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ALESSANDRO PALMITESSA

“Soul Circles“

Composer and reed player Alessandro Palmitessa recently drew attention when he cooperated with trumpet player Lewis Barnes, the Japanese freak-out big band Shibuya Orchestra, and PEM - a group which was formed to score new music for silent movies such as the work of film pioneer Walter Ruttmann. As a bandleader he has left his mark with Noizland, an Italian group that is highly praised for its distinguished blend, bringing together the best of classical Jazz, some guitar that every now and then rocks heavily, and those warm saxophone loops so typical of Palmitessa. In his home base Cologne (Germany), Palmitessa is also known as the head of the *Menschen Sinfonie Orchester*, in which professional musicians and homeless people play together. Whenever he performs on stage or records new tracks not only local luminaries but also musicians such as Markus Stockhausen or keyboard legend Helmut Zerlett show up. But as if this wasn't enough, Palmitessa is active as a solo musician, too. Using reeds, percussion, the accordion and sampling technology he composes smoothly grooving soundscapes, the melodic and harmonic vocabulary of which owes much to a tradition reaching from Ellington to Frisell or the soundscapes of Ryuichi Sakamoto.

Soul Circles is Palmitessa's long awaited first solo release. It succeeds effortlessly in capturing the vivid atmosphere of live performances by using the whole range of multitrack recording technology. *Alghero*, a short piece for solo-saxophone, which alludes to Thelonius Monk, opens up the CD. *Soul Circles'* final track *Moskau* would definitely be on top of any world music charts had vocals been involved. In fact, Palmitessa's music oscillates between these two poles, yet it does so with following diverse paths of music. Each title refers to a place where Palmitessa once had been; these are the experiences that trigger his inspiration. Palmitessa's landscapes of sound literally draw the listener in – to a ride through the soft hills of *Macedonia*, or, in *Ibrahim* (the title refers to Abdullah Ibrahim's music), to the sultry and tense atmosphere of a South-African township's border. Cosimo Erario – he testifies his mastery on other pieces on *Soul Circles*, too – with his distorted guitar play that covers a stylistic range from irritating noise-attacks to harmonic rock-hooks, definitely, though barely perceivable, leaves his print in this song.

The music on **Soul Circles** is based on the rhythmic pulse of layered and meshed loops that are generated by saxophones, clarinets or the accordion. Every now and then primitive percussions join in, and saxophones team up for some sort of short-living big bands, while in the background, melodious particles float by and suddenly step forward, seeking to catch the listener's attention. Or, they queue up for oscillations that are reminiscent of Steve Reich, as at the beginning of *Sagres*. Palmitessa takes a look on landscapes, towns and sites or into rooms that all look back in turn, stirring our emotions: this finally is what Palmitessa's music is about. His loops extend the very moment of encounter to the length of a music piece, thus having the listener experience this crucial situation. This for instance happens in *Café Sur*, when the Tango, being trapped in a loop, seemingly doesn't know where to go. Or it occurs in *Ravel*, where some Bolero rhythm relentlessly pushes a street band's eerie parade forward. In *A/R* (meaning: *andata e ritorno*, which is the Italian expression for “return-ticket”), like a wistful glance out of a train's window, the clarinet wanders over the passing-by landscape. And then there is the rain in *Cala Verde* the drumming of which pervades the tender “greenness” of the bay. *Die Zeit der Kirschen* (Time of the Cherries) eventually, *Soul Circles'* penultimate track, heads for climax - renouncing all rhythmic pulse and by this leaving the saxophones' harmonics open to space.

Soul Circles is a soulful recording in its literal sense and it has got marvellously relaxed music in store which explores the realms of Jazz, Ambient, or World Music as well. There is no doubt that a broad audience will love it.

Christopher Janssen (ZDF/arte/WDR Journalist)

www.palmitessa.de