

TaxiWars

Feel it. The sticky faux leather of the backseat. Smell it. A whiff of alcohol, mixed with the driver's cologne. You can almost taste it: the fear of being conned, the terror of a high-speed crash, the promise of excitement just around the corner.

Taxi rides are all of that.

Tom Barman loves them. "It's like indoor travelling," he says. "It's cosmopolitan. It's the rush of not knowing exactly where you're going. It's part of the art of living far from home." Sounds like a definition of jazz, if ever there was one.

And TaxiWars *is* jazz. This is not rock singer Tom Barman crooning away with a jazz trio led by saxophonist Robin Verheyen. This is a jazz band with a deep knowledge of the music's history, and a love for the driving jazz of the early sixties on the Impulse! label. The music of Pharaoh Sanders, Archie Shepp, and Charles Mingus – full of swing, pulse, and the urge to break out of the genre's confinements.

Mingus is no stranger to Barman – a sample of the bassist's *Far Wells, Mill Valley* dominated dEUS's classic *Theme from Turnpike*. And like Mingus himself, TaxiWars can sound warm and engaging one minute – as in the hypnotizing track *Pearlescent* –, yet bellicose and menacing the next. Listen to *Let's Get Killed* ("Bangkok felt like suicide!") and try not to be alarmed by Barman's effects drenched vocals. Barman: "At home, I listen to jazz almost exclusively, trying to escape from the tried and true pop structures – there are no choruses in TaxiWars. And those record sleeves fit well with my Impulse! orange furniture."

TaxiWars display high energy and sensitivity, pride and ambition, and a punkiness that sets the band apart from the plush jazz scene, all thanks to Belgian saxophonist Robin Verheyen's punchy, melodic lines and Tom Barman's haunting lyrics. "The idea came to me four years ago, when I first met Robin," Barman says. "I knew he could deliver the goods: we've recorded together with Magnus. I wanted TaxiWars to be sharp, to the point, punky and trashy – much like the band Morphine. Long solos were no-go."

The singer gave the New York based saxophonist a few clues – "Think Art Blakey, Max Roach, Prince!" – and before long Verheyen had written over a dozen compositions. "I asked bassist Nicolas Thys and drummer Antoine Pierre to join us," says Verheyen. "Nicolas is one of the finest bassists in Belgium; he feels as comfortable playing jazz as he is playing rock, and he's lived in New York City for many years. Tom insisted on taking on a very young drummer, to give the band the pep and the fresh perspective that we were aiming for. Antoine has done just that. Within five minutes during the first rehearsal, we all felt an epiphany of sorts: this was not 'dEUS goes retro'. This was something very, very different."

Vocalist **Tom Barman** has been fronting the indie-band dEUS since 1989, selling over a million albums along the way. He directed the 2003 film *Any Way the Wind Blows*, and oversaw two acclaimed jazz compilations: *That's Blue + Painters Talking* (Blue Note, 2006) and *Living on Impulse* (Impulse!, 2012).

Saxophone player **Robin Verheyen** moved to New York nine years ago and has built a reputation as one of the great young talents in the world of jazz and classical music. He has released two albums with the Robin Verheyen NY Quartet, and has performed with such artists as Marc Copland, Ravi Coltrane, Narcissus Quartet, Gary Peacock, and Joey Baron.

Bassist **Nicolas Thys** was already a mainstay on the Belgian and Dutch jazz scenes before he moved to New York in 1999. He has toured and/or recorded with legends like Lee Konitz, Mal Waldron, Toots Thielemans and Zap Mama.

Drummer **Antoine Pierre** has been touring with Belgian guitar legend Philip Catherine and trumpet player Jean-Paul Estiévenart, and others. He moved to New York City in 2014 to study at the New York School of Jazz and Contemporary Music.