

## **GINA SCHWARZ - Pannonica**

### **Music Box and Free Landscape (2 CD set)**

Gina Schwarz - bass, composition; Lorenz Raab- trumpet, flugelhorn; Lisa Hofmaninger - soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Alois Eberl - trombone; Florian Sighartner – violin; Clemens Sainitzer – violoncello; Philipp Nykrin - piano; Primus Sitter - guitar; Judith Schwarz - drums

Gina Schwarz is a bass player and composer. Starting on the accordion, Gina later learned the piano before indulging her passion for the lower registers by learning the double bass, which became her main instrument. She studied at the Vienna Conservatory, the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna and then gained a scholarship to Berklee and was also supported by the Austrian government. She won the Berklee-Best whilst a student there. She also won the Hans Koller Preis for sideswoman of the year in 2002. Since 2011 she has taught bass and performed. She has recorded albums as leader and co-leader and featured on many others. Her performances have taken her all over the world.

The first CD, Grandma's Music Box (Music Box) is full of shapes, colours, outstanding solos and creative collective parts. It contains delicate, whimsical and forceful music which creates many different musical landscapes, which the group explore. Interestingly enough, Gina found the musicians first and created the music around them and their characters. She told me, "Pannonica started as the stage band at Porgy&Bess in Vienna in 2017. Luckily I got the opportunity to play eight concerts in this exceptional venue and the promoter gave me plenty of scope as a bass player, composer and bandleader. Before I put the band together I asked myself, 'What about starting a project with my daughter playing drums? How about searching for empathic personalities first and mixing them up in terms of generation and gender and thinking

about the instrumentation afterwards? Then I asked myself, 'What is a perfect name for such a project? A woman's name? A name of a woman with strong personality was my answer- Pannonica de Koenigswarter. Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter ( 1913 - 1988) She was a warrior, a patron, a muse, and an intimate friend of many musicians. For the Baroness, jazz was the embodiment of modernism, tolerance, and plurality - an urgent and most necessary antidote to racism, sexism and gender-bias. She was closely connected to Thelonious Monk and his family, and in return for her selfless support as benefactress he dedicated several compositions to her. This double CD set is an interesting and intriguing listen.

'Gm's Musicbox' opens the CD with delicate electronic noise, much of it sounding just like the little metal teeth on old fashioned music boxes. After an eclectic introduction, a rhythmic melody is build up and the piece develops and builds. The bass solo is gentle and backed by harmonics from the bass clarinet and violoncello. The final phrase is pacey, highly rhythmic and richly textured with a clockwork rhythm which works a treat. ' Toronto' begins like a city awakening; noises drifting in and out, different instruments introducing themselves until the brass and woods lead the way into a melodic fray, topped out by a beautiful violin solo over guitar, which is allowed to develop before the flugelhorn and trombone add their dissensions. The flugelhorn line is intricate and well delivered, linking into the repeated melody well.

'Dark Glasses' is darker, atmospheric, with a sleazy, brilliantly delivered trumpet part and some intricacies happening in the rest of the ensemble. The rhythm is relentless, engaging and quite mesmeric under the varied and well structured melodic lines and some cracking percussion. A stand out track, this has so much going on. ' Off the Record' is a solo track from Gina Schwarz and shows what you can do - or part of what you can do - with a bow on a beautiful piece of wood.

'Flip Trip' is dynamic - a bit spyfilm-ish but decent enough, especially

when you get to the guitar solo from Primus Sitter and those glorious low notes from the trombone . 'Via Terra' is lovely from the start - with breathy, perfectly blown stut notes from the sax, improvised progressions from the strings and a build up which leads to a gloriously textured first third, all over a steadfast rhythmic chord rise from the piano - which changes position but not rhythm making a solid base for the rest of the ensemble. Clever. The track builds interest, with each instrument, including the bass itself, chasing ever more intricate rhythms , with the piano regularly being used as a subtle but sure steadying hand.

'Windmills' is another solo bass track and this time the strings are plucked, showing a different side to the instrument, each string movement can be heard and percussive tones from the belly of the instrument underlie the sounds.

