

PETER BRÖTZMANN | WE THOUGHT WE COULD CHANGE THE WORLD



**BRÖTZMANN**  
**WE THOUGHT**  
**WE COULD CHANGE**  
**THE WORLD**

**CONVERSATIONS WITH GERARD ROUY**

**WOLKE**

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“Freedoms are not given, they are taken”

“Words of a Rebel” (Pyotr Kropotkin) 1885

“Early this mornin’  
when you knocked upon my door  
Early this mornin’ ooh  
when you knocked upon my door  
And I said, ‘Hello, Satan  
I believe it’s time to go.’

Me and the Devil  
was walkin’ side by side  
Me and the Devil, ooh  
was walkin’ side by side  
And I’m goin’ to beat my woman  
until I get satisfied.

She say you don’t see why  
that you will dog me ’round  
(spoken: Now, babe, you know you ain’t doin’ me  
right, don’cha)  
She say you don’t see why, ooh  
that you will dog me ’round  
It must-a be that old evil spirit  
so deep down in the ground.

You may bury my body  
down by the highway side  
(spoken: Baby, I don’t care where you bury my  
body when I’m dead and gone)  
You may bury my body, ooh  
down by the highway side  
So my old evil spirit  
can catch a Greyhound bus and ride.”

“Me and the Devil Blues” (Robert Johnson) 1937

## Foreword

One day in 2008 an old friend of mine came to me and said, “I want to make a film about Peter Brötzmann, do you want to be part of it?” What a question! He didn’t know that much about (free) jazz and freely improvised music but from the late 70s on, he had been very much attracted — as we all were — by the graphic work of most of the Free Music Production records, a lot of them being worked out by Brötzmann. He also knew that I had been one of Brötzmann’s great fans and I had been acquainted to him for a very long time. The man was Bernard Josse who finally made the documentary film “Soldier of the road” ([www.soldieroftheroad.com](http://www.soldieroftheroad.com)).

“Soldier of the road” was shot between November 2008 and August 2009. We went to different venues where Brötzmann was playing between those dates: Ottenbrucher Bahnhof in Wuppertal (Germany) and The Loft in Cologne (Germany) with Sonore, then the Bimhuis in Amsterdam (Holland) with the Chicago Tentet, Le Petit Fauchoux in Tours (France) and the Mulhouse Meteo festival (France) with Full Blast, and finally Les Instants Chavirés in Montreuil (France) with The damage is done. We also had four long interviews with Brötzmann in his home in Wuppertal. Interviews of other people were made at the same time with Jost Gebers, Evan Parker, Fred Van Hove, Han Bennink, Fred Frith, Michael Wertmüller. And others with Joe McPhee, Conny and Johannes Bauer, Michael Zerang and Paal Nilssen-Love, Ken Vandermark and Mats Gustafsson, that were not used in the movie. Bernard Josse suggested me to ask Brötzmann some specific questions, some of them I did, some others I didn’t. No institution, no foundation, no label helped to finance the production. So Josse decided to produce the film and the DVD himself. With “Soldier of the road”, his idea was to make a movie that could

be seen by everybody, a documentary art film excluding the ‘references’ to jazz music that ‘specialists’ would be interested to find. I thought — and still assume — that the movie is a very good one. But I immediately felt frustrated about the fantastic amount of information that Brötzmann gave us about the history of this music that would not going to be used in that 90 minutes long film — we can easily understand why. That’s how I started to realize that not using all that information would be a great loss.

I had heard Brötzmann for the first time in a three day festival in Gent (Belgium) in 1971. I was then — and still am — a great fan of John Coltrane and Albert Ayler music and I got overwhelmed by that “Peter Brötzmann Big Group” that I had never heard about before (which, as far as I can remember, had Van Hove, Bennink, Mangelsdorff, Rutherford and Kowald on tuba). I had the feeling that something special, important and quite extraordinary was happening there. Besides the Brötzmann group, a lot of other groups, unknown to me at that time, also appeared there that year, which really opened my ears: John Stevens’s Spontaneous Music Ensemble, Sunny Murray’s Spiritual Ensemble, Chris McGregor’s Brotherhood of Breath Ltd (sic), Burton Greene trio featuring Willem Breuker, Irène Schweizer trio, Steve Lacy and Steve Potts, Cel Overberghe and Al Jones, François Tusques trio, Paul Van Gysegem Sextet, Pierre Courbois Association P.C., Siegfried Kessler trio, Willy Roggeman, Robin Kenyatta Free State Band.

Since these happy early years, as a freelance journalist and photographer I have been more and more interested and fascinated by the different generations of contemporary “free” improvisers and the historical masters of jazz.

I want to thank all the musicians, especially of course Peter Brötzmann, who were kind enough to have interviews with me during these last forty years; Bernard Josse and his family (Betty, Julien, Sarah); Philippe Carles



(co-author of 'Free Jazz / Black Power' in 1971) who was the editor of Jazz Magazine (Paris) in the period I worked for it, still a friend; and Paul Lytton who did a great work in transforming Peter's language in proper English.

All interviews appearing happened either during the shooting period of the movie, or have been published by the French Jazz Magazine during the last forty years, or were never published.

G rard Rouy, Wasquehal, November 2013