

Artist: **LE REX**

Album: **ESCAPE OF THE FIRE ANTS**

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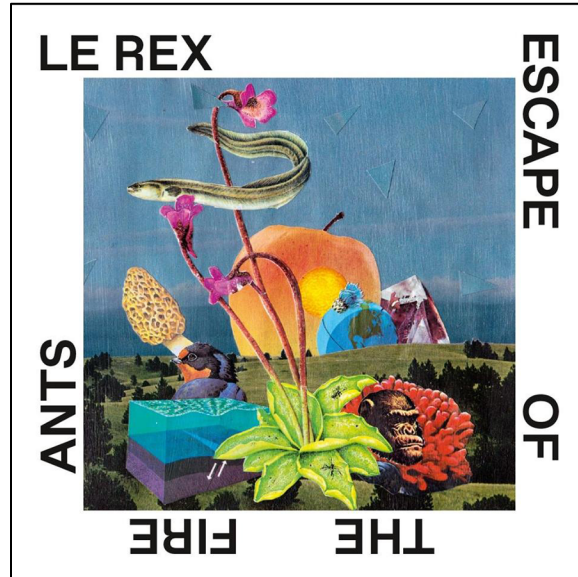
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The renegade Swiss ensemble **LE REX** reinvents brass groove music with the improvisation-laced **ESCAPE OF THE FIRE ANTS**, beautiful and fiercely creative music for strange times

*Escape of the Fire Ants* announces the arrival of **Le Rex** as an international force: a new millennium jazz brass band infused with indie rock energy & attitude; street smart & road-tested, ferociously grooving & lyrically charged

Harry Lime, the charming but dastardly anti-hero in the classic 1949 film noir *The Third Man*, famously dissed Switzerland saying “they had brotherly love, they had 500 years of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.” The renegade Swiss quintet **Le Rex** isn’t making up for lost time, but there’s an urgency and creative ferocity to their music that would make Lime reconsider his unfair denigration. Featuring four expert horn players and drums, the band is a rising force on the European music scene, with an irresistibly grooving sound honed on the street and designed for maximum impact in clubs and concert halls.

Slated for release on **Cuneiform Records** on April 5, 2019, **Le Rex**’s fourth album *Escape of the Fire Ants* is the band’s most confident and cohesive, marked by consistently compelling compositions, careening melodies and thick, lapidary harmonies. It’s cosmopolitan music drawing on far-flung influences and connections to **Chicago**, **Belgrade**, **Cape Town**, **New Orleans**, and **Lagos**. Rather than flaunting an eclectic palette, **Le Rex** transmutes its source material into seamless original works reflecting the group’s singular collection of personalities. Featuring **German**-born alto saxophonist **Benedikt Reising**, tenor saxophonist **Marc Stucki**, trombonist **Andreas Tschopp**, tuba player extraordinaire **Marc Unternährer**, and drummer **Rico Baumann**, **Le Rex** reflects the fundamental strength that flows from musicians who’ve put in the time to forge deep ties on and off the bandstand.

“We always play without charts on stage, and for this recording we did the same thing,” says **Stucki**, who has studied with **New York** heavyweights **Ellery Eskelin** and **Tim Berne**. “We took two days every month to learn the music, and played small gigs to really get the tunes in shape.”

All of the members are successful and sought-after players, working in a wide array of settings. **Tschopp**’s *Escape of the Fire Ants* evidences the band’s deepening ties to **South Africa**, where several members have formed a band with some of the country’s best jazz musicians. The album opens with the episodic title track, a piece that sets the agenda with its intricate construction. Moving from steeplechase melodic lines and high-velocity call-and-response figures centering on the trombonist’s gorgeous upper register work to a rumbling unaccompanied passage and back to the full band at jagged speed, the unpredictable *Fire Ants* are not to be trifled with.

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Stucki's "**Alimentation Générale**" opens like a lilting, sing-song ballad but with Baumann's entry the piece adds one layer of groove after another as two rhythmic cycles continually circle back to the melody. With a particularly ecstatic tenor solo by Stucki the tune brings to mind **Abdullah Ibrahim** in a particularly manic mood, revealing the group's powerful connection to the South African scene.

While Le Rex is best known for thrilling performances at breakneck tempos, the band is equally capable of delivering balladic beauty. Unternährer's anthem "**Smoking Flowers**" highlights the way the players can step into any role, as the tuba takes the lead. "It really makes sense in this band," Unternährer says. "Sometimes I'm the bass, and sometimes another horn carries the low end. This makes it flexible and more interesting."

