

Jacaranda - an african tree and the music of this world

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Perhaps the best way of approaching the "Jacaranda" ensemble and their music is not to expect music - or at least music in the usual, traditional sense. Rather one should prepare oneself for a reflection in sound of one's own inner resonances and moods, immersing oneself in "the sounds of nature becoming music".

Music is and always has been expression: expression of both universal and very personal feelings, of moods, but also of course of the conscious artistic process, working on, in and with the musical material. The one can never suffice without the other, and this remains true from age to age and from culture to culture. It is only the particular types of music, their sounds, rhythms, musical forms and formulations, the manner of ensemble playing, as well as their purpose, which are bound up with specific times and places.

Whether one thinks of the cult music of bygone ages; modern music secular or sacred; entertainment, the troubadours and dancing; the musical rhetoric of the baroque; the extravagance of the romantics or the ingenious theory-based structures of new music; the drum- defined dances and songs of the African continent; the music of Asia and the Middle- East, India or Australia: all of them are in the end simply giving expression to human sensibilities in relation to their specific worlds. Pragmatism is also involved in various ways: notes and sounds are means of communication and information serving the most diverse purposes and functions. The calls of shepherds or the whistling of the inhabitants of La Gomera are just as much examples of it as the martial music which attends acts of war, or the psychological use of "programme" music and modern advertising. The meditations of Zen buddhism, the magical cultic immersions of Australian aborigines, or the ecstatic dances between temple and medaeval processions (St. Vitus' Dance) - notes and sounds simply support and enhance the release of something rooted deep in human nature.

Today we have a view of the whole which was denied to previous generations, an entire

world of soundmaking, of music. And yet we are still a very long way from having a "harmonia mundi", or a world music. For that we need a focus which does not merely

make a disjointed sequence of individual segments, reproducing them in an acoustical

media show, but one with a genuine feeling for this cosmos which can bring it together.

"Jacaranda" is the name of a group which is trying to turn this dream into a reality. The

name of an African tree (whose linguistic meaning nobody has yet been able to decipher) also stands for a German instrumental ensemble which successfully uses alphorns, didgeridoos, clarinets, saxophones, bassoons, flutes, marimba, xylophone, congas, drums and timpani to turn the literal meaning of music on its head. The ensemble's musicians simply lift the body of music out of the gravity of written form and content with which people are always trying to clothe it, using

their instruments to serve a world-music in which there is nothing which cannot or should not exist. At any rate the five musicians, all of whom are members of the Brandenburg Symphony Orchestra, are building a musical world edifice which neither needs nor indeed permits stylistic definition. And if here or there one thinks one has identified the musicological source of a piece, then the next sequence may lead one to quite different impressions.

This is not randomness, but rather intentional and methodic. The method is not gratuitous but instead one which derives from a lively approach to the intercultural impressions which the musicians gather on their journeys around the world, and from the sounds of their instruments in space, whose sound personalities are fused into an individual musical language which can surely claim to be a small piece of world music.

Of course Jacaranda also lets notes form motifs, motifs form melodies, happy or full of longing, cheerfully brisk or dreamy, impulsive or sharply accentuated. There are love songs and fanfares, ecstatic dances and devotional meditations, embedded in a tapestry of drum sounds, vividly coloured and overflowing with inventive ornamentation while resting on the rich bass of the alphorns. Hearing, one is drawn into a third musical dimension, where there are no styles, but simply expression. The titles reflect this. "Dervish" for example, where energetic oriental improvisations on the soprano saxophone (which incidentally one could take for a completely different instrument, something between a clarion and a Turkish oboe) is placed over rhythmic cymbal, accompanied by alphorn. Or "Colour of Earth", which fuses the "incomprehensible" snorting and roaring of the Australian didgeridoo with the radiant stability of African rhythms on marimba and congas, over the sound of the alphorn, the yearning broad melodies of the saxophone sending them out into the skies of the globe. "Imagination" leads one into meditative soundscapes in which the metallic resonances of tam-tam, bells and cymbals large and small become finely chiselled reliefs, while in the furious rhythmic ecstasy of "Dance with Fire" the saxophone explodes into jazz breaks together with the marimba. The pieces are given their instrumental polish in a cooperative compositional process with the members of the group, and are powerfully suggestive.

A musical esperanto? Yes, because the five musicians of "Jacaranda" achieve the impossible in uniting the devotees of the most diverse musical genres under the crown of this one tree. The fascination of their music reaches out to old and young, attracting the classically-trained and the jazz-tuned ear alike, reconciling devotees of rock with lovers of folk music. Feelings, moods, states of experience are what is being addressed here, and these are timeless. Therefore this esperanto is not an artificial language but perhaps rather the rediscovery of a primaeval universe through the means of music.

"Jacaranda" will certainly not disappoint any listener with his own private musical agenda, but will equally certainly add something extra too. This may be a reason for the success of the ensemble, which was founded in 1997 and achieved international notice surprisingly quickly. But the prophet is never recognised in his own country, and such was the case with "Jacaranda", which represented Brandenburg at the "Grand Performances Festival 2000" in Los Angeles, in Austria, and displayed the cosmopolitan flair of its music when invited by the Federal German President to play at his Christmas concert in 2002. But they gave their West German premiere only recently, in Bad Windsheim in Franconia, and future concert plans will take the ensemble abroad once more. Tours of Italy, Switzerland, Austria, as well as America and Hong Kong are all in planning, to be realised as and when the orchestral schedule allows. Germany must take care not to be left behind.