

Nels Cline's Consentrik Quartet Bio 2024 – long version

Music fans and music makers alike know that one of the most powerful and universal ways we can connect is through music. And there is an important interplay and overlap of those circles, of players and listeners. For guitarist Nels Cline, one of his most consistent sources of inspiration across four decades as a musician, composer, band member (most notably with Wilco), and band leader (including The Nels Cline 4, and Nels Cline Singers), is exploring and creating musical circles that grow, overlap, expand, and come back to center with each new project that he steps into or brings into his orbit. Enter the newest addition to that arc, Nels Cline's Consentrik Quartet, a project in the making since the summer of 2019.

At first an informal, stripped-down improvisational trio with a small circle of old friends - drummer Tom Rainey (also a member of The Nels Cline 4), and bassist Chris Lightcap - Nels wanted to experiment with "Gabor Szabo-influenced-raga-jazz" and step away from his effects pedals in favor of an acoustic electric guitar. Without any intention of creating a new project, they first performed in a small club in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, followed by a trip to Japan to play a festival where Nels decided to drop the acoustic and to return to his axis and comfort zone: his Jazzmaster guitar. As it turned out, coming back to center was what made the pieces click in place. A new project was about to be born, and Nels knew that the circle needed to be expanded once more to complete it.

As he tells it, the obvious choice was saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock. "I think the little light bulb went on over my head when I was listening to my friend Mary Halvorson's Octet at the Village Vanguard which Ingrid was part of... when I heard her I just thought, 'Wow, maybe she'd play with me. She has this incredible ability and versatility as a player.'"

Since the new trio with old friends already included Ingrid's husband and collaborator Tom Rainey, it was a natural addition. Nels and his wife Yuka Honda (with whom Nels also has a duo, called Cup) began spending evenings with the couple in their Brooklyn apartment, getting to know one another over Indian food, and solidifying Nels' concept for this new quartet he named Consentrik. Defined as "circles or objects having a common center", it couldn't be a more perfect name, and the old Middle English spelling caught his eye.

"One can sense the appeal of this idea when it is applied to a group of improvisers playing in service to an idea or composition. I like the graphic look of the 'K' as well as the word 'consent' within it. Coming up with band names is rather legendarily difficult, but I think this one fits this group and its musical intentions rather well."

As luck would have it, another friend, Mark Christman, the executive director of the Philadelphia arts organization Ars Nova offered a grant to Nels to compose and perform quartet music in the Eastern United States. Though touring became impossible with the pandemic, it did give Nels time to compose songs for the band. Over the course of the last three years, Consentrik have only been able to play once a year, including opening for Tedeschi Trucks Band at the Beacon Theatre, and at the Solid Sound Festival - where Nels was also playing in his other band, Wilco.

Now as Nels preps for recording the Concentrik Quartet, an integral part of that preparation is a series of concerts. He explains:

"Before recording this band I want everyone to be able to change the music in the moment, if they're feeling it, and have much more of an extemporaneous compositional approach. So we're

not just reading down charts and playing the forms that I wrote, because these are master improvisers.

The music has gradually become more colorful, often more fiery, and possibly more fun for everyone - band and listeners alike! I am truly humbled and grateful that these phenomenal musician comrades deign to play this Consentrik music with me, to mess with it and let it become a lucid and powerful version of itself.”

The live performances will inform the recordings, the audience witnessing - and therefore becoming part of - the exciting evolution of these compositions which Nels describes as:

“Some pretty intense, rhythmic, and quite accessible material balanced with very quiet material, some of which [is] arrhythmic, like a rubato, floating, dreamy, and possibly, romantic if it has a sweet aspect or elegiac. the other element that one might hear [is] a contemporary, slightly edgy jazz and free jazz style, that some people might consider exciting, other people may consider it sort of aggressive, wild, yet articulate.”

Whatever sonic shape it takes, Nels Cline brings us into yet another musical universe, where we become another circle within these concentric circles of shared expression, exploration, and community.

New compositions by Nels Cline for Concentrik Quartet were commissioned by Ars Nova for the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation with support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

About Nels Cline:

Guitar explorer Nels Cline is best known these days as the lead guitarist in the band Wilco. His recording and performing career — spanning jazz, rock, punk and experimental — is well into its fourth decade, with over 200 recordings, including at least 30 for which he is leader. Cline has received many accolades including Rolling Stone anointing him as both one of 20 "new guitar gods" and one of the top 100 guitarists of all time.

About Tom Rainey

Drummer Tom Rainey has performed and or recorded with numerous artists including: Mose Allison, Tim Berne, Anthony Braxton, Kris Davis, Ingrid Laubrock, Joe Lovano, and countless others.

About Chris Lightcap:

Bassist Chris Lightcap's releases as a leader and composer have been featured on year-end top album lists by The New York Times, Rolling Stone, NPR, Downbeat, Jazztimes, the Village Voice and The Wall Street Journal. In his performing and recording career he has worked with Regina Carter, Glen Hansard, Jason Moran, The Kronos Quartet, John Scofield, Joshua Bell, and many other artists.

About Ingrid Laubrock:

Ingrid Laubrock is an experimental saxophonist and composer. Laubrock was named a “true visionary” by pianist and The Kennedy Center's artistic director Jason Moran, and a “fully committed saxophonist and visionary" by The New Yorker. Laubrock has performed with Anthony Braxton, Jason Moran, Kris Davis, Mary Halvorson, Myra Melford, Zeena Parkins, Tom Rainey, Tim Berne, Dave Douglas and many others.

Awards include Fellowship in Jazz Composition by the Arts Foundation, BBC Jazz Prize for Innovation. She won best Rising Star Soprano Saxophonist in the 'Downbeat Annual Critics Poll in 2015 and best Tenor Saxophonist in 2018.