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LC 05597

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Release September 25, 2009

Thärichens Tentett Farewell Songs

Michael Schiefel: vocals

Sven Klammer: trumpet, flugelhorn

Jan von Klewitz: alto sax, soprano sax, clarinet

Andreas Spannagel: tenor sax, flute

Nikolaus Leistle: baritone sax, bass clarinet

Sören Fischer: trombone

Kai Brückner: guitars

Johannes Gunkel: bass

Kai Schönburg: drums

Nicolai Thärichen: piano, composition

Thärichens Tentett - Farewell Songs

A short look back to Germany in the year 2001: More and more jazz musicians are moving to the capital, they say a new sound is being born there, easy-going, playful, excentric. Sceptics gripe about the Berlin hype, but with the passing of time, the impact of this development can no longer be denied. A new way of playing jazz is emerging, one that declares originality to be its highest goal without rebelling against tradition; one that likes pop as well as chamber music, big band swing just as much as Frank Zappa; and one that is not content to simply tear down the walls between musical genres, but forms its own style from this newly found freedom. Accordingly, the musicians who are calling the shots are not individual virtuoso soloists but improvising composers. Leading the pack - pianist Nicolai Thärichen, who released "Lady Moon" in 2001, his tentet's first CD.

A crazy project: Thärichen takes poems, very unjazzy ones, by Lord Byron, Thomas Hardy, and Ronald D. Laing. He brings together some of the best jazz musicians in Berlin and forms a sound with them that he bends and kneads until the poems become dancing sculptures that can rise up to become a thundering big band, only to slim down elegantly in the next moment to become chamber musical Giacometti figurines. And he tops the whole thing with Michael Schiefel's voice, androgynous, sensuous, wired, virtuoso, in a nutshell: totally manic, at least when he's on stage scating it up and stealing the limelight.

Thärichen, 31 at the time, managed to do what most artists only accomplish once in a lifetime: He found a primary idea, a master plan for an entire artistic career. This he formed consequently in the following years, with the albums "The Thin Edge" (2003) and "Grateful" (2005). His tentet remained virtually unchanged. Thärichen remained true to his favorite poets, above all to Ronald D. Laing, cofounder of the anti-psychiatry movement and merciless sarcast. Other poets, like Dorothy Parker, followed. And the audience is getting more enthusiastic from year to year, from album to album. The prominent German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung praised Thärichen's Tentet as "the most felicitous compositions, the most polished arrangements, and the most humorous presentation of all larger German jazz groups". And the major Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung said about vocalist Michael Schiefel: "Germany has perhaps never had such a jazz singer."

So now, ten years after the inception of the band, eight years after the debut, album number four. And what do we read in the title? "Farewell Songs"! Is Thärichen saying good-bye? The title seems too melancholy to fit the band's spirit. Hopefully, the thirty-nine-year-old isn't going through a midlife crisis already?

There is no need to worry, Nicolai Thärichen und his tentet are doing just fine. Musicians and songs alike are sparkling with ideas. The album starts out full speed ahead with Thärichens virtuoso cover-arrangement of AC/DC's "Up to my neck in you." And yet, almost every song is about saying goodbye. "Farewell Songs" is Thärichen's most personal album to date; the critical moments in life he has recently experienced have found their way into his music. The threepart "Farewell Suite" is dedicated to his father, who passed a short time ago - composer, author, and solo timpanist of many years with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Werner Thärichen (1921-2008). But how do you put a farewell to your father into music? Nicolai Thärichen's musical mourning covers an entire spectrum of feelings: The suite strides from grief and pain ("Waltz for my Father") to a questioning halt and introspection ("Strange Bells"), and finds in the song "If" a conciliatory end with Robert Creeley's succinct lines: "...you've had the world, such as you got. / There's nothing more, there never was." Thärichen achieves a new level of compositional maturity with this suite. His tentet makes grief sound more like a process than a condition. While two great soloists of his band - trumpeter Sven Klammer and flutist Andreas Spannagel - pursue lyrical introspection in the sounds of their solos, the band starts to cook, and sadness turns into anger and aggression. Here, loss also means to confront your own loss of control.

Farewell à la Thärichen is not, however, necessarily about mourning. In "On being a woman," composed on a poem by Dorothy Parker, the tentet mockingly muses about the eternal difficulty of having to decide between two choices. When I am in Rome, I want to go home; when I am at home, I want to go to Rome. Michael Schiefel rises to the occasion with flying colors: he cuts loose with a scat improvisation, not a conventional jazzy one, but with the voice of an overblown opera singer. His vibrato drips with campy pathos, makes you feel like you are in a Bohemian Rhapsody. And as if all this was not whacky enough already, the band members start beatboxing the rhythm. Not like hip-hoppers, boom-cha-boom, but with extremely strange syllables. What's that? Are they really singing "Bumm da-ga-disch uh-uh-dicke Backe"? Saying goodbye with Thärichens Tentett is exalted and scurrile, and actually can be lots of fun. Especially when Ronald D. Laing's acerbity gets its turn („Unadored“). If your partner treats you like dirt, why not leave him or her with words such as: "It's none to soon / for a new spittoon / and something else to shit in"? Add a funky 7/4 groove, and off you go, slamming the door in a dancing step.

Quite different is the peacefully flowing ballad „This Time“: Here it really is all about love, eventually. For once even a happy one, and unexpectedly so. Some feelings, and this is also a theme of this very personal record, can only be understood with time.

The Farewell Songs by Thärichens Tentett sound as worldly-wise as they do profound, are both deadly serious and completely far-out. They are about losing and finding - and about the fact that you seldom get one without the other.

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Photo & Info Download: <http://www.traumton.de/label/releases/?id=179&lang=en&what=info>

Back-catalog: 2006 DVD „Live at A-Trane Berlin“ (Minor Music 8011227)
2005 CD „Grateful“ (Minor Music 801122)
2003 CD „The thin edge“ (Minor Music 801105)
2001 CD „Lady Moon“ (Minor Music 801094)