



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:** <https://www.facebook.com/Inlets>

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS



Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com.

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT:

ERGO

MULTITUDE, SOLITUDE

CUNEIFORM

2009

Lineup: **Brett Sroka:** trombone, computer; **Carl Maguire:** Rhodes electric piano, Prophet synthesizer, electronic effects; **Shawn Baltazor:** drum

"In his own words trombonist Brett Sroka surrounded himself with synthesizers "to reconcile the six hundred years of technology between the trombone and the computer" and for the most part, this album connects, on a broadband scale.

...each song appears to sound like it each has its own story to tell. ... Each song and the album as a whole has direction, not stuck sounding like an "electrazzic" album..."

- **Brenton Plourde, *Jazz Times***, April 27, 2009, www.jazztimes.com

"...the trio dubbed Ergo represents a new era in music making where chill and improvisation meet headlong in the personal computer-driven age.

...trombonist Brett Sroka and keyboardist Carl Maguire merge separate and distinct identities in creative jazz-oriented music to create urban, rural and atmospheric soundscapes that go to the far side of any discernible influences, including that of Eno, Sun Ra, Autechre, or Curtis Fuller. There's a tuneful quality, consistent drones and spikes that suggest industrialism, retro fusion via Maguire's Fender Rhodes electric piano, and even an underground bop aesthetic fueled by post-art rock and tempered with the romanticism of Sigur Rós. ... you'll hear them go well beyond any strictly defined tones, into completely new horizons similar to nothing you've heard before. ... Ergo has touched on something quite unique and cool in contemporary fusion music with *Multitude, Solitude*, reaching into and past modern creative, ambient music or mere basic electronica.

Teamwork...captivating, hypnotic, and attractively exotic music..."

- **Michael G. Nastos, *All Music Guide***, www.allmusic.com

"Pointillist gurgles and clouds of computer haze are made beautiful by boss Brett Sroka's design sense—this trombone, Rhodes, and drums trio has a deft touch when it comes to molding silence and drones into rich celestial balladry. The subtleties of the new *multitude, solitude* are a nifty confluence of George Lewis's dreamscapes and Miles's *Lonely Fire*, and while it's a record that invites you to watch the embers glow..."

- **Jim Macnie, *Village Voice***, March 16, 2010, www.villagevoice.com

“... Ergo are a New York-based trio of trombone, keyboards and drums... They make moody music... Fender Rhodes...and the Prophet synth... remain versatile tone generators...this is no nostalgia trip. The main point of interest is the lead 'bone work, which cuts through the dreaminess of the keys and digital refractions. The trombone treatments are vital to the compositions; this is no mere dub frippery. This disc is best experienced as a suite...”

- **David Dacks, *Exclaim!***, www.exclaim.ca, October 2009

“Ergo’s music is also rooted in jazz, however the New York trio’s latest ‘Multitude, Solitude’...is a more experimental affair, fused with electronica and a distinct avant-garde feel. ...quite beautiful and moving...a bit like Sigur Ros meeting Sun Ra uptown. It’s also the sort of sound you might hear coming from Manfred Eicher’s ECM stable which is no mean recommendation. It is a tribute to Cuneiform that they continue to nurture bands as interesting and diverse as Ergo, Miriodor and Beat Circus and long may they continue to do so.”

- **Ian Fraser, *Terrascope***, April 2010, www.terrascope.co.uk

“...The trio that comprises Ergo...call to mind another idiosyncratic trio...The Necks, but where that estimable triad regale you with a mutable brand of ambient jazz, Ergo opt for a tangible dazzling of the senses. More isn't less here; their panoply of noises sounds like an entire company of artists at work, so outwardly sensate is the entire recording. ...

Sroka's trombone seems to be the sinew holding the whole enterprise together, and he uses it in multiple fashions, both as background coloring and fundamental component. ...haunting environs of "Vessel" is a neat summation (and microcosm) of Ergo's modus operandi: Sroka blows some affecting lead lines around which Baltazor dances... (his flurry of cymbal orthodoxy recalls...Morris Pert and Sun Ra's Francisco Mora) while Maguire paints some subtle kaleidoscopic figures with his numerous keyboards...

...Ergo don't resemble anything remotely traditional... It's apparent they're searching for new contexts and idioms on this...broaching a "fourth-stream"...where abstractionism...is as important in their approach as such hoary absolutes as melody, harmony, and rhythm. ...Ergo...set forth to upset all known jazz apple carts, successfully fomenting new dialogues in the process.

