

As Dave Douglas stated, "These are great times for the trumpet". Being one of the best of the trade himself, you'd think the man knows what he is talking about. Coming out of Chet Baker's and Miles Davis' slipstream, the instrument that best emulates the characteristics of the human voice is being re-positioned by an upcoming generation of players aptly navigating between sharp attack and crooning melancholy. The tide of new names bursting onto the scene is equalled only by what we saw (and still see) among the new wave of female singers. In this flurry, it becomes hard to distinguish oneself without persuasive instrumental mastery and truly original musical vision.

The austrian Lorenz Raab (born in 1975) can lay claim to both. Doing the old "Head-Solo-Head"-thing isn't quite his turf, and neither is catering to idiomatically orthodox listening expectations. Rather, he will embrace jazz, rock, pop, experiment with grooves and beats, incorporate classical and local folk music in ways unheard before. The musical outcome is invariably and inevitably contemporary, surprisingly catchy, original and fresh. In his home country, this has earned him the prestigious Koller award twice; he has performed at important festivals and is a highly sought after musician within the scene.

Lorenz Raab grew up the son of a musical director in Upper Austria, and he is the first trumpeter at the Wiener Volksoper. Under the likes of Kent Nagano, Claudio Abbado and Pierre Boulez, he has contributed to musical collectives with discipline and diligence; in his own bands however (and their personnel has remained remarkably stable over the years) it is all about the freedom of improvisation. He loves unusual line-ups: his „:XY Band features two double basses, drums and zither. Rock sound and DJ-operated sound processing are always welcome ingredients. In his band "Zoe", his projects :xy band and BLEU merge to an octet, forsaking routine and redundancy and thus offering a refreshingly different perspective from the tunnel-minded purisms the jazz scene often contends with.

Lorenz Raab is always looking for new sonic landscapes, and his trio BLEU elegantly fuses the unexpected with the profoundly beautiful. In the ten years of their history, the interplay between the band members - drummer and percussionist Rainer Deixler, along with Tuba and Dulcimer player Ali Angerer are Raab's partners- has constantly evolved. On this CD (their third), the unorthodox instrumentation never gets in the way of substance- a compelling, highly transparent interaction that the musicians seem to be carrying out with the utmost ease.

From the outset, the uniqueness of this music becomes apparent. It does embrace the listener, however; the melodies are anchored in solid

foundations that launch them into wide, recurring circles, thriving on both power and poetry. The ambiences are wide open, nothing is cluttered with unnecessary ingredients. The dramaturgy is diverse and enthralling without ever turning arbitrary. One thing coherently leads to the next, all in the spirit of highly entertaining sharpness and wit. And while all this does not require a proper revolutionary stance, we definitely are in novel territory, steering well clear of the mainstream

This is popular, highly plausible, non-verbose music that passes on clichés. Be it a dreamy ballad, an infectious groove or the mighty depths of a tuba line; doors are opened to new rooms that welcome the listener not as a stranger, but a dear guest who is in for constant marvelling. LR shines on trumpet and fluegelhorn, but he also excels at conceiving persuasive sonic architecture that are beyond compare. This aplomb is both touching and fascinating, and makes this recording something very special, an unexpected gem that keeps growing with every listen.

*Ulrich Steinmetzger
Transl. Sascha Lackner*