

## Biography of

## Saskia Laroo



In the 20th century, the state of the art of the trumpet has been formed in lion's shares by the achievements of jazz musicians. The concept of playing the trumpet was pushed up to a higher level than ever thought possible. Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and Don Cherry are but a few of the many trumpet players who have. They are male. Valaida Snow, Clara Bryant, Barbara Donald, Ingrid Jensen and Saskia Laroo form a short but important roster of female trumpet players who, despite the rarity of women in the field of jazz trumpet, will leave a distinct mark. Saskia Laroo, is a current feature on the face of 21st century trumpet artistry.

### Her Beginings

Saskia Laroo, coined in America by press and public as 'Lady Miles Davis of Europe' has been going strong for over three decades. Born in 1959 in Amsterdam, she grew up in Den IJp and went to high school in Zaandam. Her first playing experiences at age 8 were at Het Brass Band of Fanfare de Eendracht in her then hometown Den IJp. At 18 she attended the University of Amsterdam to study mathematics, albeit briefly, soon swayed by the challenge of a professional career in music. She studied trumpet with some of the best known artist / teachers of the day: at the Muziekpedagogische Academie of Alkmaar, the Sweelinck Conservatorium (with Boy Raaymakers) in Amsterdam and the Muziekpedagogische Academie of Hilversum (with Ack van Rooyen). However promising it sounds in retrospect, Saskia's was not a smooth beginning.

It was difficult for her to get her foot in the door: "A problem with getting gigs was that nobody wanted to play with somebody as unknown as me. The trumpet player is naturally the most important person in a band. He plays the "lead" and gives all "cues" for the other musicians. Often the rejection sounded as follows: you can't play a whole concert, you will get tired halfway because you aren't strong enough," according to Saskia. So, for a short time, she chose bass over trumpet as there were more requests for bass players for many gigs. "After starting to gig on bass, they put more faith in me and even began to accept me as a trumpeter as well."

By this period, Saskia had already begun booking herself.

### Saskia Takes Shape

By 1979 Saskia is a full-fledged professional, performing with dixieland bands and mainstream jazz combos. It was during this period that she had the privilege of frequently being called for work by Dutch tenor saxophonist Hans Dulfer.

By 1981 Saskia became a regular in his bands and also Rosa King's Upside-Down Band, which included in the line-up a young sax prodigy named Candy Dulfer. While in the formative years of her career, she'd also garnered much experience absorbing world music, namely, of Hispanic, Caribbean, Brazilian and African roots. Building on these influences, Saskia continued to expand her horizons.

In 1982 she formed her own Salsa Caliente Band; between 1986 and 1990 she led Caribbean Express; from 1990 till 1994 she performed with The Caribbean Colours.

Around 1994 Saskia felt she had found her own voice. While having gone solo for the first time in 1993, the following year this grew into the Saskia Laroo Band, featuring compositions from her debut CD "It's Like Jazz". In 1995, Laroo gave birth to two new groups: Salsa Bop - a Latin jazz quintet and Jazzkia - her straight-ahead jazz unit. In 2001 her collaboration with American pianist/vocalist Warren Byrd began and resulted in their organic 'Duo Laroo/Byrd'. Presently, besides barnstorming with her own of several groups, Saskia Laroo often appears as a special guest artist.

## The Shape of Saskia's Sound: The Musical Concept

Music over the past one hundred years has become a rich, colourful potluck in the banquet of the many, and musicians worldwide have flourished as its caterers. Jazz itself is such a kitchen, born of a plasma of creativity in peril, reared as a hunger to enthrall "the party people", and matured as food for the whole person in an uncertain existence. Saskia Laroo makes her way by cooking up new styles which blend bebop jazz, club, hip-hop, rap, world, and whatever else grooves, in a driving party mix. Her sound is often described as "nu jazz"; she herself has coined her sound as "body music". Her sound is borne of her broad musical palette. It's power may be in her down-to-earth perspective; "I want people to have a good time, to dance when I play. I don't just play for other musicians".



