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SO WEISS

Happiness For A Moment

Kristiina Tuomi: voice
Susanne Folk: sax, clarinet, voice
Roland Fidezius: double bass
& Special Guests:
Tino Derado: accordion
Ketan Bhatti: drums & percussion

SO WEISS - Happiness For A Moment

Moments of happiness are fleeting: Disillusionment, or the threat of impending routine often lies lurking in even the most promising of beginnings. It is exactly this transience of beautiful experiences that makes them so precious – and their absence so painful. For times like these, Berlin's jazz-pop trio "So Weiss" (So White) has found skeptical hope, wistful memories, and the hard-earned self-assurance of musical analogies that go straight to the heart.

Reduced to vocals (Kristiina Tuomi), clarinet/saxophone (Susanne Folk), and contrabass (Roland Fidezius) for the most part, So Weiss's melodic songs have much more in common with Celtic ballads, French chansons or romantic poems set to classical music than with Broadway classics. Composer and arranger Susanne Folk nevertheless sees herself as being influenced by American songwriting. It wasn't the first half of the 20th century that was formative for this German-American however, but much more the last decade, with musicians like Tori Amos, Paula Cole and Alanis Morissette all proving with their hits that emotionality and catchy appeal can indeed harmonize quite well.

On So Weiss's second album, Happiness For A Moment (the debut Hunter/Dancer was also released by Traumton in 2006), the existential crises portrayed – („I've Got It All“, „Drifting Off“), betrayals of trust („After All This“) and communication breakdowns („Silent“) – don't automatically rule out a light-footed feel and rhythm.

All these songs are based on the golden rules for sophisticated pop songs, songs that – and this is the constant indicator here – function especially well with a minimal cast. Besides a feeling for diversified arrangements, this naturally requires aptly accomplished musicians; in the case of So Weiss we are talking about a band schooled in jazz, a band whose members play with numerous internationally performing formations (Kenosha Kid, Odd Shot, and Tuomi, among others), and who, in the course of their still young careers, received valuable lessons from the likes of such luminaries as Maria Schneider, Steve Coleman, Frank Möbus, Greg Osby and Kenny Wheeler. Each individual voice gets its own space in every one of the thirteen songs on Happiness For A Moment: they react to and compliment each other, at times in unison, or carefully rounded out by additional instruments (accordion – Tino Derado, percussion – Ketan Bhatti) – always with the transparency the respective song needs.

Unlike the forerunner album, Hunter/Dancer, this time Susanne Folk's own lyrics outnumber the lyrical adaptations. Still, five adaptations of English (Ben Johnson, Sir Thomas Wyatt, John Keats), Irish (W.B. Yeats), and American (Robert Frost) poets make it clear that Susanne Folk still has much inspiration to thank the old poetry anthologies for, even if she expresses this much differently in her music as she does with her own lyrics. While Yeats' „White Birds“ and Frost's „My November Guest“ are based on running melodies, and very much live from the atmosphere (including contrabass-generated gull cries and madrigal-like choruses), Susanne Folk uses the effective elements of dramatic pop songs in her ballad trilogy towards the middle of the album. The title song consists of one verse that asks the same question, three times in varying intensity, if the happiness felt at the moment is just a temporary feeling or if everything could turn out quite differently in the long run.

Kristiina Tuomi's vocals come into their own here, showing emotional facets that range from a first fragile self-assuredness to an incredible questioning that escalates to downright pleading.

„Silent“ then astounds us with abrupt tempo and arrangement changes (the harmonic accordion and clarinet intro makes an instantaneous change into vocals and bass) appropriately expressing the protagonist's mood swings when she doesn't know how to interpret her lover's reticence. And „The End Of Me“ marks the progression of a forsaken lover's feelings in three different melodic parts: The uncomprehending accusations („I guess you didn't realize that you were half of me“) are followed by a wistful retrospect that finally ends up with the narrator offering the leftover half to her ex-partner because she doesn't know what to do with it - „You can take it all with you when you go away“ - a deeply sad but tender to the last good-bye refrain that could have fit well on Sting's Soul Cages Album. Contrary to what the titles of bestselling books on relationships claim, it is often members of both sex who „love too much“, and with „Happiness For a Moment“, So Weiss have created a work full of gripping intensity and cathartic power with a long-term effect you can depend on.

Back-catalog: Hunter/Dancer (Traumton 2006)

web: <http://www.traumton.de/label/artists/?id=soweiss&lang=de>
<http://www.soweiss.de>
<http://www.myspace.com/soweiss>

Press:

"What the trio So Weiss from Berlin delivers with its second CD "Happiness for a Moment" definitely has international referential character in the area of singing/songwriting-orientated pop-jazz. A genre cannot be better infused with originality, style sureness and ease... The musical quality of So Weiss is one and indivisible in its wonderfully unobtrusive magnitude and dignity; that is probably why its radiance shines so bright, so clear, so white."

Jazzpodium, Volker Doberstein, 10/2008

„...With their second CD-album "Happiness for a Moment" the trio from Berlin justifies their ranking in the upper echelons of modern pop-orientated jazz. Packing with them loads of emotional ammo, "So Weiss" is convincing across the board..."

www.monstersandcritics.de, Rainer Molz, 10/2008

„...This poetic songwriter-album, often suggestive of chamber music with room for improvisation and soundscapes, creates densely-branched pictures for the mind –and moments of happiness for the ear.“

Jazzthetik, 10/2008

„...its pieces are suffused with a singular beauty that is borne by the sensitive interplay of voice, clarinet/saxophone and double bass –and occasionally embellished by accordion and percussion.... Sung by Kristiina Tuomi, sorrow is transformed into a cathartic energy that might be ointment for any no-matter-how oppressed soul..."

NOTES, 11/2008

„...Kristiina Tuomi's pleasant velvety voice, unfailing even in higher ranges, wanders through poetic labyrinths..."

Jazzthing 10/2008