

Der Weise Panda

[The Wise Panda]

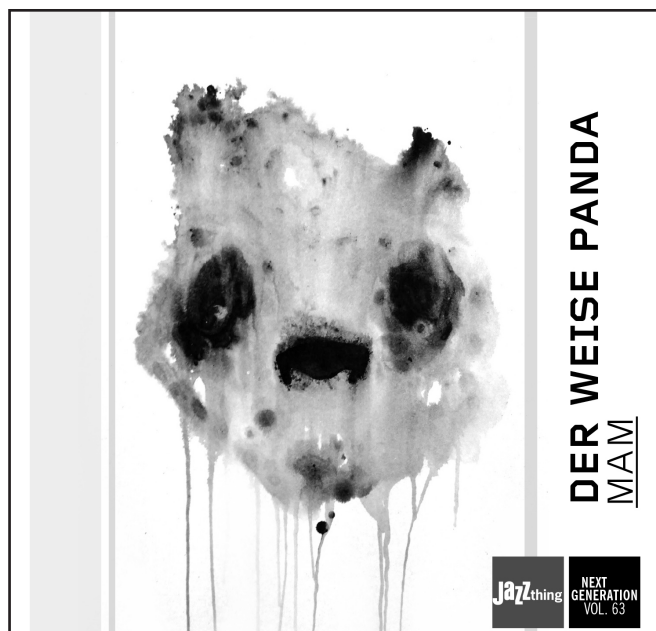
"MAM"

Maika Küster: vocal
Simon Seeberger: piano
Yannik Tiemann: bass
Jo Beyer: drums

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*You think you know how a jazz band sounds?
Dare to err, and listen to the song.
Playful from the heart, faithful instincts, vibrant expression in the form of music.
A band is a sound. This band is an animal.
Disrobe and dance.
The wise panda is coming.*

Wise, mind you. Not white. With that, it would be one of those many clichés again, regardless of whether it would concern this mysterious, cute animal or even this mysterious, cute jazz. Joe Blow and ordinary consumers would not really know what they should do with it. However, it could be so easy. Like jazz, the panda only opens itself via the key of emotions. The band around singer Maika Küster, pianist Simon Seeberger, bassist Yannik Tiemann and drummer Jo Beyer can best be understood if you throw all intellectual ballast overboard and let yourself be completely guided by your instincts. Which does not automatically mean that you have to become mindless. To the contrary: The music of the "wise panda" makes demands and touches you, it develops an idiosyncratic dynamic that you first have to understand and accept to be drawn into its powerful vortex. Another highlight in the dazzling Jazz thing Next Generation series.

Angelika Niescier was actually the godmother for the unusual band name. Even before they started their studies, the four in Cologne were coached by the saxophonist, composer and bandleader. "We often worked all night long and learned an awful lot," Maika Küster recalled. "Angelika once said that she would look like a panda. And then we immediately named the band after this animal." Sometimes there are such coincidences that can open doors. "The wise panda" is not a compulsive, roughly-hewed marriage of convenience of music-making students, who need adequate partners for the purpose of their practical exam preparations, but instead a real labor of love. Küster, Seeberger, Tiemann and Beyer simply fit together, they march to the same beat, understand music as a vehicle of their personal messages and a possibility to leave their own mark on music. "When you start to study, you have to be aware that you are somehow just mediocre. There are always musicians who play faster, sing cleaner, higher, deeper and better and are more skilled," Maika explained, who already distinguished herself as a high school student in Dinslaken due to her unconventional vocal style. "But they do not necessarily fit to me."

"Der Weise Panda" enchants thanks to an unusually high degree of technical maturity, but which never becomes an end in itself. Maika's voice floats somewhere between heaven and earth and jumps to and fro without warning between English and German. She improvises in the best sense of the word in that she lets a first-class listening experience evolve from a simple number such as "Mond" together with her fellow band musicians. "Each of us composes her or his own pieces, and everyone contributes new ideas. However, the pieces need to have been developed sufficiently so that the band can work with them. There must be scores and an idea of what you want to do with the piece. Then we rehearse and see how the whole thing develops. If things go well, the piece becomes more beautiful than you yourself would have imagined. "This is the case in the touching title track "MAM", which Maika dedicated to her mother, the artist Karina Hubrich.

The jury of Sparda Jazz Award found the songs so fascinating that they awarded the newcomer ensemble first prize in 2015. Not only jury member Klaus Doldinger praised its ensemble playing, stage presence and its natural, uncontrived manner. Who would have thought that? "Der Weise Panda", actually inherently lazy and sluggish, but cuddly and pretty smart, is now in the fast lane. Maika brooded that she had hoped it to be where they are now maybe in five years. The gift of time can use the creature in the meantime to continue to grow, to conquer the hearts of as many people by storm as possible and leave its unmistakable scent marks in the German jazz scene.

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