

Le Pot: She – Hera – Zade

On the trilogy *She, Hera, Zade* of the Jazz Quartet *Le Pot*

The band *Le Pot* – comprised of Manuel Mengis on the trumpet, Hans-Peter Pfammatter on piano, synths and Moog, Manuel Troller on the guitar, and Lionel Friedli on percussion – has produced a listening experience of extraordinary caliber with its series *She-Hera-Zade*, produced by the Swiss label Everest Records.

This trilogy narrates no convoluted story drawn from the Arabian Nights and ending happily ever after. It is a journey into the future. That is, into a time that lies in darkness, a time that we can glimpse only in fragmentary moments of clairvoyance. The band becomes an instrument for divining the fifth dimension. This music, whether referred to as instant composing, avant-improvisation, or simply composition in time, often recalls industrial or dark industrial soundscapes, a network of ambient elements that suggest danger looming. A sonic image gradually takes shape in the form of a triptych, circling around a bright clearing though cloaked in darkness.

In 2016, the band completed the trilogy by releasing *Zade*, a surprisingly minimalistic album of purely acoustical works. The eight tracks of *Zade* pick up where the CD *Hera* left off. This second album of the trilogy, recorded in 2014 in the fortified church of Raron, included treatments of classical works such as the "Requiem Aeternam" from Benjamin Britten's War Requiem. While *Hera*, released in 2015, worked with melodious lines, colors, and jazzy beats, the last album of the series, *Zade*, drives the vocabulary of whirring, clanging, zinging and booming to its radical conclusion. The trilogy's finale becomes a genuine swan song, an end game. The band exercises restraint in introducing instrumental interventions. A great deal of open space thus emerges. And unmeasurable time. Time expands and contracts with repetition of the piano tone that tolls like an admonition in the piece "Open out." The trumpet likewise sounds a lonely reminder, while the drums and guitar maintain the continuity of the sound fabric with just a few very precise bits and bobs following long pauses. All this produces a sound experience that is like nothing so much as an eavesdropping, a listening in, whereby a tremendous silence predominates.

In *Hera*, long periods of tension are built up, condensed, and layered, whether the musicians improvise in independent trajectories or come together in perfect rhythmic unison, whether they are building towards a spirited climax or recapitulating a base melody. They may seem to be waiting bemused for dawn to come, as in the album's last track, "Now until the break of day," or building intensely towards an extended percussion solo, but one has at all times the feeling that the world still exists and functions, albeit fragmentarily. In *Zade*, by contrast, we get the Future 2.0. *Zade* sketches out a world to come in a post-industrial, post-democratic, and possibly post-atomic age. A swan song, as it were – one that leads, as it must, into silence. Or perhaps into the space in which the harbingers of new life can be born.

The first album of the trilogy, called *She* and released in 2014, already included all the elements which make this unique sound so intriguing: a highly energetic and dense electronic sound fabric, large structural arcs with slowly gradated but ultimately sweeping climaxes, and unexpected shifts in tempo. The CD *She* gives boldest and most unfettered expression to the power of free jazz. Its abstract, ethereal sound is driven to the limit through electronic augmentations. But at times – as in the piece called "Iccl" – the listener experiences redemption through the drummer's gentle but precipitous rhythms, by the gracile entrance of the guitar, by a trumpet sound that recalls the cool Miles Davis, or simply by the power of silence. In the album's opening track, "Ariel Alert," the group begins in media res, weaving a dense carpet of electronic sound, only to break off suddenly. This reinforces the effect of the second piece, "Desert Whale Song," which begins with a stillness gently and sparsely interrupted by isolated tones, foreshadowing the end of the trilogy. Yet before the end of this first album, the listener is graced with climaxes, long arcs of tension, sudden caesuras, and variations full of emotional or even existential urgency. It ends with "Hier, oder am anderen Ende" (Here, or on the other end) – a piece that you want to place somewhere in the depths of the sea. The musicians' isolated calls evoke echo sounders; the rhythmic fabric conjures up a kind of afterworld. This is an acoustical experience made to open your ears. Its reverberations will remain with you for a long time.

Christine Pfammatter