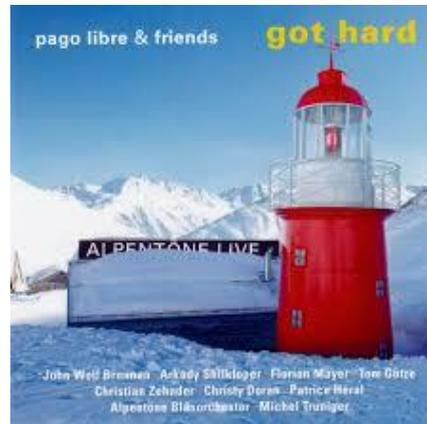


»HIS Voice«, Praha, CZ (September 2018)

Pago Libre & Friends: got hard Leo Records
(www.leorecords.com)



In addition to the eponymous “Pago Libre” album in 2002, the quartet, Leo Records has released the CDs *Moskau-Petuschki* (Leo Lab), *Wake up Call/Live in Italy*, *Phoenix/Live in Salzburg & Zurich*, *Stepping Out* and *Shooting Stars & Traffic Lights*. Leader, pianist, composer, arranger, and wildcard artist, John Wolf Brennan (a native of Ireland, but a domestic Swiss) has another nine CDs on Leo under his own name.

The ensemble **Pago Libre** is always full of wild ideas, agility, resourcefulness, although it likes to follow up on traditions, unexpected gimmicks, and the immediate blending of compositional freshness with frenetic improvisation. **Got Hard** – their latest CD – was recorded at the Alpentöne Festival on August 19, 2017 with Moscow hornist and alphornist Arkady Shilkloper and two musicians from Dresden, violinist Florian Mayer and bassist Tom Götze. But keep in mind: on the title page, the quartet's name is still complemented by: **& Friends**, and those "friends" are not very few! The stimulus to this was given by the festival, and Brennan accepted this challenge with full seriousness, so there was an unprecedented project here; reviews of its preservation on the disc would deserve the title of **«How a local event can become a world event»!**

But first, let's introduce our friends. They are vocalist (with overtone vocalization) and wippcordeonist **Christian Zehnder** of Basel, guitarist **Christy Doran** of Lucerne and drummer and vocal percussionist **Patrice Héral** from French Pérois. Plus the Local Wind Orchestra **«Alpentöne Bläsochester»**, directed by **Michel Truniger**, including two flutists, five clarinetists, one basklarinetist, one bassoonist, two Altosaxophonists, tenorsaxophonist and baritone saxophonist, three trumpeters, a hornist, three thrombone/bass trombonists, one euphonist and two tubas.

Consequently, the whole conglomeration, with the drummer, goes into a concert with a six-minute **Got Hard** suite, which is pompously festive, but divided into various approaches from con brio to valse fellibiesque to bizarre reprises. The subtitle of the song **FunPhare for the Common Sense** refers to the inspiration of **Fanfare for the Common Man** by Aaron Copland, but its intent, according to the attached note, is focused on the "lacking quality of contemporary politics and social media." However, the performance with (short) dance moments reminds me more of the creation of a “banda” orchestra on the promenade. Which - I would say - could be a matter of intent.

Then, Pago Libre enters dramatically in **Randulin Variaziuns** and finds us immediately in a joyful joke of folk mood (Vallader, a local idiom), with vocal mournfulness and overtuning, moving into voice fascination and miniaturization. For more than twelve minutes, the musicians show how shyness, frivolity, swiftness and clumsiness can be paralleled, parody and paralysis, all possible moods in one row luggage. **Robin** (dedicated to Robin Williams, a playable and acclaimed singer) is the first opportunity to meet the alphorn, and this bypass has a bizarre trajectory. There is a persistent folk atmosphere recharged by the percussions, and they are violin/guitar-driven duets that break into disrepair, but in fact all the leading instruments flutter together, celebrating the theme, striking up with provocative crowd, so I do not wake up to the enthusiastic response of this provoked audience .

In order to make the rotation unstoppable, Brennan takes on the title track in a short and subtle **ma/thema/gical fortspinnung**. The **Triangulation** trio (besides Brennan, Christy Doran and Patrice Héral) offers scattered musical jerks, go nonchalantly from one grace to another, forget it, break out there, break out here, breaking up the parts. Again, ABO, with Pago Libre members, leans on a haunting **GruyAIR**, a replication of the original Celtic-Helvetian original (reminiscent of the Irish or Scottish variants). Voice's "mountain" vocal reverberation, using yodeling, is as if it is thrown into the plains, which is illustrated by the "music behind the music", a gratifying tradition with contemporary entrapment, which is alternately the aggressor is licking music.

The ambitious duet of **Lai Nair** is carried by Shilkloper alpine horn, which is underlaid by Götze's bass. But the horn is at the same time brilliantly blasphemous and inviting, the bass is suggestive and coincidental, which both instruments leading to an inexorably interconnected and completely solistic courtesy. **Tü-Da-Do** is, as the subtitle reveals, the 7x7 variations on the postauto triad horn, and thus varies from the childishly crafted charisma or exhausted banging through the exclaiming vocal that goes into heroic pamphletting or the cruel frenzy for touching cheerfulness and over- but little valid, those 49 variations I probably will not reach verbatim, perhaps enough if I add that all vocal extravaganzas.

When **¿Nana?** is running out of water, (inspired by the French-Swiss sculptor Niki de Saint-Phalle), crumbling with vocal percussions to a striking penetration (unexpected applause in the middle of musical events), and this lingering massacre comes to a terrible atrocity (on the violin), but eventually they are grouped together into a dying disembarkation. Another of the Celtic-Scottish sources as a presumption of self-evident quality was arranged by Brennan under the name **Tam Lyn**, and in addition to this project, he invited nearly six musicians from the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance to the project, including **Colleen Shanks** (Irish Bagpipe and Irish Flute). They all bend the song into massive vigor, but there is always a moment of lightness before they are galloping into a carousel dry-room. Pawn to Take Five, Paul Desmond, who has popped Dave Brubeck, can be considered Brennan's **Fake Five**, which is a ten-minute dot, actually more of a pint at the end. It is a protruding orchestral development with a voice experience that intertwines the piano and scrawls violins with instantaneous procrastination, intertwined collaborations with promising soundscapes, racing off in all possible dimensions, slipping into bucolic moments.

Brennan's work actually is not only some bold experimentation. On the contrary: you can enjoy everything which can be reached from a jazz, folk, and classical area, which can be shifted, accentuated, duplicated, summed up. The result is a very specific piece of work, full of the unusualness, fictitiousness, and contemplation of what might, in the end, attract him into the shop. That's why **Got Hard** is so compact, yet full-blown album, filled with humor

and surprise. If it finally disappears into the distance, do not despair. It is always possible to re-engage him. What is also the characteristic of the third explosion, totally friendly to the audience, but not lost due to the applause of individuality.

Leo Feigin knows how to choose not to miss the value or attractive track of his label Leo Records. It shows that today's compasses have already been published under the editions 828, 835 and 836. Few record companies have more remarkable music – passionate and subtle, irrepressible and profoundly reversible.

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