

A week full of holidays

The album "Soliloquies" by pianist Georg Ruby.

By Hans-Jürgen Linke

In the last piece of the "Soliloquies" series by pianist Georg Ruby, the evergreen composer Peter Kreuder is the imaginary dialogue partner in "Für eine Nacht voller Seligkeit" [For a Night Full of Bliss]. In the fifth piece, "Nefertity", it is jazz musician Wayne Shorter, who died roundabout two years ago. The other pieces—13 in total—are improvised compositions or composed improvisations consisting a variety of material. The introductory piece "Montag" [Monday] is so expansive, wild, theme-free, fast, and restless within three minutes and a few seconds that one wonders where this journey might lead.

But that's not a question of material. Georg Ruby takes his material from everywhere, a typical case for soliloquies. And an improvising pianist is never alone during a soliloquy, but always carries around an extensive bundle of memories, impressions, and preferences with which he can expand and beyond which he can expand himself. "Für eine Nacht voller Seligkeit" [For a Night Full of Bliss], for instance, does not lose itself – even not for a single – moment in nostalgic reminiscences, but rushes off in

several directions, surveying the field from which everything could be given away for this single night, and pausing briefly in between to reassure itself of the theme.

By the way, Peter Kreuder quarreled with Hanns Eisler over a nine-note motif, accusing him of stealing it from his piece "Goodbye Johnny" and using it for the melody of the GDR's national anthem. From that perspective, Georg Ruby did nothing wrong. He names the composer of the theme, which he then rather free-mindedly puts through the wringer of his improvisation, pushing it to the limits of recognizability.

Georg Ruby, one of the protagonists of the Cologne jazz scene since the 1980s, recorded his current album in three sessions in January of this year, supported by sound engineer and sound designer (and, incidentally, drummer and percussionist) Reinhard Kobialka. The soliloquies do not engage in calmly progressing or even melancholic reflections. These are eventful, polyrhythmic, tonally free, energetically restless pieces, sometimes constructed with remarkable dexterity and complex vertical layers – in other words, strikingly virtuosic regarding his technique.

Together but also individually, they occupy a broad space between avant-garde jazz and new music and are full of rich sonic imagination. Sometimes, the piano is prepared and distorted, is treated powerfully and percussively or even as a delicate-sounding string instrument.

Georg Ruby never sets himself in any idiomatics. He always moves forward, and there are hardly any repetitive elements in his music. At the most, rhythmic patterns emerge temporarily. And what begins with a "Montag" [Monday] progresses step by step through a holiday ("Feriado"), a Friday ("Viernes"), and so on until the next "Dimanche", Sunday. Soliloquies which take the passing of time into account, picking up traces and residues without falling into contemplative retrospection.



Georg Ruby. JEAN LAFFITAU