

Jan Garbarek Group

The art of the flight of the bird

Nothing is more difficult than what is simple. Jan Garbarek, age group 1947 has been trying for 40 years to make that which is difficult, simple, clear, evident. His music stems from many sources, one can discuss this point over a long period of time, he likes to get involved in it in an eloquent fashion. No explanations are necessary at this point where his music is at present and has been for some while. It is in its implicitness unmistakably idiosyncratic – original, where others are inventive.

Garbarek has been working on his sound for 40 years, he has hardened it, sharpened it (like a Japanese smithy his steel for a Samurai sword), until he reached that triumphal unquestionability, which cuts into our mind. There is rigorous implacability in this. It overlooks those who only celebrate his „good sound“. Among others, the free, also wild improvisation of the Sixties and early Seventies with all its provocative potential belongs to Garbarek's origins. He soon however noticed folk and art music of many cultures and, finally, strange and obvious the folklore of his own country of Norway. On his way around the world he discovered “the ‘most exotic’ music in my own backyard“. From the time that Coltrane fascinated him, Ayler, Sanders, Shepp from the free improvisation he distilled pure expression in a long process. In his saxophone sound his personality is so concentrated that it reveals itself at first go as is only with musicians like Johnny Hodges whom he so admires. Picasso is to be recognised by one stroke of the brush. In the wide spaces of sound which are produced by the incomparable drawn out lines of melody, Garbarek's music gains a bitter clarity. Intensity instead of sentimentality. We cannot hear Garbarek „erroneously“. He is, quite frankly, too coherent, too compelling, too evident as he invites us to our own connotations.

The triumph of simplicity is only to be understood if we ponder on the way by which he got there: an elimination and evolutionary process, a long concentration and compression, compacting, not abstraction. Otherwise this music would be a ponderous game, a shell, and not the carnal sensation, which leaves us speechless.

„Atmosphere“ must not always be a negative conception in music. The Jan Garbarek Group provides, what else more beautiful could we expect from the Arts, the time and the listener a different aggregate state. Music is a foreign country. They do things differently there.

Peter Rüedi