As if to emphasise the 'one-ity' of the solo track, 'Four Steps' has a fullness and intensity of rhythms. The drive in this track is tangible and the number of styles encompassed impressive, from folk-like echoes in the violin part to the bass solo which is all jazz, to the classic lean of the ensemble phrases. But don't expect the classical leanings to create a classical sound. Each instrument is doing a different classical thing and not all at the same time - until the final 2 bars that is when it is a pure classical finish.

'Lily of the Nile' is introduced by bass clarinet of Lisa Hofmaninger, setting up the tone for this deep, calming, mellifluous number and it just gets more interesting as the track weaves its way betwixt jazz, classical and the undefinable whilst 'Passing' is Gina on her bass in reflective mood.

'New Year's Eve' is again begun with bass clarinet, over a steady, walking rhythm before the other instruments pick add their melodies and songs. The layers are added with no loss of those already there so the track's textures build until the piano leads through a quieter

landscape, just a few bars and then the violoncello adds a warping, sighing, emotive solo which breaks through enough over the rest of the ensemble to allow the essence of its message to be heard before the clarinet rises out of the background again, this time with a melodic message, which merges into the guitar solo, which is again quite beautiful. The track completes with everyone adding their touch and a sudden stop, the piano chords allowed to echo to the finish.

## CD2: FREE LANDSCAPE

The second CD in the set is different. Gina explained how it came about after they finished CD1 and had two days left in the studio. She says, "What do you do if you booked a studio for four days and you are finished after two? Well, I brought brand new compositions from the week before to the studio on day 3 and 4 - tunes with less structure and arrangements, but more openness and freedom for Pannonica. This concept of recording was exciting for everybody! At the end of the session each member of the band called out a title. For example 'Schneefall' (which means snowfall) and with hand signals we started the tune and finished it after one minute.

The CD opens with 'Free Landscape' which is well, free - if short. The tunefulness of the trumpet set against the noisy background is smile-inducing at the start but this CD was always going to be very different from the first because it was formed as it was recorded and the track sets the tone nicely. On 'Free Landscape' the studio was turning into a laboratory, the music was exploding."

'Cut I: Bienenschwarm' is short, sweet and undercooked as it finishes just as it gets going whilst 'Chai Waltz' is gloriously in opposition as it sets up rollicking rhythms, drives, pushes and there is a one-ness of the entire ensemble in this track which makes a great contrast to that which went before - yet the improvisation is still prevalent.

'Cut II Quadratlichter' is introduced by piano over intricate and deft percussion, into which the sax and trumpet drop, before everyone wades in, adding their voice, working up the patterns. 'Road Trip A22' is another heavier, more direct and driven track with sections in which each person leads but the best one, for this listener is the piano-led madness which comes just after the two thirds mark. 'Cut III Zirkel' revolves around 5 notes largely - given by the sax and improvised by the others - short, sharp and not that sweet if I am honest. but 'Cut IV: Schneefall' makes up for this with its beautifully improvised delicious explorations.

'Baharat' is a piece with many influences - it sounds at times Arabic, at times sleazeball movie and at others jazz club but the trumpet at the start is compelling and smart with emotive delivery from Lorenz Raab. The bass emerges and the percussive rhythm changes, strong on atmosphere, and sassy in the patterns. It changes again, now brassy over piano. This track is well thought out, diverse and the final third is quite extraordinary. Exquisite.

'Abibliophobia' begins with a bass solo and then the rhythm is built, layer upon layer added by the ensemble, all the while keeping a tracking 2/4 rhythm going which at one point offsets against the percussion before returning. The interactions between the instruments on this track are profound and the structure of the arrangement very solid. The outro is gloriously bonkers.

'Cut V Quantenmechanik' and 'Cut VI Drei Tage bei Oma' are two improvised tracks with different instruments and very different sounds. The second one has almost a standard in there.

'Free Landscape Reprise' closes the album with gorgeous, melodic bass clarinet setting a tone of loveliness which the others pickup and convey to the listener - a gentle, free and quite beautiful way to finish the album.

This CD set is like a journey - from fascinating compositions to improvised and free playing where each musician is allowed to shine. Fascinating interplays, and an ever surprising flow of ideas flow easily from the band.

A little on the woman whose name the band took . Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter ( 1913 - 1988) was a patron, a muse and intimate friend of many musicians. For the Baroness, jazz was the embodiment of modernism, tolerance, and plurality - an urgent and most necessary "antidote" to racism, sexism and gender-bias.

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