- **Darren Bergstein, *The Squid's Ear***, December 28, 2009, www.squidsear.com

“... Long tracks with ambient grooves, fine textures, a floating sound. ...” - **François Couture, *Monsieur Délire***, November 19, 2009

“This electro-acoustic experimental jazz trio from NYC blend and blur genres via Brett Sroka’s trombone and computer, Carl Maguire’s Rhodes electric piano, and Shawn Baltazor’s drums. The results range from busy complexity to spare atmospheres, pieces that sound like the soundtracks to suspenseful films, or floating dream sequences. ...very rewarding and varied...”

- **George Parsons, *Dream Magazine***, #10

“... Ergo, at its core, seems as unconventional as they get—trombone, keyboards, drums—creating music that wouldn't have been possible before relatively recent innovations in sound processing and sampling/looping. ... For fans of the improvised, electronics-centric music heralded by the Norwegian musicians in the extended Punkt family, *Multitude, Solitude* is a seamlessly organic album of quietude that commands attention from its very first moments.

... This is music that evolves slowly, almost imperceptibly; yet for all its freedom, there's no shortage of structure. Closer in ambience to classical chamber music, the album's two longest pieces are particularly compelling. "Endlessly (multitude, solitude)," with its layers of trombone—in Sroka's hands, truly a vocal instrument—possesses the same paradoxical stasis-meets-forward-motion of Norwegian saxophonist Trygve Seim's outstanding *Sangam*...

Shorter pieces...rely on processing to allow Sroka to build up layers of trombone. ... Hints of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley imbue Sroka's writing, but never come to the forefront.

... Like Norwegian artists like Arve Henriksen, however, Sroka takes a different approach to composition, one where improvisation and structure work hand-in-hand, each feeding the other. *Multitude, Solitude*'s 50 tranquil minutes ebb and flow with stunning realism in a landscape of otherworldly textures.”

- **John Kelman, *All About Jazz***, January 4, 2010, www.allaboutjazz.com

“Keyboardist Carl Maguire... trombonist/computer operator Brett Sroka and drummer Shawn Baltazor spawn an experimental muse, where rigid definitions or categorizations, justifiably fall flat. ...

The band delves into numerous jazz improvisation and subtle electronics-based offshoots via quietly changing themes and floating soundscapes. Baltazor's rumbling drums often serve as a contrapuntal effect during the temperate moments, as he also injects shades and hues with textural cymbal swashes. Sroka's moody lines elicit tension-and-release formats amid laid-back choruses, to complement the unit's generation of subtle dynamics and crashing cadenzas.

...intuition plays a vital role throughout. ...it's an oscillating and persuasive venture...where no hard and fast rules apply.”

- **Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz***, January 8, 2010, www.allaboutjazz.com

“This is a trio working the electro-acoustic margins...and whilst Ergo's music often flirts with ambient notions, there is equally a predominant air of unease about their work...

...the overall effect is tantalizing in its indeterminacy.

... "Endlessly (Multitude, Solitude)" makes the point. Here, keyboardist Carl Maguire—the man who's responsible for some of the stimulating releases of recent years with his band Floriculture—generates all kinds of excuses for stasis with near-static, repetitive keyboard figures, even as the music develops a kind of distinctly non-linear flow. The result is almost an uneasy compromise between two arguably irreconcilable notions...the trio is adept at thinking as one. The outcome of the collective ideal is...a seemingly infinite capacity for reflection, even while the music never drifts into the background. ...”

- **Nic Jones, *All About Jazz***, January 16, 2010

“Trombonist Brett Sroka’s dreamy trio makes small, incremental moves sound profound, mixing together some ominous keyboard tinkle, a bit of digitally enhanced brass, and enough textural percussion to keep the whole thing fluid. Rather unique. ...”

- **Jim Macnie, *Village Voice***, November 9, 2011, www.villagevoice.com

"BEST DEBUT: Ergo *Quality Anatomical Music*" – **Best Of 2006 List, All About Jazz-New York**

". . . explores the intersections of electronic music, Jazz improvisation, and smart Rock bands like Radiohead or Sigur Ros. . . Sroka has huge ears and catholic tastes, using these to good effect on this moody and memorable recording." – **Jason Bivins, Cadence Magazine**

"Solid musicianship and a vision are what ERGO is all about, and they absolutely are on to something very special." – **Steve Caputo, Inside Connection Magazine**

"Pianist Carl Maguire's debut solo release for the German "Between the Lines" record titled "Floriculture" was one of the true modern jazz surprises of 2006. Yet, with this trio effort recorded in New York City, we are presented with a horse of a different color. Here, Brett Sroka mingles largely; probing trombone lines with Maguire's synth and electric keyboard treatments. It's a sinuous blend of subtle effects, firmed up by Damion Reed's asymmetrical rhythmic maneuvers.

