Star*

"Houle's particular combination of profound musicality and fast apprehension is increasingly in demand both locally and worldwide..." - *The Georgia Straight*

"A master of extended techniques (chirps, multiphonics, circular breathing, etc.), this virtuoso Canadian clarinetist treated listeners to a tour de force solo performance at Brechemin last November." - *The Stranger*

"Nothing short of world-class." - *Austin American-Statesman*

"Houle's prowess has been amply demonstrated in past...and his use of extended techniques is indeed impressive, yet he eschews all showiness, such as when he circularly breathes, plays it like a flute with no mouthpiece, or blows into both halves simultaneously." - *FIMAV*

"Houle s'exprime avec des possibilités d'expression infinies, dévoilant un lyrisme très convaincant. De nouvelles directions musicales sont ici constamment appelées. Un album d'une très grande densité... orchestrale !" - *Abeille Musique (France)*

"Houle performs with such consistent creativity that his improvisations have to be numbered among the supreme joys of modern jazz." - *The Improvisor, The international web site on free improvisation*

"Canadian clarinet and soprano saxophone virtuoso Francois Houle is expert at everything from the music of Iannis Xenakis to post-bebop jazz, always finding ways to weave musical worlds together." - *Amazon.com*

"A real treat. This is what improvised music should be: an adventure into the imagination and highly listenable." - *Amazon.com*

"...a sensory experience confirming Houle as a composer and instrumentalist setting the highest of standards for the international contemporary creative musical scene." - *Coda Magazine*