"When I compose," Stucki adds, "I like to hear the instruments in extreme ranges, with the tuba and trombone playing high. I like to play the bass lines sometimes. It sounds different, and gives the band a different kind of power."

Stucki's "**Harry Stamper Saves the Day**" is a riff-based tune inspired by the kind of heavy swing emanating from drummer **Joey Baron**'s *Baron Down* with **Ellery Eskelin** (the title references **Bruce Willis**'s character in the 1998 apocalyptic thriller *Armageddon*). From swaggering to unabashed beauty to antic heroics, the brief but lyrically distilled "**Elliot's Theme**" is sandwiched between "Harry Stamper" and the microgrooving "**Bandumeh Landing**," an impressive tryptic of Stucki tunes.

Reising offers contrasting sonorities with "**The Funding**," a crunching **Talking Heads**-meets-**Zepplin** piece, and "**Glow**," a luminous fanfare built on a supple and unadorned melody. In another crafty example of Le Rex's sleight of hand, Tschopp's "**Ballad For an Optimist**," isn't really a ballad. While it starts with a lovely trombone statement, before long it turns into a joyous dance party, so it does deliver on the optimism. Closing with Reising's "**Der Knochige Dürre**," Le Rex offers an unsettling narrative that keys on a squealing free improv flight by Stucki. It's a completely different mood and feel than anything that's come before, and a reminder that this is a band that keeps listeners guessing.

In many ways *Escape of the Fire Ants* announces the arrival of Le Rex as an international force. The band first came together in 2009, united by common musical interests and a love of busking, where the band honed new compositions and techniques through rigorous trial and error. Reflecting the group's commitment to mobility, 2010's debut release *Le Corse* and its critically hailed 2012 follow up *Ascona* (both on **Unit Records**) were recorded with transportable gear on specifically chosen locations on **Corsica** and **Switzerland** (the group borrowed their band name **Le Rex** from an abandoned movie theater they found on the French island).

With the band's debut release on Cuneiform, 2015's *Wild Man*, Le Rex branched out, inspired by a well-received tour across the **United States**. Writing and honing material in Chicago, they worked closely with veteran sound engineer **Griffin Rodriguez**, who has documented many of the city's most eloquent improvisers as well as rock-oriented bands like **Beirut** and his own **Icy Demons**. For *Escape of the Fire Ants*, the band found an ideal situation working with recording engineer **Julian Fehlmann** at **Studio Mécanique** in **La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland**.

"We really tried to find a studio that's not a jazz studio, with more of an indie rock aesthetic," says Baumann, who as Le Rex's rhythmic architect makes sure that the center holds, until it's time to let it fly apart.

The band's enviable cohesion is both musical and social, a dynamic that flows from "quite a special a group of friends, which is not something you have in all bands," Baumann says. "We have this common sense of humor that translates to the music. Playing on the street helped us develop that. We realized on the street you have to be entertaining, which led to players moving around a lot on stage. It's not only a visual thing. It's a sonic thing too. If the horns move away from the drums, it changes the arrangement."

Street smart and road-tested, ferociously grooving and lyrically charged, intricately arranged and spontaneously generated, Le Rex's music contains multitudes. With *Escape of the Fire Ants*, the band is on the march.

#### ***For more information on Le Rex***

[www.lerexmusic.ch](http://www.lerexmusic.ch) – [www.facebook.com/LeRexMusic](https://www.facebook.com/LeRexMusic) – [www.cuneiformrecords.com/bandshtml/LeRex.html](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com/bandshtml/LeRex.html)

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#### **PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**

Please credit photographer: **Bastien Bron**. Digital [High-Resolution] images available on request.



## WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT:

### LE REX                      WILD MAN                      CUNEIFORM RECORDS    2015

"... Wild Man is lively, at times almost rambunctious, yet the pieces, primarily composed by Marc Stucki, are poignant as well as playful, sober as well as celebratory. While 'The Dwarf' has elements of New Orleans and the album as a whole is indebted to the Chicago tradition of AACM, opener 'Mole's Dream of the Prairie' is reminiscent of Ellington while 'Riff Raff' verges on calypso. Also worthy of mention is... 'Mr Richard Keil' ..because there should be more jazz tunes named after actors best known for playing Bond villain henchmen. **4 stars.**"

- Marcus O'Dair, *Jazzwise*, October 2016

"*Wild Man* consists of 13 vibrant, upbeat jazzy tracks... Not a conventional jazz ensemble... considering the lack of piano or upright bass, but the tuba seems to take over the role of the bassist here, with the drummer holding down the rest of the rhythms and the saxes & trombone firing off the lead melodies. ... A great thing about *Wild Man*, and Le Rex in general, is hearing the tuba in such a prominent role... Marc Unternährer is a joy to listen to throughout. ... This is ultimately a fun album, and another great release from the folks over at Cuneiform. [4.5/5 Stars]"

- Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, Dec. 26, 2015, [www.seaoftranquility.org](http://www.seaoftranquility.org)

"**Pete's Picks of 2015 ... here is my top 15... Le Rex – Wild Man (Cuneiform)** ... They're effectively a mini brass band, but with jazz chops and a great sense of humour. They mix old school with the new, referencing everything from New Orleans to Chicago. ... A band that must be great to hear live, the sort to get you dancing in the aisles"

- Pete Butchers, "Pete's Pick of 2015", *Jazz Today*, December 28, 2015

"Swiss quintet Le Rex... followed up their US tour with a sojourn in one of the centers of ree jazz, Chicago, to make *Wild Man*. ... a wonderful variety of influence and inspiration, from New Orleans second-line and the AACM to Swiss clockmakers and alpine dwarves. ... we get everything we'd expect—and more—from a band called Le Rex on an album called *Wild Man*: playful, energetic music free of self-serious pretensions. Or as they themselves describe it, "a kind of cunning adventure jazz."

Piece by piece, and even within individual pieces, the adventure unfolds as a series of constantly shifting stylistic strategies, with a dedication—and ability!—to groove that both grounds the listener in each moment and dramatizes each redirection. ...

The overall effect is surprise that comes off as both sure-footed and spontaneous. ... The album features Tschopp's excellent trombone playing throughout; see the dueling solos on the free-leaning title track, or the open-ended introduction to the leaden swinging final cut, "Be in Shape!," one of my favorite moments on *Wild Man*. ... [4 stars]"

- Eric McDowell, *The Free Jazz Collective*, November 25, 2015, [www.freejazzblog.org](http://www.freejazzblog.org)

"**Best of 2015: Honorable Mentions – New Releases: Le Rex – Wild Man (Cuneiform)**"

- "Best of 2015," *New York City Jazz Record*

"The band moniker Le Rex is culled from an abandoned theater, discovered on the island of Corsica, but there's nothing bleak or dusky about this quintet's musicality. ... these young lads convey remarkable maturity from a compositional perspective, and keep things novel or fresh amid a host of blossoming developments and tightly enacted grooves. ...

One of the strongest works on the album is "Sugar Maple," which is offset by a rather magnetic, drifting melody line... Other tracks offer popping horns and blustery hooks, counterbalanced by the soloists' impassioned and vociferous exchanges. Lots of talent on the loose here... [4 stars]"

- Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, February 1, 2016, [www.allaboutjazz.com](http://www.allaboutjazz.com)

"There's one trend in music... that I'm really enjoying...: the proliferation of groups with unconventional instrumentation... Switzerland's Le Rex is a perfect example, with two saxes (alto and tenor), a trombone... a tuba... and a drummer. They draw on various traditions of horn music, like New Orleans, klezmer, and so on, but add a lot of twists... The adventurousness of the arrangements... reminds me of the Tiptons, who have done similar things in an all-sax context. Le Rex's combination of catchy melodies, bouncy tuba bass lines, and offbeat harmonies is infectious... Highlights are too numerous to detail... The trombone solo on "Riff Raff" is outstanding... That tune's rhythm part, reminiscent of soukous, is joyous... Le Rex has hit upon a new twist for jazz, and deserve a listen. Seriously fun music."

- Jon Davis, *Exposé*, March 9, 2016, [www.expose.org](http://www.expose.org)

"Le Rex... develops a highly unique and dynamic sound which reaches from experimental structures to hymn-like passages and uptempo brass groovers - and sometimes all put together in one track. ... **truly progressive jazz music.**"

- *Mos Eisley Music*, December 14, 2015

"ACOUSTIC LEVITATION, BEST OF 2015... A Swiss quintet of two saxes, trombone, tuba and drums, create a very second-line sound that will have your face grinning and your ass moving."

- Steve Koenig, *Acoustic Levitation*

"HEAVY on the horns... Alto saxophonist Benedikt Reising, trombonist Andreas Tschopp, tuba player Marc Unternährer, drummer Rico Baumann, and the primary composer, tenor saxophonist Marc Stucki, join together in a most powerful demonstration of just what those horns can do. Tunes like the bouncing/jouncing "Le Clic", where the horns lead a most percussive backbeat, will blow you totally away. ... I give Le Rex a **MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED, with an "EQ" (energy quotient) rating of 4.98** for this release."

- Dick Metcalf, *Improvjazzation Nation*, Issue #159, [www.rotcodzaj.com](http://www.rotcodzaj.com)