



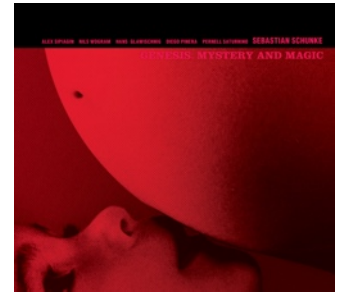
GENESIS. MYSTERY AND MAGIC

Sebastian Schunke

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Sebastian Schunke – Compositions, Piano

Alex Sipiagin – Trumpet, Flugelhorn

Nils Wogram – Trombone

Hans Glawischnig – Bass

Diego Pinera – Drums

Pernell Saturnino – Percussion

Among the young musicians of today is a pianist who is known not only for his pianism, but also for his soul-searching intellect and unquenchable spirit. This pianist is Sebastian Schunke. The pianist, like so many literary and musical adventurers has always looked forward—so far forward that in October 2011 Mr. Schunke had visions of his own bodily and spiritual death, with a prodigious album entitled *Life and Death*. In the discovery of his own mortality and seeming to have a musical out-of-body experience, Mr. Schunke imagined his entire human journey up to the end of his earthly journey in a series of abstract melodic and harmonic inventions. There, in that album

and before the echoes of the last notes died, there seemed to be the hope that Mr. Schunke would awake again in some musical Valhalla to herald us again with another grand artistic odyssey, the experience of which he would turn to music; to a fine and memorable suite for all to hear.

It seemed that our prayers were heard. Sebastian Schunke indeed has made that journey and preserved it for posterity. *Genesis: Mystery and Magic* is just that record, a Homeric account of a journey to the heart of the forces that stir the soul of the wayfaring artist always looking for new adventure, always searching; looking to record history, and per force, his place in it—in the mysterious and magical circumstances that surround him or her there. For this, always moving forward on that swart ship Mr. Schunke must look back, being ever the pianistic and musical palaeontologist he must go, so he believes, to the beginning of all things musical, to the Challenger Deep of music, where it all began for him. “Genesis”: the word is fraught with meaning and circumstance. The Greeks called it “genisthai,” which meant “to be born” and this is likened to “provenance,” the origin or formation of something like the earth and of the Bible. Here, however, not to be mistaken as being mundane, Mr. Schunke means to suggest that he is examining the formation of time and space and its relationship to his art—his pianism—and that has led an odyssey of a profound nature. This magisterium is informed by dwelling on the mysterious and magical nature of music as it is formed by the collision of European polyphony, with the glorious polyrhythms intrinsic to post-colonial Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean musical cultures. And then there is the nature of “mystery”—the enigma of something impossible to understand or explain, yet exquisite to behold; and “magic”—the power of apparently influencing the course of events by the use of sorcery or the powers of enchantment. And this powers the music that the pianist has created from the first notes of his first chart.

“Adelante” uncoils like a whip cracking the proverbial order: “Vamos, adelante!” (“Just go forward”) as if the musicians were responding to the silent order to advance without looking back. They leave that conundrum to their pianist and leader, Sebastian Schunke, who, with left hand over right and right behind left, creating harmonic waves that rise and fall, and exploding arpeggios, leans back to examine the genesis of his own adventure into the trenches of Afro-Cuban and European music via the blues and jazz idioms all nestling cheek-by-jowl in the swaggering melody with which he emerges from the smokey bars in which this was learnt. Along the way Mr. Schunke picks up not only the majestic percussion colourists Diego Pinera and Pernell Saturnino, but also the Russian-born New-York based trumpeter Alex Sipiagan and the magnificent trombonist from Braunschweig, Germany, Nils Wogram. The burnished harmonies provided by the two musicians lend a polished glow to the melody as it races onward, egged on by the vocalistic approach of the brass-men.

It is no longer a matter of conjecture as to who one of the most exciting bassists is today. Hans Glawischnig is a true maestro of his bass violin. And on “Song for Antje” he proves why: with a majestically executed opening solo con arco as the pianist gently urges him on. AS the song opens out almost like the revelation of a rose from a bud, serenaded by Mr. Sipiagin, Mr. Glawischnig has a glorious mini break pizzicato, before chivalrously laying down his mantle for the trumpeter’s return. All the while the pianist quotes a haunting passage from the elegiac melody as if to add a soft undercoat to the canvas of musical landscape, which is continuously daubed by the colours of the bassist and the percussionists. “Ella” unfurls with almost spiritual zeal; a diaphanous melody introduced by the bassist and drummer, before Mr. Schunke announces the main theme of the portrait with a staccato series of notes. Background colours are applied gracefully by the almost haiku-like rhythmic paint brushes employed by both trombone and trumpet. The extensive piano solo evokes the gentle swirling strokes of the portrait and the warmth of its hues and brush-strokes is revealed in the angular and sometimes beautifully choppy (read into that ecstatic drumming by Mr. Pinera) nature of the song’s architecture until, ultimately a gorgeous picture of the mysterious “Ella” emerges. At this point the musical suite is broken up—for the first time by a brief and reflective “Interlude 20–12” examining music in the space and time of an interim era, while the music continues on the B side of Sebastian Schunke’s journey.

“Metamorphosis” is both a darkly Kafkaesque portrait cast in the dissonance and consonance of the turning of human speech into a cubist melody. The design of this piece pivots on the continuously moving drama between deeply Afro-Cuban percussion and piano played by Mr. Schunke with fabulous tumbao, glorious bass-lines, interspersed by exquisite breaks from the rumbling bass, and a trumpet and trombone wailing and speech-like as they add curvilinear aspects to the song that twists and turns by a corkscrew-like solo by Mr. Glawischnig's bass. “Rapsodia No. 2 ‘Deep’” seems to recreate a Joseph Conrad-like journey into the heart of darkness. The only aspect of the music that assures the rescue of the musicians from their perilous journey is the fact that the dark aspect of the colours also comes with a splendid glow. If Sebastian Schunke's pianism is to be measured in terms of a European concert pianist then here the soaring nature of his brilliant runs and arpeggios might hark to his brilliant technique and virtuosity. It also bodes well for the trombonist Nils Wogram, who employs human smears and speech-like phrasing to create a solo of rare and unbridled ingenuity. Another brief “Interlude 20–12” and Mr. Schunke introduces his mighty tribute to the pianists that went before him. “Misterioso,” which naturally suggests a lexicon employed by the legendary Thelonious Monk as well as a pantheon of greats from Herbie Nichols to Bud Powell to Don Pullen and Cecil Taylor forms the return journey of the pianist from the beginning of his education in the University of Life and his musical odyssey from Germany to New York and back. Impressionism collides with musical Cubism as Mr. Sipiagan introduces the theme to a viscous churning harmony created by bass and piano together with trombone and percussion led by a powerful ostinato passage that opens up the melody that, in turn, swells and swaggers as if riding the roaring tide of music that crashes onto an imaginary shoreline reminiscent of both America and the Africa which resides both there and in the Caribbean. The sinister piano line announces both exploration and resolution of this glorious piece, to end what is possibly one of the most exciting musical journeys to come from the pen of Sebastian Schunke.

Sebastian Schunke's music has completed a musical odyssey from life to death and back again. On this ever so memorable record of a journey to the genesis of his space and time, dappled with musical notation both written and improvised Mr. Schunke has created one of the most compelling musical suites in recent memory.

Raul da Gama