

Promo portrait/interview/press material; Elektronavn Sacred Songbook: Letters from Emptiness.

Creak and cowbells, spirituality and quarrel

The musical universe of Magnus Olsen Majmon outlined by Rebecca Persson

"Please sing the same song for my stomach each day. Then the baby will recognize the song!" Magnus Olsen Majmons girlfriend insisted that he would choose a song for their forthcoming child. Maybe she had an ordinary lullaby in mind? But the songs seems to mutate in the mouth of Magnus and they quite often develop to mystical improvised melodies. The fact is that Magnus is a composer who has propensity to avantgarde. As a lullaby he picked a melody in a minor key, that means a sad song.

And now in front of us we have this newly released CD/LP of strange songs with timeless texts and a mutated lullaby:

Songs with Creeaaaakkks

On this song album I have in front of me I hear a great bunch of unmistakable creaks. Could it be a technical fault on the CD? I'm so used to Cd's sounding totally smooth and clean. And now I hear this creak again! It reminds me of the sounds of a jammed door, but I'm sure its something else. On one of the songs I also hear a car driving by.

"To integrate found sounds in music is to state that all sounds have musical potential" Magnus Olsen Majmon enthusiastic explains with a smiling reference to the history of art. His new CD "Letters from Emptiness" features strange, beautiful but also sad songs, all wonderfully spiced with creaks and whistling. The songs are improvisations made at an old rusty piano in an old half-timbered house in the countryside in Denmark.

"I make a virtue of necessity. I might be able to compose relevant music on all instruments" Magnus tells us with a quiet twinkle. He seems both humble and very self confident. "The rusty piano was the instrument around a at that time. I have dreams about a grand piano with a view to the sea".

Spiritual songs

The texts to the songs are a wild mixture of Bible text, ancient Chinese poetry, Japanese zen wisdom and a single danish traditional song. On the cover of the CD we see an angel-like shape drawn in blue pastel. "The texts causes a spiritual, poetic and melancholic keynote. And they might be there because I'm a reincarnated Chinese, Japanese, spiritual mystic and a lot more". Magnus laughs. "Or ... the texts appealed to me from a shelf on the library". What does he actually mean? It seems he feel quite good about this open mentality.

"For me there's absolutely no problem in mixing different religious texts and thoughts. I feel a bit annoyed when so called religious and spiritual people fight each other...since its obviously the same everlasting questions and answers to our existence they seek. I wonder if its the same God all monotheistic religions comes from, they just call it different names. Off course its relevant to discuss the concept of God and how something can appear out of nothing!? I sincerely think and hope that most progressive religiousness during the next 1-200 years will melt together and seek inspiration from each other. That's the method I've used creating my new CD". Its very clear that these topics are important for Magnus.

We descend from heaven and down to Earth:

Is it possible to sing a quarrel?

Some people throw with their plates when they have quarrel with their beloved ones. Other people just eat a huge block of chocolate to swallow their frustrations. Magnus Olsen Majmon does something else. He sits down by the piano and sings.

Most of the songs on the album 'Letters from Emptiness' appeared on some hot summer days 2008 in the setting of Magnus' girlfriends home, far out in the countryside in an old thatched half-timbered house with hollyhocks – after an quarrel. A perfect idyll on the outside but tumult inside. A young couple with just as many quarrels as other couples. The difference lies in how to solve the problems.

"After wards I'm a much better partner. Then my emotions have been carried away creatively instead of arguing further on with my lover or going out knocking someone down" Magnus explains. A young slim man with wild pianist hair,

worn clothes and clear blue eyes. He looks like a real composer but certainly not someone who would knock down another person. Actually he doesn't really want to talk about quarrels. But he seems happy to talk about suffering. "Grief is a keynote that I carry with me from this and a bunch of past incarnations. Everybody knows of grief – or they will. But not all dare speak about it. Grief and suffering is a keynote here on our Earth – a planet which also indeed holds a wealth of sensuous and acting beauty. Its very important to work on this suffering. A recommendable way is to do it creatively via art. This path can be extreme therapeutic for both the person who acts and the listener". Magnus speaks quiet and well-considered and holds a focused look all the time. I ask him to sit down at the piano and play one of the songs. But that isn't possible just like that.