And for music of this ilk – where electronics are often abused or overwrought – this trio professes a seamless electro-improv alignment of the musical spirits. Some of these works sport a chromatic edge, whereas gently rolling hills, spiked with dynamically-oriented peaks present a rather bizarre, yet irrefutably enticing vista. They soar into the red zone every so often, but the music crosses that indefinable frontier, teeming with intuitive experimentation, probing jazz dialogues and EFX-drenched avant-garde stylizations. Uncannily cohesive and an enormously compelling listening experience... " – **Glenn Astarita, E jazznews.Com, September 20, 2006**

"...this music is not anything that you might hear at Jazz at Lincoln Center, or your local mainstream radio station, for that matter. Labels are only as good as the information they provide, so saying it is on the "fringes of jazz" or "beyond jazz" is a bit meaningless, but suffice it to say that there are a lot of electronics beyond what a Fender Rhodes can do, and there is nothing remotely close to a 32-bar AABA structure to be found here. You are entering a sonic universe, but more importantly, a music which reveals itself as most definitely structured and well thought out. ...memorable themes which develop over time. Each track has a life cycle which carries it forward...rather than just spacing or tripping out for the duration..."

The action is not in the form of soloing in the normal sense, but rather a collage of sounds, with Maguire's keyboards and synthesizer creating a bottomless ocean... Within this dense flux floats Sroka's trombone... Sroka's trombone rarely sounds immediately recognizable as such... Reid's drumming is everywhere, and he provides a kind of glue which holds things together.a layer of percussion... Many types of jazz allow you to lose yourself within them, and *Quality Anatomical Music Since 2005* most certainly does that, but from quite a different angle. Recommended." – **Budd Kopman, All About Jazz, September 06, 2006**

"2006 playlist: We listen to a lot of music, privy as we are to advance releases and publicity teasers, so narrowing the field down to our most-played 30 albums is actually quite a winnowing. . . Here's what filled our ears this year. . . Ergo – *Quality Anatomical Music Since 2005* (Actuator). Experimental electronic music from Brooklyn by way of Sun Ra. Band goals include "trying to reconcile the 600 years of technology between trombone and computer." – **Roberto Friedman, Bay Area Reporter (San Francisco)**

"Two strong showings by pianist/keyboardist Carl Maguire: the quartet release *Floriculture* (Challenge) and the experimental electronica of the trio *Ergo*" – **David Adler**

"Sroka is more interested in charting new musical territory than simply revisiting the traditions of J.J. Johnson." – **Mike Shanley, JazzTimes**

". . . fully incorporates other-worldly aspects of electronica, with Crimonesque washes and colors that almost put you in mind of King Crimson. The three-piece band sounds much bigger than it actually is." – **J. C. Lockwood, The Merrimack River Current (Northern Massachusetts)**

". . . judging from a recent set at the Cornelia Street Café in Manhattan Sroka's music is more interesting than ever. The improvisation stretches more readily in different directions with fewer individuals on the bandstand" – **Thomas Staudter, The Gazette (Westchester County, NY)**

Miscellaneous press quotes on Ergo:

"Ergo's trombonist Brett Sroka, keyboardist Carl Maguire and drummer Shawn Baltazor are all part of a generation for which Autechre and Sigur Ros are as pressing concerns as Armstrong and Sun Ra. That's certainly evident in the band's timbral sophistication, spacey contours and slinky grooves." – **Steve Smith, Time Out, New York**

"The trombonist Brett Sroka, the keyboardist Carl Maguire and the drummer Shawn Baltazor make up this atmospheric collective, which takes full advantage of electronic programming and cross-genre appropriation... " – **Nate Chinen, The New York Times, April 23, 2009**

"An Ellington fiend who likes to get his computerized space-dub on, the trombonist has lots of sound sculpture in him. His rather dramatic art music is both texturally rich and compositionally engaging." – **Jim Macnie, The Village Voice**

"...Lexington native Brett Sroka has found a way to turn the trombone into the coolest instrument since the bass clarinet. He plays in a band called Ergo, which blends blip-hop electronica with jazz. This trio consists of drums, keyboards, and Sroka's unruly trombone. Sure, we'll bet he looks cool playing his electronic music...You can see Ergo tonight..." – **Christopher Muther, "editor's picks," The Boston Globe, February 26, 2004**

"The city has always been known for its under-the-radar jazz talent. This gig — happening tonight only — is a great example of how substantial that talent can be... Here's a great chance to check Sroka's dynamic and distinguished ideas in action, while catching a glimpse of the underground." – **John McCormick, Flavorpill.Net**