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Veronika Harcsa & Bálint Gyémánt Shapeshifter

Veronika Harcsa: vocals

Bálint Gyémánt: guitar

Nicolas Thys: bass

Antoine Pierre: drums

Live:

06.01.2019 DE-Münster, Jazzfestival
05.03.2019 DE-Kassel, Theaterstübchen
13.03.2019 DE-Berlin, A-Trane
13.04.2019 DE-Heppenheim, Forum Kultur : /Duo
19.04.2019 BE-Brussels, Le Senghor
20.04.2019 UK-London, The Pheasantry Club
13.06.2019 DE-Bremen, Sendesaal
15.06.2019 DE-München, Unterfahrt
27.06.2019 HU-Budapest, Palace of Arts
18.08.2019 DE-Bad Elster, Jazztage
tbc

Veronika Harcsa & Bálint Gyémánt - Shapeshifter

With two albums thus far (*Lifeloover* und *Tell Her*), Veronika Harcsa and Bálint Gyémánt have fascinated press and audiences as a duo since 2014. "Harcsa is an amazingly versatile musician, a brilliant vocalist and gifted entertainer in the best sense," states allaboutjazz.com, and public radio MDR adjudges: "Harcsa's voice oscillates in many different colors. [...] At times she sounds like the jazzy sister of Alanis Morissette and in the next moment she turns into a spherical siren."

On *Shapeshifter*, Harcsa and Gyémánt are starting a new chapter of their collaboration. Playing as a quartet for the first time, with Nicolas Thys on bass and drummer Antoine Pierre, the atmospheric original compositions have more foundation now. Rhythmic finesse, multifarious harmonies and airy, even in dynamically denser parts smartly balanced arrangements develop captivating qualities. "We like the duality between catchy melodies and conceptual soundscapes," Veronika Harcsa explains, "our songs have verses, bridges and refrains like a pop song, but the melodies and harmonies are rooted in jazz aesthetics and modern music." A good example of this balance between direct emotionality and profound ideas is the *Nights*-Trilogy, with its wide musical arches "describing the different faces of a city at night from lonely, empty streets to vibrant night life."

A distinctive dramaturgy is noticeable in many pieces. Often starting out on quiet passages, here tonal colors and vocals create enigmatic or lurking moods. Rhythmic accents and beats only enter after a while and Veronika Harcsa's warm timbred voice swings from dark registers into vibrant heights. Bálint Gyémánt plays acoustic and electric guitar and on the latter designs a broad sound-panorama of flowing sounds and energetic outbreaks with various effects. Although both are only in their mid thirties, Harcsa and Gyémánt sometimes flirt with references to psychedelic rock. Their common Hungarian heritage also shines through occasionally, appearing only subtly though, not in specific references. "You can trace this in the folk improv at the end of my solo in *Last Night*, or in the odd rhythm of *San Francisco*. But these are only traces. The real heritage is in the attitude that rhythm is just as important as the melody."

Veronika Harcsa wrote most of the songs on *Shapeshifter*. They are poetic reflections of her personal life and of the way of the world. "I'm living a double life between London and Budapest, flying all the time, and I think this life on the move is very common to our generation. We (people of the 21st century) became very mobile, and this creates ambiguities. We can seize the world around, go to faraway places, get the best of all the cultures on Earth. In the meantime we're likely to get overwhelmed by the flood of impacts and information, and seek refuge in quietness, hiding from all the noise."

The connection to the two musicians from Belgium - who now for the first time extend the duo Harcsa-Gyémánt to a quartet - goes back several years. Since her studies in Brussels, Harcsa has stayed in touch with the Belgian scene and played in different formations with Nicolas Thys and Antoine Pierre. "I had good hopes that it would work in quartet with Bálint," Harcsa says, "I have the feeling that the Belgian and Hungarian spirit and humor are not far, since we really laugh a lot." Since 2014 Thys and Pierre have been playing together in the quartet *TaxiWars* with Robin Verheyen and Tom Barman, head of the avant-garde pop band *Deus*; furthermore, they have a trio with saxophonist Jeroen van Herzele. Thys' own formation, *The Sound People Project*, stands out due to its instrumentation of harp, clarinet, viola and guitar. Drummer Antoine Pierre started playing with Philip Catherine's band in 2010 when he was only 18 years old. In 2014 he completed his masters degree in Brussels and moved to New York. Two years later he released his first album as bandleader of his octet.

Not only because of its new lineup, *Shapeshifter* marks an impressive step forward in the successful collaboration of Veronika Harcsa and Bálint Gyémánt. The title of the album symbolically signifies the development: the band grows, the sound becomes more opulent, more profound, more complex, and the dynamics even more powerful. At the same time the essence stays present, namely the distinctive melodies and variable grooves, elegant changes of style and the intense singing of an outstanding voice. This is how modern, pan-European songwriter-jazz that values personal expression over ephemeral trends should sound.

Biographical Background of Veronika Harcsa and Bálint Gyémánt

Veronika Harcsa and Bálint Gyémánt have been playing together continuously for more than ten years, after meeting during their studies at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest. In 2008 Harcsa finished her diploma there and switched to the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, where she graduated with a masters degree in 2014. In 2005 already, the multiple-award-winning singer and composer started her first jazz band in which Gyémánt was sometimes featured as a guest. In the following years they celebrated great success together with the electronic quartet *Bin-Jip*. Born in Budapest seven years before the fall of the iron curtain, Harcsa still cherishes open borders and considers herself a passionate European. She spent longer times in Serbia and Romania and in 2014/15 she initiated monthly concert series in Berlin, where she has invited David Friedman, Julia Hülsmann, Samuel Blaser, David Helbock and many others to improvise with her duo. After having composed for film and theatre already, Harcsa was recently involved in projects of modern classical music. She took the leading role playing *Éléonore* in Bohuslav Martinu's Dada opera *Les Larmes du Couteau* at the Martinu Festival in Basel, staged by Oscar prizewinner Jiří Menzel. In a duo with the harpist Anastasia Razvaljaeva she has brought songs of Debussy to the stage.

In the meantime Bálint Gyémánt further developed his talent on acoustic and electric guitars, which includes the precise and masterful use of the loop station and other effects. As a member of the *Transform Quintet* he recorded with Grammy-winner Joey Calderazzo and for his own award-winning debut in 2016 he was able to engage Shai Maestro as special guest.