

# “THE SAXOPHONE IS AN INSTRUMENT, NOT A GENRE” – STEPHANIE SCHOISWOHL (SPECTRUM SAXOPHONE QUARTET)

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Spectrum Quartett (c) Spectrum Quartett

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The **SPECTRUM SAXOPHONQUARTETT** was formed in 2020 by **STEPHANIE SCHOISWOHL**, **FLORIAN BAUER**, **DANIEL DUNDUS** and **SEVERIN NEUBAUER**. It was selected in the New Music category for the funding program “The New Austrian Sound of Music (NASOM) 2023/24” of the BMEIA in cooperation with mica – music austria. On February 19, 2025, they will perform most of the works from their fine debut album “En dehors”, released by col legno, at the **impuls Festival** in Graz. Michael Franz Woels spoke to Stephanie Schoiswohl about emotionally charged backgammon evenings, the game of a hundred options and the theme of never giving up.

**Can you briefly describe how your ensemble, Spectrum Saxophone Quartet, came about?**

**Stephanie Schoiswohl:** It was a long-cherished wish of mine that came together during the corona pandemic in 2020. We all know each other from our long-standing collaboration on projects during our studies in Graz at the **KUG** and pursue similar musical ideas. This original chamber music construct of the saxophone quartet in terms of repertoire, apart from the solo literature with piano and orchestra, has historically been the classic workplace in the scene.

**You chose a French title for your album of contemporary Austrian compositions. How did that come about?**

**Stephanie Schoiswohl:** The term “En dehors” is often found in old French compositions, for example in the score of a saxophone quartet by Florent Schmitt. “En dehors” means stepping out as a soloist, stepping into the foreground. The saxophone had its roots in the Belgian-French homeland – so the title was also chosen in honor of its history. En dehors, meaning stepping outside and standing out, also refers to the deliberate selection of only Austrian composers.

**How did you make a selection? In my opinion, one of the most “turbulent” pieces with many changes of direction is “La Gammonaira” by Gerald Preinfalk. I assume the title is an artificial word?**

**Stephanie Schoiswohl:** I'll go through the pieces one by one. The 5-movement Saxophone Quartet by Friedrich Cerha was written in 1995 for the Vienna Saxophone Quartet. You can also find information in the [online booklet](#).

The piece has never really been professionally recorded in the present day and it was important to us to re-record this “first” Austrian new music piece for saxophone quartet with this variety of changing instrumentation of the saxophone line-up. It is stylistically similar to a string quartet, with individual voices that come to the fore from time to time.



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The selection of Olga Neuwirth is partly a result of the fact that all four of us were allowed to substitute at **Klangforum Wien** from time to time and that we came into contact with many new composers. We also got to know **Olga Neuwirth's** saxophone quartet during our studies and that's why it simply belongs on this album.

Ursula Reicher is a jazz composer with whom Florian Bauer and I also play in a big band. She composed the piece “Never” especially for us. It has a mystical, dark, circular motif and the compositional idea deals with the theme of never giving up.

## “THE RESULT IS A POWERFUL SONORITY, ESPECIALLY LIVE.”

Gerald Preinfalk was one of our teachers at the KUG. So it was only natural to ask him – who knows the saxophone and all of us better than anyone else – to compose a piece that was practically tailor-made for us. He composed this piece at a time in his life when he was taking a little time out, including at the Spanish finca “La Donaira”. As he loves playing backgammon, we also learned this art from him during joint projects. Those were often very volatile and emotionally charged evenings. This piece is therefore a direct dedication, a reminiscence of our backgammon evenings together and the artificial word in the title is a mixture of the finca and the board game. Incidentally, the subtitle is “The game of hundred options” and Gerald Preinfalk himself says that he often discards ideas very quickly and can be very erratic when composing.

In order to bridge the gap between atonal music and sound surfaces, and to close the circle of very well-known composers – Georg Friedrich Haas was once a student of Friedrich Cerha – the last work on the CD deals with the spectral music of Georg Friedrich Haas. It is a microtonal monumental work for saxophone that is very demanding to play. The result is a powerful sonority, especially live. We are of course familiar with his masterpieces for large ensemble, such as “in vain”. I think this saxophone quartet reflects this experience of the aura of a spectral piece of music very well in a small format.



Video: SPECTRUM Saxophonquartett

**There is a long history of the saxophone quartet, which blossomed in France and the USA in the 1920s and now flourishes all over the world. The styles are wide-ranging and the saxophone family has expanded over the centuries. Are there any saxophone quartets and saxophonists who have particularly inspired you?**

**Stephanie Schoiswohl:** The saxophone is a very young instrument, it was only patented in 1846. We have certainly been strongly influenced by our teachers, but we don't have any great role models in that sense. We find the repertoire of the Fukio Quartet or the **SIGNUM Saxophone Quartet**, for example, exciting. Of course, there are also many saxophone quartets in Austria, but we try to do our own contemporary thing and create and develop a new repertoire. The question is where we would fit into the classical concert scene if we only played old, classical repertoire in the style of Alfred Desenclos, for example. We look for our niches and try not to limit ourselves so much. We also look outside the saxophone scene for our inspiration. **Klangforum Wien**, which I have already mentioned, is of course also a source of inspiration, as they are excellent at dealing with contemporary music and we have learned a lot from playing in the ensemble.

For example, when recording the piece “Ondate” by **Olga Neuwirth**, we invited a colleague, the flautist Thomas Frey, to be the recording manager, as he is very familiar with her compositions. He also knows the peculiarities of wind instruments. In general, as a quartet we don't want to close ourselves off to the most diverse influences; the saxophone is an instrument, not a genre.

**When thinking of more experimental pieces you've come across recently, which one do you remember well?**

**Stephanie Schoiswohl:** Alberto Posadas, a Spanish composer, also experimented a lot with saxophone sounds. He changed the sounds – in collaboration with a saxophonist, for example, by using typical trumpet mutes. Or by trying to produce a very high and a very low tone at the same time without obtaining any additional intermediate tones in the multiple sound. There is also a cycle for saxophone quartet, from which the **Sigma Project** played a work at the **Suena-Festival** in Vienna last year. The Sigma Project also works a lot on contemporary repertoire development and we are pleased that we know one of the musicians personally.

Furthermore, I personally was with the **Ensemble Schallfeld** at the Klangspuren in Schwaz last season, for example, where the young composers also gave free rein to their creativity – we experimented with tubes, funnels and aluminum foil.

**It went quite quickly from the foundation to the debut album. Now, of course, you're hoping that Austrian composers will continue to expand your repertoire.**

**Stephanie Schoiswohl:** We'll keep at it and work together through our different stages of life. Among other things, we are hoping for more compositions by Austria's great composers, but we are also looking forward to many more compositions by instrumentalist friends.

**Thank you very much for the interview!**

Michael Franz Woels (with Elisabeth Kelvin)

### CONCERT INFO:

Wednesday, February 19, 2025, 2 p.m., as part of the **impuls Festival**

TiP . Theater im Palais, Leonhardstraße 19, 8010 Graz

The program includes works by Gerald Preinfalk, Yulan Yu, Friedrich Cerha, Olga Neuwirth and Georg Friedrich Haas

### → LINKS

Translated from the **German original** by Arianna Alfreds.

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