

Misha Alperin Her First Dance

Misha Alperin: piano; **Arkady Shilkloper:** french horn, flugelhorn; **Anja Lechner** violoncello

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“Her First Dance” marks a welcome return for Ukrainian-born pianist Misha Alperin. It is his first new recording for ECM in a decade: although “At Home” and “Night” were released, respectively, in 2001 and 2002, both were recorded in 1998. That was the year Alperin invited German cellist Anja Lechner to join him at the Vossa Jazz Festival in Norway (from which performance the “Night” project and ensemble developed). This newest albums of solos, duos and trios picks up the productive association with Lechner and also features Alperin’s musical partner of many years, Russian virtuoso horn player Arkady Shilkloper. Misha’s own compositions and piano playing are foregrounded. There is no one else in ‘jazz’, to use the term loosely, who plays with a touch at all like Alperin’s. His crisp articulation, even in the faster tempos - see the opening “Vayan” here, or the piece called “Jump” - testifies to his first career as a ‘classical’ musician, interpreting the giants of 20th century Russian music. Here all pieces except “The Russian Song, written by Shilkloper (and performed as a duo by Arkady and Anja Lechner), are composed by Alperin. “Vayan”, “April in February”, “Lonely in White” and “Via Dolorosa” are solo pieces. The title track is played Arkady and Misha, while “A New Day” and “Frozen Tears” are duos for piano and cello. All three musicians appear on “Tiflis”

Born in 1956, Misha Alperin grew up in rural Bessarabia, the eastern part of Moldavia. He played with folk musicians while also studying composition and piano, and was subsequently a member of the Moldavian Jazz Ensemble of saxophonist/violinist Semjon Shirman. He came late to jazz, hearing recordings of Charlie Parker and Coltrane only when he was 24. Overwhelmed by the strength of the music, he transcribed solos by the great hornmen and endeavoured to adapt them for the keyboard. The first jazz pianists who caught his attention were Art Tatum, Red Garland, Thelonious Monk, Lennie Tristano and Keith Jarrett.

Alperin moved to Moscow in 1983 where he met Shilkloper - then working with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, the orchestra of the Bolshoi Theatre and the Bolshoi Brass Quintet - and began, experimentally, to cross-reference elements of the Russian and Romanian folk musics of the Moldavian region with his subjective understanding of the jazz tradition. "It was a big challenge to see if I could contribute to Misha's concept," Shilkloper has said, "because the Moldavian music he had adapted is noted for the demands it makes on horn players." Alperin had less doubts, convinced of the universality of the music. “I wish to break down barriers and borders not only geographically, but also historically - the borders between epochs.” Arkady contributes his own “Russian Song” to the present album.

The first Alperin/Shilkloper European tour brought the duo to Oslo, where *Wave of Sorrow* was recorded in 1989, attracting the interest of European critics. "Alperin's compositions are impossible to classify in terms of genre," Thomas Rothschild wrote in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. "They are for the most part aphoristic pieces, indebted as much to Bartók, Schnittke or Kurtág as to Jarrett or Corea. They are unique indeed, and must be heard."

Since 1993 Alperin has been based in Oslo where he is professor of jazz piano and improvisation at the Norwegian State Academy of Music. He has since become a central figure in the new Northern jazz, influencing a whole generation of players, and working with Norway's leading improvisers (including Jon Christensen, heard on Alperin's "North Story" and "First Impression" discs of 1995 and 1997).

Anja Lechner is a member of the Rosamunde Quartet, whose ECM recordings include performances of compositions by Tigran Mansurian, Valentin Silvestrov, Dmitri Shostakovich, Anton Webern, Thomas Larcher, Joseph Haydn and more. Lechner is also versed in improvisation in different traditions, working with musicians from Dino Saluzzi to François Couturier. Her most recent collaboration with Saluzzi, "Ojos Negros", was a Down Beat Album of the Year, and an album with Vassilis Tsabropoulos, "Chants, Hymns and Dances", with music of Gurdjieff and Tsabropoulos, topped Amazon.com's classical charts.

"Her First Dance" was produced by Manfred Eicher at Auditorio Radio Svizzera in Lugano, increasingly a location for ECM recordings. Other discs recorded there in recent seasons include Anouar Brahem's "Le Voyage de Sahar", François Couturier's "Nostalghia – Song for Tarkovsky", Enrico Rava and Stefano Bollani's "The Third Man" and Bollani's "Piano Solo".