

Susanne Abbuehl The Gift

Susanne Abbuehl: voice; Matthieu Michel: flügelhorn; Wolfert Brederode: piano, Indian harmonium; Olavi Louhivuori: drums, percussion

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„Avec Susanne Abbuehl, la voix ne s'impose pas comme une démonstration de force. La chanteuse néerlandais-suisse excelle dans l'exercice de la nuance et de la légèreté. Chez elle, le silence est souverain et les mots se détachent comme des rondes-bosses que les oreilles contemplent. Nous sommes conviés à un voyage qui s'effectue les yeux fermés sur un parcours en seize étapes au cours duquel l'écoute est une rêverie. L'emprise du calme est parfaitement efficace et c'est une étonnante réussite dès lors que Susanne Abbuehl a choisi de nous faire entendre une sélection de poèmes qui ont en commun l'exploration du monde à l'intérieur de soi. En mettant en musique des écrits de Wallace Stevens, d'Emily Brontë, de Sara Teasdale, d'Emily Dickinson, elle montre que le poète est celui qui peut embrasser l'étendue du dehors sans sortir de sa chambre. Pour nous convaincre que l'immobilité est un tremplin, elle s'est entourée d'un trio souple, aérien, délicat, qui ouvre les portes vers les harmonies de douceur. Cet intérêt pour l'espace poétique, dont témoigne *Since Feeling Is First* d'E.E. Cummings sur „April“ (2001), n'est pas un élan de hasard, il signale un chemin où la voix qui descend dans la profondeur du poème fait remonter l'esprit.

Susanne Abbuehl est capable d'une telle extraction. C'est une magicienne.“

Guy Darol, Jazz Magazine (F)

„Susanne Abbuehl: une voix essentielle du jazz européen.

Poésie choisie et complicité lumineuse garantissent une esthétique qui est devenue référence.

Une carrière hors du commun, une discographie qui s'étend sous le label ECM, un professorat qui couvre deux hautes écoles de Suisse, compositrice idéale pour la mise en mélodie de poèmes.“

Ivor Malherbe, RTS (CH)

ffff Téléràma Mai 2013

The Gift est le troisième disque de Susanne Abbuehl pour ECM, après April et Compass, et, autant que ceux-ci et peut-être plus encore, il est en effet un cadeau. La voix de cette jeune femme semble avoir été créée pour la poésie, et la poésie, pour cette voix. En tout cas, celle, intime, lyrique, d'Emily Dickinson, à laquelle Susanne Abbuehl joint ici celles de Sara Teasdale, Wallace Stevens, et même Emily Brontë.

Que l'on se rassure, il n'est pas indispensable de comprendre l'anglais pour jouir de cette poésie vocale. Le chant, doux, charnel et immatériel à la fois (c'est son paradoxe), s'élève comme une fleur à laquelle la trompette de Matthieu Michel sert de tuteur, de même que ces deux voix, la féminine et l'instrumentale, s'enroulent autour du silence qu'elles courtisent ensemble. Le piano de Wolfert Brederode, qui avait déjà splendidement serti la joaillerie nocturne d'Abbuehl dans ses disques précédents, et les percussions d'Olavi Louhivuori nappent souterrainement les épousailles de ce timbre si pur, si sororal, et de cette trompette d'or liquide.“

Michel Contat, Téléràma (F)

„Worte stehen am Anfang dieser Musik. Sie entfalten ihre Wirkung im Nacheinander. Den Ausklang des Vorausgehenden mit sich tragend wie einen Schweif, lassen sie die eigenen Laute wie ein Vermächtnis nachhallen in der allmählich sich verwirklichenden Botschaft. So verbreiten sich poetischer Sinn und Sinnlichkeit in der Zeit. Und Susanne Abbuehls Talent erfüllt sich nun jedes Mal, wenn sie den luftigen Takt eines Verses in den Fluss der Klänge überträgt. Wer am Freitagabend im gut besuchten Kulturzentrum Kammgarn zuhörte, wie die 43-jährige Berner Sängerin mit ihrem bestens eingespielten Quartett Gedichte von u. a. Emily Dickinson oder Emily Brontë vertonte, hatte den Eindruck, hier würde Sprache neu belebt und quasi zurückgeführt in eine alte Harmonie von Laut und Bedeutung.“

Ueli Bernays, NZZ (CH)

„Sublime.“

Bernard Loupias, Le Nouvel Observateur (F)

„With music composed to interpret the poetry of Sara Teasdale, Emily Brontë, Wallace Stevens, and above all Emily Dickinson, Susanne Abbuehl has retreated from the world to paradoxically embrace it on *The Gift*. As part of this process the Swiss/Dutch singer has changed her band, with only pianist Wolfert Brederode remaining from earlier albums *April* and *Compass*. Drummer Olavi Louhivuori, now in *Oddarrang*, who appeared to wider notice on Tomasz Stańko's *Dark Eyes* is an apposite choice here, although his role within the chamber-jazz settings means he must remain subtle, as it's an album that values space, a sense of longing, an exiling of overt rhythm, and the pleasures of the aftermath of a single note of music. The Swiss Matthieu Michel on flugelhorn is a truly mesmerising presence, his approach a calibrated diffidence that suits the source material and atmosphere of *The Gift* so very intuitively. But it's Brederode's artistry as an improvisational respondent to the voice beyond accompaniment that increases magnificently as the album unfolds, culminating in the variation of his use of Indian harmonium at the beginning of 'This and My Heart' especially. *The Gift* has a beautiful power all of its own making, with the shaping of mood, the channelling of the source texts and the knowing, at times Norma Winstone-like quality of Abbuehl's voice and compositions so very rewarding. No track exists in isolation. The spontaneity of performance, and it is all the more remarkably a studio album after all, translating to private listening without any feeling of distance; its message, an inspiring one.“

