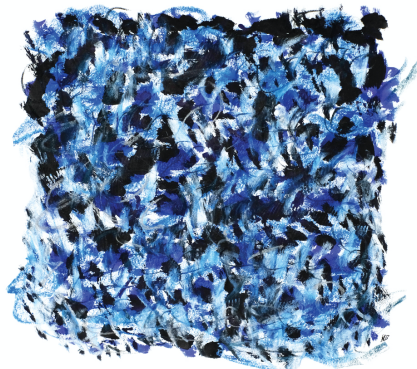


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VOSTOK REMOTE ISLANDS



Fie Schouten Vincent Courtois Guus Janssen



Translation:

Musical Atlas of Remote Islands

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Meticulously researched maps, forbidden manuscripts, anonymous reports, medieval codices, letters of hope and despair, this is how writer Judith Schalansky's trio of exceptional instrumentalists Fie Schouten, Vincent Courtois and Guus Janssen conceptualize the remarkable islands.

Yes, the album *VOSTOK Remote Islands* contains improvised music inspired by the bestselling book *Atlas of Remote Islands* (subtitled *50 islands I've never set foot on and never will*) by German writer and designer Judith Schalansky from 2009. field.) The music is a true echo of her writing about the islands from the perspective of a person looking at historical maps, forbidden manuscripts of island actors, anonymous accounts of events, medieval codes binding the local reality, letters of hope and despair from those who have lived on the islands or even just set foot on them. It is up to each reader, or rather listener, to decide how much to be carried away, whether to be tempted into imaginary journeys in search of ancestral secrets, and whether to be unafraid of the often sinister labyrinths of memory or of "mere" imagination.

This project is the brainchild of clarinetist Fie Schouten, who finally selected twelve islands out of fifty. She plays not only the bass clarinet, which is her domain (I have written about her in the past, most recently here), but also the clarinet and basset horn. Joining her on the album, which was released on 24 November, are cellist Vincent Courtois and pianist Guus Janssen, who also plays organ, harmonium and harpsichord. They are thus a trio of instrumentalists straddling the line between contemporary classical music, free improvisation and progressive jazz. In four pieces they are joined by baritone saxophonist Giuseppe Doronzo. You may know him from his duo with Pino Basile or from the AVA Trio.

The fifty-six-minute album contains, as mentioned above, a dozen tracks, the most extensive of which (12 minutes) is track 6 under the title Raoul Island. This is a volcanic island off New Zealand, essentially the top of a stratovolcano. Here the musicians work with three soundtracks in an elaborate counterpoint of varying intensity and density. Drones of near-psychedelic effect, minimalist pulsation, expanding lyrical surfaces and other sonic experiments are gradually added, the timbral richness enhanced by bass clarinet, organ and baritone saxophone. I consider this track to be the highlight of the album.

However, all the other tracks offer a great experience for the mature listener (and geographer)! Tristan da Cunha is an island in the Atlantic archipelago of the same name, which belongs to the overseas territory of Great Britain, and is again of volcanic origin; moreover, its central volcano was still active in 1961. The piece has a distinctive ambient mood, saturated with rich timbres and culminating in an urgent bass clarinet solo. Diego Garcia is an island in the Indian Ocean also belonging to the UK, which has a military base there, but is otherwise uninhabited. Musically, it is at times jarringly loose, with an immersive ending. Rapa Iti I is the first portrait of an inhabited island in French Polynesia, rendered in fragile, immersive tones. Its second sequel, Rapa Iti II (the penultimate track), evokes the sound of shells and sunshine. Howland is an uninhabited island in the middle of the Indian Ocean, home to a major nature reserve managed by the United States. Music swirls and circulates here. Cocos Islands, an atoll archipelago in the Indian Ocean, belongs to Australia and is, incidentally, warningly polluted with plastic waste. Its music is thick with harmonium, lyrical and mysterious, as if to exorcise the demons of civilisation from there.

The titular Vostok is a coral island in the Pacific Ocean, considered a natural gem, both underwater and above sea level. The mysterious mood of the piece is heightened by harpsichord and baritone sax, then a clarinet splits in, then everything clatters, sonic subtleties alternating with a rumbling. Pukapuka is a coral atoll in the Cook Islands called the Land of Beautiful Girls. Until recently, this small piece of land held an ancient culture and a distinctive language. In the musical portrait, ostinatos and minimalism reign supreme, and the contrast between pearling and wailing is rampant. Then we find ourselves in the Arctic Ocean, on Solitude Island, Russia's Island of Solitude is at first quiet to dreamy, then intensely urgent. Socorro is a volcanic island in the Indian Ocean, the bass clarinet and baritone saxophone babbling, almost churning, then erupting in a graduating duel and entanglement, a lyrically tinged surface emerging at the end. The album's finale belongs to the world's smallest contemporary flightless bird, the Rogers' Hawk, found only on the inaccessible volcanic Inaccessible Island in the South Pacific, part of the Tristan da Culha archipelago (see opening track). The two-minute trifle starts loosely, but then an uncomplicated romp wins out.

A truly original project!