Laroo makes this magic with her favourite of her several units, the Saskia Laroo Band. Its members are often an international bunch who hail from other lands, are well-versed in many styles, and open to new sounds. Thus, her joy comes to life with this group: some tradition, lots of hipness, groove, ba-ad solos, bold rap vocals, and her mellifluous trumpet leading the way. With all, she freely cooks up the jam.

Yet, like many eclectic artists before her, there are challenges to mass acceptance innate to mixing jazz and more popular styles. Laroo loves the freedom to jump from jazz to groove and back... and back again. Though this predilection has been clear from her first release, "It's Like Jazz", some of her more purist jazz pals chide her for "flirting too much with pop...". Pop fans dig the pop elements but still see Saskia as a jazz artist. Ironically, the music critics' opinions seem to differ little from the fans. Saskia's first concern is with reaching everybody, the audience as well as the critics. Her math ultimately weighs having a solid fan base over critical acclaim, "I think the reason why it's all going okay is because I play for the fun of all, including mine."

### Some Other Tidbits...

Multifaceted, Saskia has not only her celebrated penchant for eclecticism, her mathematics, or her hot looks, but also her multi-instrumentalism. Aforementioned is her skills as a bassist, having studied its classical technique for some time prior to playing jazz gigs on the instrument in her early career. She also includes bass guitar as part of the artillery. Even earlier, during 1966-1971, she studied alto and soprano recorder, from 1967 studied and played cornet (pocket trumpet) in the Fanfare de Eendracht of Den IJp. Soon she'd study cello from 1971-1974 and added on a year of guitar lessons. At the age of 27, Saskia began to sing and study the alto saxophone. She then tacked on a knowledge of piano and organ. She currently specializes on trumpet.

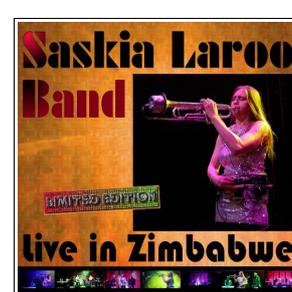
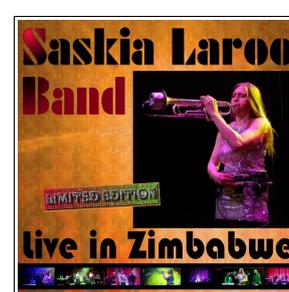
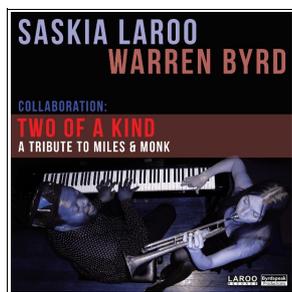
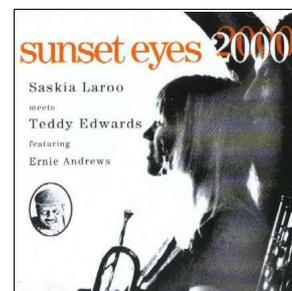
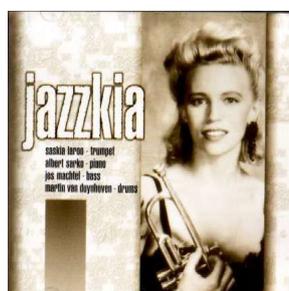
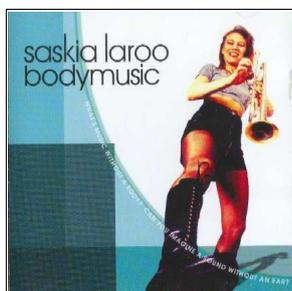
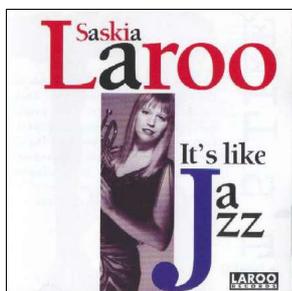
### Saskia's Edifice: The Laroo Label

At the start of her illustrious career, the idea of being a recording artist eluded Saskia, but through an uncanny series of events, she is today the owner of Laroo Records and has produced and co-produced five albums on CD (see discography). The first of these events involves a bodacious barter between her and employees from the pressing department of a record label. In 1992, they offered her a one thousand CD pressing instead of money as exchange for her performance. Seeing this as a good opportunity, she seized it, in faith of future masters to be pressed. At the time, there were already offers from various major and indie labels interested in signing her. Yet, on the advice of knowledgeable friends, she'd explore releasing her recordings on her own label. Today, she has distribution and licensing worldwide. A short list would include the USA, Canada, Japan, South Africa, and Russia.

