

Sounds : improvised modules

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A guide to Switzerland



DANIEL HURTER,
URS KERNEN,
DANIEL V. MOSER-LÉCHAT
Der kleine Schweizermacher.
hep Verlag, Berne.
2021. Third edition. 170
pages. CHF 29.
Only available in German

The content is concise and, for the most part, unsurprising – which is probably why reading it has a deeply calming effect. No word is wasted in any of the short, dry, assiduously proofread sentences that the authors use to condense the essence of Switzerland into 170 pages. Still, the book even manages to devote a few lines (on page 151) to the Covid-19 pandemic and the contentious role of the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH).

“Der kleine Schweizermacher” (Guide to Switzerland) – embellished with the sub-heading “Alles Wichtige über unser Land” (Everything you need to know about our country) – has an ominous tone when you consider that Swiss director Rolf Lyssy criticised Swiss immigration policy in his similarly titled 1978 film “Die Schweizermacher”. The book – now in its third edition – basically turns things around by presenting to Swiss readers the material that they would be advised to study if they had to take a citizenship test themselves.

Most people would be familiar with the book’s contents. Nevertheless, imagine if there was a referendum and your daughter, just turned 18, was about to vote for the first time. You would be glad to have this straightforward guide to help you answer her questions. Finding the right words to explain the many facets of Switzerland to your loved ones is often far from easy. And yes – when reading the book, you get a good idea of what it really takes to pass a citizenship test.

Some slightly outmoded gaps in information cannot be ignored. For example, the entry on literature mentions four men – Francesco Chiesa, Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt – but no one else.

However, entries such as the one on insurance are most insightful. The three authors refer to a “mentality of wanting to protect yourself against all risks in life”. That is why the Swiss like to “take out insurance policies that make little sense or are already covered by other policies”. The authors’ verdict on church bells is just as pithy: “While many love this tradition, some consider church bells a noisy nuisance.” Switzerland in a nutshell – for both Swiss and non-Swiss.

JÜRIG STEINER

Improvised modules



NIK BÄRTSCH:
“Entendre”.
ECM, 2021

Nik Bärtsch – the inspiration behind combos Ronin and Mobile – has long been one of the linchpins of the European jazz scene. However, “Entendre” marks an important step in the Zurich artist’s career. It is Bärtsch’s first-ever solo album after a series of 12 previous recordings. It also represents his first collaboration with iconic German record label ECM. In the 1970s, ECM began championing the pioneering, ethereal soundscapes that have transformed the genre of jazz. Keith Jarrett’s legendary “The Köln Concert” was released by ECM, as were albums by Jan Garbarek, Ralph Towner and Eberhard Weber.

The fact that ECM has released “Entendre” is a compliment to Bärtsch, whose music fits perfectly into the label’s portfolio. His is a brand of jazz that breathes and flows. That fills time and space, unfurling a mantra-like intensity. Recorded in the rounded acoustics of the Stelio Molo auditorium in Lugano, the album consists of six tracks, five of which the 50-year-old musician refers to as “modules”. The sixth piece is called “Déjà-vu, Vienna”. Bärtsch prefers to work to set pieces and cues, building on these repetitively instead of following composed arrangements – full of hypnotic and groovy rhythms, imbued with both a clear structure and a free spirit. Controlled and ecstatic at once, with generous scope for improvisation.

“My music shows a close affinity with architectural spaces, following the principles of repetition and reduction as well as intertwining rhythms,” he says. “Listening to music can be like exploring a room in a house.” A deep statement that belies the immediacy and intuitiveness of Bärtsch’s music.

“Entendre” also exudes a somewhat mystical energy in its trance-like quality, as do so many of the pianist’s other works. Wearing black and resembling a Zen monk with his shaven head and thin strip of beard, Bärtsch visually underscores this impression every time he walks on stage. This translates into a coherent whole. ECM’s involvement makes perfect sense and is fully deserved.

MARKO LEHTINEN