

# Včelí šalvěj s očistným aroma nejsoučasnější hudby

*Bee sage with the cleansing aroma of the most contemporary music*

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The Austrian-Dutch duo **KATHARINA GROSS & FIE SCHOUTEN** released the **excellent album "bee sage"** on the Dutch label Attacca last November. It features five pieces for cello and (contra)(bass)clarinet from the pen of contemporary composers, most of which were composed specifically for this pair of performers.

Cellist Katharina Gross and clarinetist Fie Schouten are dedicated to programming contemporary international repertoire in the field of contemporary classical and experimental music. The latter often uses low-frequency sound in contrast with expressive concepts, also using electroacoustic elements. Such music is also heard on their first recording together, "Bee Sage". Both protagonists play brilliantly, and not only thanks to their stunning virtuosity, but also because of their intrinsic harmony with the unique compositions.

The nearly hour-long album opens with the eight-minute track "Oi kuu" (Oh moon), composed in 1990 by Finnish composer **Kaija Saariaho** (1952-2023), inspired by a truly minimalist poem by the Japanese Buddhist monk Myōe (1173-1232): "clear clear clear clear clear clear clear clear clear clear clear oh moon". The result is a fragile sound world that is born at first from the depths to eventually blend a meditative posture with a thickening, intense excitability.

This is followed by the more than 16-minute composition "Masks" from the pen of Romanian composer **Doina Rotaru** (b. 51). Masks was born in 1989, but only took its final form last year thanks to both performers. The piece contains four movements representing four imaginary masks. They are preceded by a prologue as a kind of theatre, enhanced by the sound of a gong. The masks alternate during dramatic dialogues, sometimes tense, sometimes hysterical, sometimes ironic. The two protagonists also play small percussion instruments, so there is a cello parody based on Bizet's Carmen, accompanied by tambourine. Lyrical melodiousness clashes with urgency, sometimes even frightening, sound hysterics flood the hushed areas, and nervousness prevails in the dialogues.

The 14-minute dive into the delicious depths of "bee sage" (2023) is by the Dutch author of the so-called Spectral Music **Rozalie Hirs** (b. 65). The title "bee sage" is named after the plant *Salvia apiana*, also known as white sage, sacred sage or just bee sage. This highly aromatic plant, native to the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico, is associated with purification, healing and spiritual practices. Therefore, the music is meditative and soundscape-like, partly influenced by baroque rates, but evoking movement. They also evoke joyful emotions. Harmonic spectrums are revealed gradually, allowing the listener a gradual, non-immersive immersion in the music.

The trio of female artists is followed by two representatives of the male composer world. Turkish electroacoustic composer and performer **Tolga Tüzün** (b. 71) contributed a composition of over ten minutes, "Dyssynchrony" from 2023. The Istanbul-based artist

likes to experiment with space; rhythmic anomalies, microtonal excursions into the unknown and contrasts between chords and tones collide in his exciting compositional style. The result is an often almost brutal clash between lyricism and expression, between calm and chaos, alternating moods, positions and structures. The music thus reflects the complexity not only of musical dialogue but also of communication as such. The deliberate incongruity, the disruption of synchronisation, the unpredictable alternation of contradictory expressions (minimalism, jazz syncopations, renaissance polyphony, ambient haze, etc.) all force the listener to concentrate fully. Listening then turns into an unconventional adventure.

The album closes with **Dimitris Andrikopoulos'** (b. 71) equally remarkable composition "When you see..." (10:57), also from 2023. The Greek composer, who lives in Portugal, explores the limits of audibility in his work. The composition is based on the atmosphere and taste of death emanating from the poem "When you see millions of mouthless dead" from the pen of Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895-1915), a British poet of World War I who was killed in the Battle of Loos, France, in October 1915. Ah yes, "it is easy to be dead". The work is a clear and uncompromising condemnation of the romanticisation of war casualties. There is only despair in war, and the dead are mere shadows of the once living. There is only silence and absence... The piece begins with an ambient silence, which gradually turns into restlessness and finally gives way to a fascinating rush of sound. But in the end, the fragility of the last breath and surrender prevails, the coda is marked by a cutting drone.

Extremely impressive music!