

Julia Hülsmann Trio

The End Of A Summer

Julia Hülsmann: piano; **Marc Muellbauer:** double-bass; **Heinrich Köbberling:** drums

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“Julia Hülsmann is a highly imaginative player possessing a rich harmonic language, 24-carat melodic sensibility and incredible rhythmic suppleness.”

- Jazzwise, UK

“The End Of A Summer” is the ECM debut of the Julia Hülsmann Trio, its programme of songs without words guided by the playing, composing and aesthetic priorities of its leader. Hülsmann has said, “My music is all about melody”, and everything in her work is informed by it, a rigorous sense of poetic compression uniting the writing and arrangements, the solos, the improvising, even the group interaction.

Sightings of German jazz groups are rare on ECM, from the outset an internationally-inclined German label. But the clearly delineated music of Julia Hülsmann’s trio is channelling more than German jazz. Her musical sense of purpose was reinforced by studies in New York with Richie Beirach, Maria Schneider and Jane Ira Bloom. Jazz on ECM is amongst the influences the group members share, but individually they have been inspired by the most diverse musical experiences. Drummer Heinrich Köbberling, for instance, hears parallels between the ‘minimalism’ of house and techno music and the simple pleasure of a pulsing cymbal in a jazz ballad. Bassist Marc Muellbauer, who writes labyrinthine music for his group Kaleidoscope and once participated in workshops with Stockhausen and Kagel, recognizes that complexity can be a vantage point from which to view the value of simplicity. In the trio, he says, “the music is often *between* the notes.”

Muellbauer has played with Hülsmann since 1996, when both were at Berlin’s Hochschule der Künste; Köbberling became the drummer five years later. Since then the trio has built a substantial German following “while hardly playing a trio gig”. Instead the focus has been on projects with guest singers, and settings of poetry. A recording with verse of E.E. Cummings and the voice of Rebekka Bakken (“Scattering Poems”, ACT 2003) won the German Jazz Award and sold prodigiously. It was followed by discs and/or concerts with singers Anna Lauvergnac, Roger Cicero and Daniel Mattar.

The lyrical spirit prevails on the present all-instrumental recording, whose impetus came from Manfred Eicher. The producer and the pianist first met at the Jazzahead Festival in Bremen in 2006, subsequently exchanging ideas that would lead to the recording of “The End of a Summer” in Oslo’s Rainbow Studio in March 2008. (In the same month, the trio members contributed to a second ECM disc: “Fasil” with guitarist Marc Sinan, release of which is scheduled for 2009).

Material featured on “End Of A Summer” was composed over the last decade, the most recent piece being the title track, which was “written quickly, in a melancholy mood, with summer fast disappearing. It’s about saying goodbye to a few things, with a tearful smile.”

“Sepia” is a piece inspired by the chromaticism of Jobim’s “Picture in Black And White.” “Sepia’s” changed a great deal in performance. It started out as a slow bossa, but the recorded version is quite free.”

“Gelb”, by contrast was a commissioned work on a theme related to beat writer Ruth Weiss, “part of suite of colours. I wanted to write something simple that grooved.” “Not The End Of The World” is from Hülsmann’s New York years, a study on a descending scale. From the same period, “Senza” explores polyphonic and contrapuntal elements, as the theme returns each time with different

accompaniment. Hülsmann credits former teacher Beirach with underlining the need to find and maintain an original voice in her writing. “He emphasized that I had to drill deep into my material and dig out what is authentic in it.”

Muellbauer and Köbberling also contribute material. Muellbauer’s “Last One Out” was “originally conceived as a piece for saxophone trio, no harmonies intended. We’ve done it many different ways, including fast and open. Now we play it slow, and there’s lots of chords but no harmony and the theme arrives only at the end.”

Köbberling’s “Konbawa” (Japanese for “good evening”) was written in New York in 1999, and “Where In The World” also celebrates a New York experience: “I used to go every week to hear Kurt Rosenwinkel’s group. They had a song in 3/4 which I really liked and I wanted to write something in that spirit. I tried but could not – and something totally different emerged.” Hülsmann: “On this piece I play only the chords Heinrich wrote out. Very well-chosen, beautiful chords.”

In this context, however, even pop singer Seal’s “Kiss From A Rose” sounds like a piece that Hülsmann might have written. Her insistence on working with the substance of a melody and a staunch disinclination to over-embellish puts her in a jazz tradition that includes such stubborn spirits as Monk, Carla Bley and Ahmad Jamal. Of the Seal tune she says: “I heard it on the radio and liked it. The original arrangement is rather bombastic: we made it ‘small’ and more intimate but didn’t change much – simply helped it to breathe better.”

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Julia Hülsmann was born in 1968 in Bonn, and began playing piano at the age of 11. She formed her first band at the age of 16. In 1991 she moved to Berlin, and played in the Bundesjugendjazzorchestra under the direction of Peter Herbolzheimer. She currently teaches in Berlin and Hannover and plays in projects with Marc Sinan, Celine Rudolph, and others, as well as her own groups.

Bassist Marc Muellbauer (born in London in 1968) also leads his own nine-piece band, Kaleidoscope. He has played contemporary classical music with the ensemble United Berlin, and Argentinean tango in the quintet Yira Yira, as well as jazz with diverse formations. Muellbauer teaches double-bass at the Hanns Eisler Academy in Berlin.

Drummer Heinrich Köbberling (born in Bad Arolsen/Hessen in 1967) has worked with Aki Takase, Ernie Watts and many others: he has played on around 50 jazz albums. A 1997 leader date, “Pisces” included Marc Johnson and Ben Monder as sidemen. Köbberling is also a member of the post-techno/house group 8doogymoto. He teaches drums at the FMB Conservatory in Leipzig.

The Julia Hülsmann Trio is on the road in Germany this autumn and winter to promote “The End of a Summer”, with concerts in Essen (September 13), Heidelberg (October 7), Munich (October 17), Berlin (October 25), Darmstadt (November 21), Bielefeld (January 30), Wuppertal (January 31), Kiel (March 19), Bremen (March 20).