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Bio information: **ERGO**

Title: ***IF NOT INERTIA*** (Cuneiform Rune 339)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / ELECTRONIC / EXPERIMENTAL

“Ergo's music is also rooted in jazz...fused with electronica and a distinct avant-garde feel. ...quite beautiful and moving...a bit like Sigur Ros meeting Sun Ra uptown.” – *Terrascope*

“This is music that evolves slowly, almost imperceptibly; yet for all its freedom, there's no shortage of structure...Hints of Phillip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley imbue Sroka's writing, but never come to the forefront...Sroka takes a different approach to composition, one where improvisation and structure work hand-in-hand, each feeding the other.” – *All About Jazz*

“Pointillist gurgles and clouds of computer haze are made beautiful by boss Brett Sroka's design sense...The subtleties of...*Multitude*, *Solitude* are a nifty confluence of George Lewis' dreamscapes and Miles's *Lonely Fire*...it's a record that invites you to watch the embers glow.” - *The Village Voice*

Whitney Balliet famously described jazz as the “sound of surprise.” For the experimental electro-acoustic trio **Ergo**, jazz is a forum for surprising sounds, startling textures, and gently enthralling improvisation. With the ensemble's third release *If Not Inertia*, Ergo continues to astonish, delivering music that investigates strange and unexpected spaces while inviting listeners into the process.

The latest incarnation of Ergo features founder and guiding spirit **Brett Sroka** on trombone, computers and whistling, **Sam Harris** on piano, prepared piano and Fender Rhodes, **Shawn Baltazor** on drums. **Mary Halvorson**, the dauntingly prolific young guitar star, joins the band on three tracks and **Sebastian Kruger** contributes acoustic guitar on one. Equally inspired by **Sun Ra** and **Sigur Ros**, the trio is devoted to exploring the push and pull between structure and freedom, density and spaciousness, and electronic and acoustic timbres. Their music unfurls in uncharted territory, a vast sonic realm defined by loops, improvisation, brief composed motifs, and constantly shifting interplay.

In addition to the music, the CD includes a .mov file of an incisive five-minute film by **Donya Ravasani**, *The Making of If Not Inertia*, featuring interviews with the musicians about the process of creating the album in the studio.

If Not Inertia opens with the minimalist excursion “Sorrows of the Moon,” a quietly roiling piece that adds layer upon layer over a piano drone, accelerating gradually to an anxious epiphany. “Two For Joy” opens with an exquisite electric piano figure that evokes the opening of a music box filled with clanky toys, sepia-toned photos and brittle leaves.

The album's centerpiece, the almost 12-minute “Little Shadow,” is a case study in Ergo's methodology, from the hushed cymbal rainfall and the breaking-down trombone line that wends slowly hither and thither without building to a sizzling climax. Similarly, Sroka whistles a portentous, meandering melody on the title track that could serve as the ominous theme for a laconic spaghetti Western.

The energy shifts abruptly on the “The Widening Gyre,” as Sroka's trombone blusters and roars and Halvorson showers bent notes over the gathering storm. By the time the album closes with the sweetly guileless “Let's” Ergo has completed a singular journey that fights stasis on every level. Without recourse to obvious grooves, this is music that compels movement, emotional, intellectual and even spiritual.

In many ways, Ergo is the sum of its manifestly creative parts. Raised in Lexington, Mass., Sroka studied with trombone greats **Britt Woodman** and **Steve Turre** at Manhattan School of Music, where he earned a BA in 1997 and pursued his own compositional studies by dissecting dozens of **Duke Ellington** scores.

Sroka made his recording debut as a leader with 2002's impressive **Fresh Sound-New Talent** CD *Hearsay*, a stellar sextet session featuring rising young masters **Jason Moran**, **Eric Harland** and trumpeter **Avishai Cohen**. Shortly after the album's release, electronic music captured his imagination, and Sroka immersed himself in synthesizers and software seeking, he said, “to reconcile 600 years of technology between the trombone and computer.” In addition to Ergo, he is a member of the psych/noise/rock collective **12,000 Trees**, and a prolific film composer.

Ergo came together in 2005 when Sroka was working with a cadre of similarly-inclined musicians, unconcerned about genre conventions and performing in venues such as **Mercury Lounge**, **55 Bar** and **Galapagos** with audiences open to musical exploration. Evolving out of these musically permissive forums, Ergo released its 2006 debut album *Quality Anatomical Music* on its own **Actuator** label, an album lauded as the year's best debut CD by *All About Jazz-NY*. The original lineup featured Sroka on trombone and computer, **Carl Maguire** on Rhodes electric piano, Prophet Synthesizer and effects and drummer **Damion Reid** (best known for his work with **Robert Glasper**, **Greg Ward** and **Rudresh Mahanthappa**).

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The album's success led to performances at an international array of major festivals. It also led to Ergo's ongoing relationship with **Cuneiform**, a label committed to working with artists who create genre-defying music, including avant-garde leaning jazz. The trio's Cuneiform debut, 2009's *Multitude, Solitude*, featured a new version of Ergo with Sroka, Maguire and drummer **Shawn Baltazor**, a dynamic, stylistically expansive drummer and composer whose recent gigs include two high profile concerts with **Darcy James Argue's Secret Society**. On Nov. 27, 2011, for **Cuneiform At the Stone**, the label's two-week NYC showcase at **John Zorn's** legendary club, Ergo performed with one of jazz's most acclaimed pianists (who is now the Kennedy Center's Advisor to Jazz), **Jason Moran**, as their special guest.

Ergo's lineup on its newest CD and second Cuneiform release, *If Not Inertia*, took shape with pianist/keyboardist **Sam Harris** joining Sroka and Baltazor. Born and raised in Dallas, Tex., Harris has emerged in recent years as one of the most sought after young pianists in New York City, working regularly with heavyweights such as trumpeter **Ambrose Akinmusire**, vocalist **Gretchen Parlato**, and bassist **Linda Oh**.

The presence of fellow sonic seeker **Mary Halvorson** on three tracks of the new CD adds a good deal of drama to the trio's sound. Like the musicians in Ergo, she's well versed in the mainstream jazz tradition, but she's dedicated herself to honing her own idiosyncratic improvisational toolkit with an extended palette of sounds and wide-open aesthetic that encompasses avant-rock, new music and free improv. A prolific bandleader in her own right, Halvorson tours and records with cornetist **Taylor Ho Bynum**, drummer **Tomas Fujiwara**, guitarist **Marc Ribot**, bassist **Trevor Dunn** and wind legend **Anthony Braxton**.

It's no surprise that she's joined forces on *If Not Inertia* with Ergo, a band that resists with every note the forces, internal and external, that work against musicians who seek new sounds.

If Not Inertia also features acoustic guitarist **Sebastian Kruger** as a guest on the track "Let's." Leader of the Brooklyn-based indie rock band **Inlets**, Kruger is a longtime colleague of Sroka and Baltazor.

For more information, see:

Ergo: www.ergoisaband.com - www.facebook.com/ergoisaband - www.myspace.com/ergo

Brett Sroka: www.brettsroka.com - Sam Harris: www.samharrismusic.com - Shawn Baltazor: www.shawnbaltazor.com

Mary Halvorson: www.maryhalvorson.com - Sebastian Kruger/Inlets: www.facebook.com/Inlets

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