Subsequently, Saskia formed her prime musical vehicle The Laroo Colour, the band which would later be renamed The Saskia Laroo Band in 1994. Then she released her debut CD, "**It's Like Jazz**". This album and her 1998 release, "Body Music" are Laroo's take on acid jazz. Incorporating some of Miles Davis' ideas from his final recording "Doo-Bop", the nine tracks on "It's Like Jazz" feature swingin' beats, funky horns, jivey rap, and fiery solos. The later release, "**Body Music**", along with the gems from the first CD, explores combining the newest dance styles with jazz, such as drum'n'bass, big beat, and other hip grooves.

Around 1997, Saskia began her regular Sunday night tenure at one of Amsterdam's most famous jazz clubs, jazz café Alto. Out of this she culled a rhythm section of her favourite jazz musicians, then produced her first straight-ahead jazz CD, "**Jazzkia**", a homage, once again, to Miles Davis in one of his earlier periods, the 1950's and early 1960's. Though her third release steps in this purist jazz style, she'd not forsaken her joy of latter-day dance grooves.

Saskia's meeting the legendary Teddy Edwards, tenor saxophonist in 1980 led to a later collaboration, and a fourth Laroo release, "**Sunset Eyes 2000**". The North Sea Jazz Festival 1997 was the scene of their serendipitous re-acquaintance. In the summer 1998, Saskia travelled to visit Edwards in the USA. Some time later, after listening to her "Jazzkia" demo from a November 1998 session, he shared his approval and "dug the concept". Soon their album collaboration was born. In the words of James D. Armstrong from Jazz Now magazine, "[Sunset Eyes 2000 is] a special contribution to the jazz tradition". In 2008 she released another funk jazz album "Really Jazzy" and in 2011 an acoustic jazz duo album with American pianist vocalist Warren Byrd "Two of a Kind, a tribute to Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk. In 2014 she released her first DVD "Live in Zimbabwe", followed by a CD album of the same concert, held in 2013.



## Discography

It's Like Jazz (SL 9401, 1994)  
 Bodymusic (SL9801, 1998)  
 Jazzkia (SL9901, 1999)  
 Sunset Eyes 2000 (SL9902, 1999)  
 Really Jazzy (SL0801, 2008)  
 Two of a Kind (SL1101, 2011)  
 Live in Zimbabwe (DVD, SL1401, 2014)  
 Live in Zimbabwe (CD, SL1402, 2014)



## Her Independent Success: Self-made Saskia

The White Russian magazine Jazz Quadrat gave in 2004 an interview with Saskia the following subtitle: self-made Saskia?

What are the ingredients of self-made Saskia Laroo?

Support: "My parents have always supported me since my childhood, and that gave me enough fuel to be able to fight for what I wanted".

Discipline: "I try to live as healthy as possible: healthy food, enough sleep and I maintain my physical condition. Trumpet playing is like top sport, you need a lot of free time and to be in good physical shape".

Curiosity: "I find travelling very interesting, especially if it gets me in touch with local culture and if I can accordingly integrate that atmosphere in the music".

Endless possibilities: "In mathematics the term 'infinity' is being seen as an element to work with. To improvise and let your mind create music under specific circumstances I find very inspiring. For me it's a sort of natural high to improvise due to the feeling that there exist infinite possibilities and freedom to express."

Experiment: "I never found it difficult to invent something new for myself because I like experimenting. I like to mix things that seem impossible to mix."

Experience: "I feel enormously privileged that I have been able to experience so many scenes and cultures and that I can use all those impressions in my music. To be able to touch many listeners and even to make real cross-over."

