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Sokal & Puschnig VOICES OF TIME

Harry Sokal | saxophone

Wolfgang Puschnig | saxophone, flute

Gerald Veasley | bass

Alex Deutsch | drums

Yes, the lord works in mysterious ways. He, or at least the holy authority in charge of jazz matters, could have made this recording of Harry Sokal's und Wolfgang Puschnig's band project happen 30 years ago.

After all, the two first met in 1975, one year after Puschnig first moved from Klagenfurt to Vienna, where Sokal had been born and raised. Soon after, they began working side by side in fusion bands like "ostinato", Puschnig and Sokal played together in countless studio jobs from Falco on down, and of course they became famous as the celebrated soloists of the mother of all big bands the "Vienna Art Orchestra", which was probably Europe's most brilliant big band in the early 80's. In 1983, this up-and-coming saxophone duo came close to forming an ensemble.

In New York, they recorded an LP with Mike Richmond and Wolfgang Reisinger (with whom Puschnig would later make a sensation in the Air Mail Quartet). True, it took 19 years for the album to be released: it finally reached the public in 2002 as "red-white-red & spangled" in the "Austrian Jazzart" series. And it not only awakens memories but also brought back to mind an old idea. It seemed all the more urgent to get Austria's most internationally famous saxophonists together in a formation since Sokal and Puschnig were considered polar opposites in the 80s: the one, a technically brilliant changes player called the "American", who thanks to his advanced melodic and harmonic understanding could lay notes on top of the chords "like a bird flying through four different seasons"; the other, deeply immersed in the Slavic substrate of his Carinthian homeland, a choreographer of elegiac, deeply moving impressionistic portraits, an inspiring singer without words, recognizable from his very first expressive notes.

As musicians grow older, people like to talk about their increasing maturity of expression, of the stories that they can tell through their instruments now that life has given them these experiences. No doubt, Puschnig and Sokal now also need fewer notes to attain the essence of their musical expression.

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Instead of bombarding the world ostentatiously with virtuosic energy, they now focus on the expression that fills each single note with meaning.

Indeed, puschnig and sokal have experienced much, and both of them have also enjoyed successful solo careers. Puschnig released "traces" in 2001, which marked his late due debut with another of his long-time partners, pianist uli scherer. In "39 steps" (named after the alfred hitchcock film) he evokes the time when he and the vocalist linda sharrock formed a magnificent, inseparable pair.

"Cross culture" reflects the process of puschnig's self-discovery as a musical cosmopolitan with strong local roots, for whom carinthian folk songs and korean shamanistic music or philadelphia funk are not at all incompatible. The biographical references seem even more personal in the pieces "poesie" and "impermanence", written under the impact of the death of a close friend and grandmother. They express the impermanence of all existence in moving declarations of love that radiate warmth and consolation. Harry sokal, on the other hand, indulges in a moment of marvelous euphoria at the sight of fish doing the spawning dance at the bottom of a river ("barbentänze"). "Juggle in" in 7/4 time dates back to the 80's and reminds us of the enthusiasm that jan garbarek and keith jarrett once inspired. In the young saxophonist, who named the legendary "belonging"-lp as his favorite album.

Stories, written by life. Despite all the associations, "voices of time" is not mere nostalgia. Rhythm masters gerald veasley and jojo mayer see to that: veasley has been a master of his groove ever since his days in joe zawinul's "syndicate", and, under the name "dr. Nerve", mayer is considered an expert in hand-made break-beats: a human drum-computer. Harry sokal and wolfgang puschnig are living proof that youngsters do not have a monopoly on making forceful music. Almost 30 years after their first meeting, their musical dialog combines highly empathetic quality with esthetic independence. "Voices of time": two musicians tell about life, without any pretenses, trusting in each other's ability to understand. A life in which they have found themselves but never lost their sense of awe.