

Georg Ruby & JassLab de Cologne / „Eins und Eins“

Jasslab de Cologne honors Hildegard Knef – with trendsetting jazz chansons

It is true that jazz musicians don't often dare to enter the songwriter's circle. In some places some musicians do – yet doing it just the other way round, like Paolo Conte in Italy or Claude Nougaro in France who are writing songs explicitly using the sound of jazz. This mixture is very popular ever since, letting them catch up with leading chansonniers like Charles Trenet, for whom jazz has been as native as his own language.

In Germany it seems that recently only the work of Lisa Bassenge bodes what could be possible for song respectively chanson in jazz. Post-war Germany has failed to resume the tradition of the great composers of the 1920ies that has been destroyed by the Nazis. Frederick Hollaender's, Werner Richard Heymann's or Theo Mackeben's memory has been (as that of many other mainly Jewish artists) suppressed or they have even been forgotten. Those have been successful after the war who went to America – like Marlene Dietrich, who has been confronted with the hate of lots of Germans in 1945 as she returned to Germany to entertain GIs, wearing the victor's uniform.

Paying attention to all of this is important to understand the particular importance of Hildegard Knef – because she has set milestones that helped music to come to maturity in the „Wirtschaftswunderland“ nourished by the Americans. She countered smooth overseas' elegance with her own broken profile – time and again the voice of the educated actress has been compared to the sound of a „bell with a crack“. A clear, strong and shining sound as from Barbara Barth, interpreting „die Knef“ with Jasslab Cologne, hasn't been heard in the case of the original. Barths elegant interpretation wouldn't be as interesting (as impressive as it is) if Georg Ruby, piano player and arranger, and his jazz ensemble would not follow a completely different course in working with the legend Hildegard Knef. And if not they would have placed the Knef songs in a setting together with masterpieces from the jazz neighbourhood – three songs from Cole Porter (whose compositions she also has sung) are featured along with other classics from Knef's repertoire.

Georg Ruby's team rearranges the original versions as sincere as very smart – of Ralph Maria Siegel, Charly Niessen, trendsetting big band arranger Hans Hammerschmid, as well as encore, of Theo Mackeben. On „Eins und eins ...“, the title song, Jasslab gets rid of its sweet three-four time. The Ensemble also easily does without the middle part's circus waltz rhythm with the admiration needing lyrics of „Der Mensch an sich“. The story of „Ich hab' noch einen Koffer in Berlin“ starts off as tinny as it would sound from an old transistor radio just to reach out for the endless freedom of jazz in the end. And „Für mich soll's rote Rosen regnen“ is drifting, yet steady on the sounds of the ensemble's freely invented and profoundly worked out version of jazz. Knef's rediscovery may be ascribed to the spirit of Cole Porter, who is represented on one half of this great recording, because anyhow he was composing and writing jazz chansons. Mackeben's finale „Frauen sind keine Engel“ is like a somewhat ironic epilogue – the singer vanishes more and more and is replaced by silence. The great silence began in February 2002 – when Hildegard Knef, the Berlin girl from Bavarian Ulm, died at the age of 76. Silence is over now. New Knef conjurations – unfamiliar, yet familiar as here – are welcome. Jasslab has made a fresh start.