

"Palimpsest"

Lasgush Poradeci Heinrich Heine.

My heart is a Palimpsest, so is yours!

"What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours."

- Thomas De Quincey, *Libra "Suspiria de Profundis"*.

This metaphor applies to the heart, to poetry and music! The palimpsest is a manuscript or a piece of writing material on which the original writing has been erased, to make room for later writing, but of which traces remain.

This is the complexity inscribed in Eda Zari's "Palimpsest", a bilingual album in German and Albanian.

After five years, Eda Zari returns with a new album, once again conceptual. If John Coltrane needed his suite, "A Love Supreme", to musically express his genuine love for God, Eda Zari's intends to create a spiritual work based on Lasgush Poradeci's poetry, an Albanian poet from the 1920s and the 1930s, who sang to the cosmic sublimity of love. Musically speaking, Eda is equally at home with jazz, cinematic music, and world music, but she has settled on a singular Melo-rhythmic and polyrhythmic vocabulary, to properly render Poradeci's verse in music.

Why Palimpsest?

"With Palimpsest I would like to round off the abundance of Poradeci's poetic language into coexistence with the new Melo-rhythmic acoustic vocabulary that is elevated to a higher song level. The past returns to the present in a musical form, that can casually be hummed in the morning but also work as a leitmotif in the communication between two people committed to each other. Over time, "Palimpsest" will gain new layers of meaning. The very concept of it allows for us to experience the past in our present and the present in our past, through the unstitching and restitching of memories, language, words, and sound, in time and space. Music helps us rewrite our biography, by giving us - to say it with the poet - a

feeling of how "love sounds" or how "the pain of a farewell" could be written. The album can be leafed through like a music book and be "read" just as the poetry is "sung"! You can read the sound and sing the experience as if it were a biographic collection, a continuous dazzling story. "Palimpsest" perfectly captures the heart of my album, which is also divided and bound in a trinity of time. I would like to think of the three of us: Poradeci, Heine and me as a creative trio in **exile** - simultaneously separated and connected in a temporal union of the past, the present, and the future. To me, the beauty of music is that it exists through and beyond verbal messages. After all, what other evidence can a poet find for the success of verses, or the musician for the compositions, besides the musical compatibility between tone with the word? " - says Zari.

This seems to have been, for Eda Zari, the foundation stone on which to build the album. Certain parallels and divergences between Poradeci and Heine convinced her to write music based not only on Poradeci's poems but also that poet's translations from Heine's "Book of Songs"- Buch der Lieder. All this in the name of the human principles of art and the actualization of the relationship between poetry and music on one hand, and the two languages within the same idea on the other; as a specific response to the circumstances of music and poetry and today's multicultural and multilingual environment.

"In Heine and Poradeci I feel the translation of spiritual sound in verse. What these poets say is an expression of the trauma their internal singing has experienced. This is why Poradeci insists on his announcement of a new song "From the bottom of myself I am going to sing of a new longing." Sometimes, when I was read, addressed with Poradeci's verse, such as "You are coming from far away ...", "Because I found you, woman, that's why...", I would promptly arrange a melody in my mind, like a soundtrack, but staying far from the ethnic or defined folk elements, rhythms, melody or harmony. The melody born by emotion in Poradeci's verse manifests itself, to me, as a cinematic event or footage that narrates moments from Poradeci's life in Graz, in Cologne, by Lake Ohrid in Pogradec, in Bucharest: I see the settings, the characters, the ever-present "woman", the mise en scène; just as I see Heine's solitary nights, as he wanders in the Capital of the Revolution or at the "Pantheon of the Living" as he used to call Paris, where he wrote about displeasure, hatred, love and longing for his native Düsseldorf. As a matter of fact, I have always seen to it, that the essence and message of melody are entirely dependent on the content of words. Words influence

my voice, my perceptions of how my voice can be instrumental – literally and figuratively – in music. Lyrics influence my tonal accentuation, my phrasing, my intimate coloring via the *a cappella* segments, and the lyrical *recitativo accompagnato* passages, to convey authenticity to the Poet's song, as the word acquires more solidity, by integrating itself into sound," says Zari.

The impressive symbolism in "Palimpsest" consists of placing heart, mind, and memories in a sound receptacle. The album is a cloth of love that Eda Zari weaves with Poradeci's word, as musical vocabulary is threaded over the poetic one. In collaboration with Henning Jung and Leon Brückner, Zari takes us into a spiritual journey in the physical and immaterial world, rich in passages of longing, hope, separation, loss and rediscovery. In this journey, words find their place on a music sheet and are made into songs. Poetry gets a new life in sound each time the song is sung, by producing acoustics that recasts the work into new finitude.

Poradeci has written:

"...The essence of the lyrical verse is spiritual music; and music is made spiritual by the spiritual tone; and the tone is made spiritual by the spiritual vibration, oscillation and shock - whereas the spiritual shock, or to say it otherwise, the emotional shock comes from nothing but the internal poetic inspiration, which is perceived, felt and comprehended spontaneously and directly, in the emotional transfiguration of an idea or a feeling, or even the poet's current vision..."

Concept and Content

The challenge of giving sound to these poems - that Poradeci often reworked and rewrote - required bold explorations of various musical directions, outside of genre canons and restrictions. Over a span of three years, including the pandemic, we tried to identify and expose several layers and colors within the poems, to render them musically. Poradeci's poems, and those from Heine's "Book of Songs" that the Albanian poet masterfully translated, inspired not just me, but all artists involved in the album, says Zari.