"No, that's not possible. And I won't. Hmm...OK I will. But I love improvisation!" Magnus answers with a wry smile. I always sing the song in a new way. But not on purpose. I just don't feel like singing the same song for my young daughter again and again. At the other hand though I'm also really fond of repetition. Well... improvisation as a method is a keynote in my life. At the same time I'm very aware of quality and I love to control and refine certain aspects of the creative product."

Bird twittering, soprano and cowbells

Magnus explains how the songs are all improvised on an old rusty piano with a creaking pedal. This is all audible on the raw unpolished sound of this CD/LP. They have only been played once. Afterward he edited the songs, added field recordings like bird singing, peal of thunder and whistling of the wind. And he asked other musicians to join in.

"I was interested in adding other peoples egos and musicality to the music in a relatively free manner. But...where I was still in charge...". Magnus hesitates and start thinking. It's obviously very important for him to word himself as clear as possible. " On this topic I'm a bit two-sided. I love to just let go in the precious now as much as I love to control and refine. Using both methods in art gives us a very exiting process and a more interesting and vital result".

Magnus traveled the relatively long way from Copenhagen to Århus to meet the viola player Robert. They'd never met before. Magnus found some of the viola players music on the internet and trusted his intuition that they could create good music together. And they could. " At first hand I wanted a violin player, but then Robert showed up as an interesting string musician". Nevertheless you won't hear much string-arrangements on the album but only some painstaking chosen strokes and scratches here and there. One could ask why not just use electronic string sounds? " Because it sounds awful! Synthesizer string-sounds don't really have body and soul. In best case a mutated body and a threadbare soul. In this case I was not at all interested in that kind of sound".

Magnus loves using whats currently available. His girlfriend – a soprano – was shanghaied to add a female color to some of the songs. "That was practical, she was there and I just gave her some nice kisses in return" Magnus tells with a big smile.

A sound of bells which reminds me of cow, are the opening sounds of one of the songs. "These are some amazing cowbells I discovered and recorded in a summer cottage some years ago. I don't know if there's any symbolism in these cowbells but they just sound so beautiful mystical".

Lets get back to the quarrel and the suffering:

Is it necessary to suffer to be able to make good songs? "It feels just right to sing after a quarrel because there's such a deeply felt authentic mood present. If the one-to-one relationship gets too harmonic the music gets gets worse" Magnus answers. But probably he doesn't mean it black and white? " As an artist your productivity can certainly increase when emotions are high – a depression might be productive nutrition for the poor artist". So it *is* necessary to suffer to make good art? " I'm not at all an advocate of worshipping suffering. The point is to overcome suffering. Personally and at a lager scale. But suffering is – as mentioned earlier – so fundamental a condition on our Earth. Just look back or around! Holocaust, Gulag, Ex-Yugoslavia, Armenia, Rwanda, Pol Pot etc. The list is endless. Grief hurts the core of ones soul. Its very deeply felt and often so hard to overcome. So its not only my own personal challenge to overcome suffering, its obviously a collective matter. Very often its the same mechanism that creates suffering on both small and big scales or levels – in the family as well as between groupings and nations".

There's no doubt that Magnus has his heart involved in this CD. He e.g. had the cover to the CD printed on ecological paper and that was done even though its three times more expensive than ordinary paper and even if he really can't afford it. " I wish from the bottom of my heart that this CD communicates relevant spiritual messages at an abstract level. And that it might work therapeutic. How? – well...that's audible. I won't speak more about that. I'm a musician and I'll let the music speak from here".

The album is available on CD/LP via www.emptysoundsrec.com from March the 23rd 2010