Stephen Graham, marlbank.com (UK)

„Sie giesst Lyrik in eine Form aus gesungenen Noten, gibt den Worten jeden erdenklichen Raum zur Entfaltung. Mit ihren Vorgängeralben erwarb sich die unorthodoxe Stimmvirtuosin deshalb ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal. Bei Texten sucht sie nach dem inneren Rhythmus, nach unterschwelligem Melodien und ihrer tiefen Bedeutung.“

Reinhard Köchl, Jazzthing (D)

„Soundskulpturen von schlichter Schönheit und einer geradezu spirituellen Aura, Klangkunstwerke die berühren.“

Heribert Ickerott, Jazzpodium (D)

„Wunderbar sensible Musik vom aktuellen Quartett der Schweizer Sängerin und Komponistin, die nach längerer Pause endlich wieder von sich hören lässt. Sie hat hier Lyrik auf schwebend-gelassene Art vetont - und das Flügelhorn von Matthieu Michel geht aufregend innige Dialoge mit Abbuehls klarer, unaufgeregter Stimme ein.“

Roland Spiegel, JazzZeitung (D)

„There was a time when artists were expected to release a record every year—sometimes a very good thing, as there was so much development going on that there was plenty to document; other times a less-than-ideal situation, as some artists simply didn't have that much music in them, so releasing albums too frequently often worked against—rather than for—them. Swiss-born/Netherlands-resident singer Susanne Abbuehl may, with *The Gift*, only have four albums to her name since her 1997 debut, the long out-of-print *I Am Rose* (Suisa), but since joining the ECM roster in 2001 with the *Edison Award*-winning *April* (2001), she has established herself as a singer of rare instincts and conceptual distinction.

The Gift comes seven years after [Compass](#) (ECM, 2006), so clearly Abbuehl is a singer who takes whatever time she needs to make each recording both special, and an evolutionary step along the unique trajectory she's been following since *I Am Rose*. *The Gift* does, however, represent a significant change for Abbuehl, whose past approach has been to split her repertoire between sourced poetry from, in addition to her own words, writers including e.e. cummings, James Joyce and William Carlos Williams, set to music from artists who, in addition to her own writing, ranged from pianists Carla Bley, Chick Corea and Sun Ra, to saxophonist Ornette Coleman, all of *The Gift*'s sixteen songs feature Abbuehl's music, with words from two famous 19th century Emilys—Dickinson and Brontë—as well as two 20th century poets, Sara Teasdale and Wallace Stevens.

That's not the only significant change with *The Gift*. While pianist Wolfert Brederode—himself an ECM artist with two marvelous recordings to his name, 2008's [Currents](#) and 2011's [Post Scriptum](#)—has remained a constant in Abbuehl's groups since *I Am Rose*, the rest of her quartet has been completely revamped. Christof May's clarinet—and, most importantly to Abbuehl's previous

ECM recordings, *bass clarinet*—has been replaced by flugelhornist Matthieu Michel, here making his first ECM appearance, and, for the fourth time, Abbuehl changes the percussion seat, this time recruiting Olavi Louhivuori, an increasingly busy Finnish drummer who, in addition to participating in trumpeter Tomasz Stanko's *Dark Eyes* (ECM, 2009) quintet, continues to work in bassist Mats Eilertsen's *SkyDive* (Hubro, 2012) quintet and Alexi Tomarila's trio, heard most recently on the Finnish pianist's excellent *Seven Hills* (Edition, 2013).

With Brederode also playing harmonium (as he has on past recordings), and Michel layering spare lines over and under Louhivuori's tuned percussion on the opening "The Cloud," the qualities that have distinguished Abbuehl since her ECM debut are immediately evident. In a time of melismatic singers, Abbuehl's attention to the purity of every note, the articulation of every vowel and the absolute precision of every consonant—even as her notes are fading to black, it's possible to hear the finest details—make her a singer who impresses, not through superfluous virtuosity, but by the exact opposite: for Abbuehl, every single note counts, and every single note bears the same relevance.

There are folkloric elements to Abbuehl's writing that emerge clearly on pieces like the gentle "This And My Heart"—where a flugelhorn solo breaks up the singer's reiteration of Dickinson's brief, four-line, two-stanza poem—but even as the music adopts clear song form, Abbuehl's lyric sources avoid predictable patterns. "If Bees Are Few" is a dark, rubato tone poem miniature, Dickinson's lyrics as ethereal and gossamer-light as Abbuehl's delivery and her quartet's interpretation, while the lengthier "My River Runs to You"—featuring Brederode's beautiful *a cappella* intro—slowly builds its dramaturgy from a perfect combination of Mathieu's breathy embouchure, Louhivuori's soft colors, Brederode's gentle majesty and Abbuehl's ability to imply so much with the subtlest of gestures.

Beyond her Indian studies, Abbuehl was a student of singer Jeanne Lee and there's a certain quality to her voice that also recalls ECM label mate Norma Winstone, whose own approach to chamber-infused vocal music in recent years culminated in 2010's sublime *Stories to Tell*. Abbuehl has, however, long left behind any obvious touchstones. A singer whose greatest strength is her willingness to be absolutely vulnerable and whose most impressive quality is her ability to imbue great meaning to every word—every note—with the power of understatement and control rather than manifest and dissolute virtuosity, *The Gift* may have been a long time coming but, as has been the case with every Abbuehl recording, it's been well worth the wait.”

ALL ABOUT JAZZ – John Kelman