Zari's polyphonic choirs, Henning Jung's *repetition* patterns in the guitar, variations added by Sting's percussionist Rhani Krija and the balafon carry the listener far away, into landscapes of vibrant sounds and rhythm. The idea of Repetition patterns is dictated by the type of poetry verse and the repetition modifies not just how the word, but also the sound, is perceived. The effect works as an invitation for the listener to participate, to the point of imagining the rhythm or the word before it even appears. Following certain esthetic tenets of music for films, the ballads are introduced by the sound of bandoneon - played by Santiago de Arias, from Buenos Aires, a pupil of the Argentinean legend Dino Saluzzi. Through his *a piacere*, Tango Nuevo style, Arias renders the two poets' impatience and enriches the string ensemble with a precious nostalgic, melancholic touch. These introductions establish immediate contact with the listener, as in the case of "Morgens steh' ich auf und frage," to make room for a mother-and-son duet (Eda Zari and Henning Jung), sung in German and in Albanian. Each one uses their voice to convey the essence of absence and the anxiety of waiting for someone who is not *there*.

In the impressive ballads "Ewigkeit II" and "Prandaj", the pianist Maestro Frank Chasternier showcases his improvisation technique to build a minimally elegant, spell-binding harmony that never lets you go, all the way to the coda. Evidently, Eda Zari and her hand-picked ensemble do not want to let the logic of a musical genre mar the perfection of the poetic image.

A high-class lineup

"In order to develop the album musically, it was important for me to go back and carefully listen to all my past albums. Not to mention that I am also very familiar with the esthetic of music for films, which is also part of my work. Anyone that deals with the relationship between poetry and music, especially in the context of film music, is aware of the difficulty of marrying an idea with the sound of a moving image. In my enthusiasm for films and especially film music, I never let go of the idea of bringing together an ensemble of musicians capable of sustaining the magic of cinematic sound, in which Poradeci's poetry expands on minor and major landscapes; and where places, events, women and lovers are perfected through sound. For this reason, I invited aboard the sound esthete, pianist Frank Chasternier; the well-known Moroccan percussionist Rhani Krija - who is ever-present in my albums; virtuoso double-bass player, Martin Gjakonovski; trumpet player from Berlin, Sebastian

Studnitzky; drummer from New York Jochen Rückert; the outstanding bandoneon player from Buenos Aires Santiago de Arias; Belgian double-bass player Nicolas Fizmann; guitarist Henning Jung, who also happens to be my son; and the string & brass ensemble from IMM Düsseldorf. This mix of musicians channeling Poradeci's poetry also reflects my cultural stations between Germany, Albania and other places."

How do you imbue words with sound?

Although translator Hans Joachim Lanksch once said that "Poradeci's translations into German are condemned to fail," Eda Zari now asks for a second chance and tries, through her voice and her music, a new "translation" of these texts, for the German-speaking public and not only, by making them accessible to listeners who look beyond Balkan turbo-folk clichés. The sound of Zari's unique vocals and the instruments from her orchestra help transform the poet's thought into emotion and the poetry becomes tangible across all cultural and temporal boundaries. Arrangements have been designed in such a way as to require, in addition to the singing voice, mostly acoustic instruments.

Producing an album in unusual settings

"Singing alone in the studio, surrounded by my colleagues' absence, boosted my yearning for making music together. As if this weren't enough, the songs are about love and loss, so my voice and breath convey to the listener a desire to meet again, to make music with my colleagues again, to sing praises to love in front of the public and with the public. This is my greatest wish right now. It is also the reason why I insisted that colleagues get together "separately", to break barriers and share something spiritual with each other. "Palimpsest" can also be seen as multiple personal declarations of love, sung, and re-sung in the times of Corona and post-Corona. People involved in this album seldom or never met together in the studio," says Zari.

And yet, in the hands of world-renowned musicians, instrumental lines fused into a patchwork of high artistic and production quality, in which Eda Zari stands out not only as a vocalist but also as a producer. Her voice was the focal point, where all production threads combine with each other. Alongside producer Henning Jung and

arranger Leon Brückner, she brought the album's highly ambitious concept to life and achieved, thanks to her artistic abilities, a uniquely authentic vocal superposition.

"Palimpsest" sung in two languages

Whether in the original German or Poradeci's Albanian translation, Heine's poetry has a warm sound, loaded with overtones of solitude, but never pathetic. This is equally true of Hans Joachim Lanksch's German translation of Poradeci's *Përjetësia II* (Ewigkeit). "I kept asking myself: in what language can I best convey the feelings, the love lost, the love found? What other language lacks what I would need? During my career in classical music, I have sung in many languages: Italian, Czech, Hungarian, Latin. But Heine's German and Poradeci's Albanian help me keep my native country Albania and my second home country Germany connected via poetry, music, and culture."

Eda Zari has been living in Düsseldorf for three decades now, which is longer than the time she lived in her native country, and yet, it seems as if the singer is grateful to this cultural mix that allows her to convey, through her music, her comings and goings between Germany and Albania, and elsewhere. It is not by accident that Zari heavily draws on the culture of the city where she currently lives and where composers Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and poet Heinrich Heine himself used to live. "My classical music preferences have always made me lean towards the repertoire of songs by Mendelssohn and Schumann, including those based on Heine's poems. I have been reading, for years, the letters exchanged between Heine and Schumann, where one finds opposing views about the relationship between language and music. The way Schumann approaches Heine helped me with my challenge to bring Poradeci's poetry into song.

Eda Zari's 31 years shuttling between Albanian and German add a hidden glow in the "Palimpsest" of mind and heart - Lasgush Poradeci and Heinrich Heine - "My heart is a Palimpsest, so is yours!" - she says.