

TRAUMTON Records

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Frederik Köster / Sebastian Sternal
CANADA

Frederik Köster: flugelhorn
Sebastian Sternal: piano

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Frederik Köster / Sebastian Sternal - CANADA

Both are among the most distinguished musicians and composers of the current German jazz scene, have been awarded multiple prizes (for example the Jazz-Echo) and have been playing together in various formations for 10 years. Never before though, could they be heard together in such an intimate setting as on their first duo-album Canada. Their mostly original compositions, which were - with two exceptions - written specifically for this album, and even more so their subtle, often lyrical, sometimes also energetic interplay are unmistakably influenced by the recording location: Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada.

The initiator of this chamber-musically sensitive production was an acquaintance of Frederik Köster's. "Thilo Schaller is a professor for audio engineering at the University of Lethbridge, not far from Calgary. He had invited us, to record something with him," the trumpeter tells. "So we were there for ten days and in the meantime explored the surrounding country." Köster (*14.10.'77) and Sternal (*2.10.'83) had already been manifested Canada fans. Sternal had written the piece „Calgary“ for the second album of his Symphonic Society, which was released last spring. More recent titles, like "Into The Wild" or the comparatively erratic piece "Hunting", can be heard as pleasant anticipation of the trip and spontaneous transformation of the impressions on-site turned to music. "Of course we already had the country in mind while composing," Sternal says, "and then the atmosphere there strongly influenced the direction the arrangements and improvisational parts of the pieces went in." In addition to the recordings, the trip was a real adventure for the two friends. "In the Waterton Lakes National Park in the Canadian part of the Rocky Mountains we saw bears and swam in mountain lakes," Sebastian Sternal exclaims mightily impressed.

One would maybe expect a more edged sound, given the rough mountainous landscapes. However, much more strongly than the jagged Canadian Rockies, the play of colors of the woods and far views over grasslands seem to have inspired the pieces; instead of the usual urban bustle a general calmness resonates in many pieces.

The melodies change from harmonic phrases to delicate abstractions; Köster varies the sound of his flugelhorn from creamy to onomatopoeic, while Sternal selectively flashes up his dexterity, without ever surrendering his grounding completely. At times rather contemplative, at others with emphasis, the music always exhibits the original signatures of the two artists from Cologne and Mainz.

“Since we were already in Canada now, we wanted to reference two of our favorite composers on this record,” Frederik Köster explains about the two cover titles, namely Kenny Wheeler’s “For Jan” and Joni Mitchell’s “A Case Of You”. Not only trumpeter Frederik Köster was lastingly inspired by Wheeler. He even visited him in London shortly before his death. But also the pianist Sternal is thrilled by Wheeler and calls this grandmaster of ulterior suspenseful melancholy “a huge influence”. Almost anybody who values personal poetic songs with a musical vision can agree on Joni Mitchell. Her birthplace Fort MacLeod is close to Lethbridge. “Of course we drove there, in anticipation of a museum or something of that sort,” Sebastian Sternal recounts. Instead they found “a town without the slightest indication or reference. It was like in a bizarre movie. We had to ask our way, met a librarian in the local library who could indeed remember Joni’s parents, but referred us to the town theatre. Also there nobody could help us and we were sent to an old craft glazier named Gerry Eversole. He had actually knew Joni, had studied with her at the art school in Calgary and had funny stories to tell. For example, that she had seen herself much more as a painter than as a musician in the beginning.”

Of course such experiences have a formative influence on the recording sessions, Köster and Sternal realize retrospectively. “We are convinced, that it turned out to be such an atmospherically intense album precisely for that reason,” Frederik Köster says, and Sebastian Sternal adds with a smile: “In a way Canada is a ‘concept album’ in the classic sense: a homogenous record, which can be unerringly pulled from the shelf to suit a certain mood.” The expressive power of these two musician-personalities ensures that the range from cautiously shimmering to trenchantly beaming sounds develops its own aura and irresistible intensity.

*„A very special music flowing from two very special musicians.
I love Frederik’s sound, I love the way he keeps control of his instrument
without loosing magic and poetry. Sebastian is the perfect partner,
the one everybody would like to play with. A pianist for
whom every note counts and his dialogue with
Frederik is pure beauty.“*
Enrico Rava

Links:

<http://www.frederikkoester.de>

<http://www.sebastiansternal.de>