## Festivals and concerts

Aruba, Austria, Bangla Desh, Belgium, Bonaire, Brazil (Fests Olinda, Recife, Sampa), Bulgaria (Sofia Jazz Festival), China, Colombia (Bogota Teatro Jazz Festival), Croatia, Curacao, Czech Republic (Autumn Jazz Festival Prague), Estonia, St. Eustachius, France, Germany (Burghausen Jazzwoche), India (Yatra & Chivas & Utsav Jazz Festival), Indonesia (Bali & Jakarta Jazz Festival), Italy, Japan (Sunset Festival), Kuwait (Kuwait Jazzfest), Latvia, Lebanon (Hamra Festival), Lithuania (Mama Jazz Festival), Luxembourg, St. Maarten, Malta, Moldavia (Ethno Jazzfest), Nepal, the Netherlands (North Sea Jazz Festival), Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Senegal (Dakar Jazzfest), Singapore (Mosaic Festival), Slovakia, Slovenia (Lent Festival), South Africa (Capetown Jazzfestival), South Korea (Mega Dance Festival), Spain, Surinam (Paramaribo Jazz Festival), Switzerland (Montreux Jazz Festival), Taiwan (Holland Days, Taichung Jazzfest), Thailand (Bangkok Fest), Turkey, Ukraine (Koktebel Jazz Festival), the USA (Atlanta & Hartford Jazzfest; Nedfest, CO; Sunset Boulevard Festival, LA, CA), White Russia, Zimbabwe.

### **Performed with:**

Jazz and popmusicians: Warren Byrd, George Coleman, Steve Davis, Hans Dulfer, Teddy Edwards, Essiet Essiet, Roy Hargrove, Slide Hampton, Billy Higgins, Gene Jackson, Frank Lacey, Wynton Marsalis, Butch Morris, David Murray, Jean Toots Thielemans, Yellow Jackets, George Benson, Candy Dulfer, Rosa King, Kool Ace, Blixx, Marcus Miller, Maceo Parker, Courtney Pine, Harvie S etc.

Dance: 100% Isis, Cinema Royale, Franky D, Dimitri, Ken Ishi, Maestro, Ronald Molendijk etc.

World music: Jesus Alemany & Sierra Maestra, Larry Harlow, Nicky Marrero, Hugh Masekela etc.

### **Press attention / CD critics**

Some fools say jazz is also a monolith. Not as long as there are vibrant energizers like Laroo's crew playing. Her stage was small scale, but her performance was large. It was exactly the kind of thing that keeps jazz alive. Philip Woolever for AllAboutJazz, Nov 18, 2014

Laroo plays the stars out of the heavens, while her grooving band trundles on, fiercely propulsive. It is funk, jazz-dance and hip-hop in one. Stan Rijven for Dutch national newspaper Trouw Oct 17, 2014

"She plays the trumpet with pleasant easyness" (Maartje den Breejen, Het Parool, 31 March 2008)

"With Really Jazzy Saskia accomplishes integration of different musical styles" (Angelique van Os, Jazz Nu, 2008)

"One of the few women trumpet stylists in the world, Laroo from the Netherlands has created her own edgy combination of jazz with rap and hiphop" (Audrey Perera, the Straits Times, 11 Mar 2008)

"It's a really nice CD. Saskia Laroo has a sound I associate with the sound of my big love, Miles Davis, but in her own style, ofcourse. Really splendid!" (Wim Reede from jazznet.com, on Saskia Laroo's It's Like Jazz, december 2005)

"They're riding on a heatwave." (Jim Santella, in Jazz Improv. oktober 2005)

"Horn player Saskia Laroo is a Jazz Goddess." (India Blue, in The Hartford Advocate. March 2000)

"Saskia mixes styles of music and culture as if they had always meant to be together (J. Lyon Layden, in Creative Loafing. February 2001)

"Her harmon mute playing on Blackbird managed to suggest [Miles] Davis without attempting to imitate him." (Don Heckman, in LA Times. December, 2000)

"Her tasteful solos have their subtle surprises and she is obvious an expert improviser." (Scott Yanow, in LA Jazz Weekly. July, 2000)

"Her muted trumpet may remind you of Miles, but the style and improv are strictly that of a rising star in the jazz world." (Arthur C. Bourassa, in Jazz Now. November, 1999)

