

Dealing with the force of gravity

“Der Mann auf dem Trampolin” is the sixth album by the Gilbert Paeffgen Trio. In it, Gilbert Paeffgen and his comrades-in-arms Claude Meier and Fabian F. Müller overcome gravity. Cùltür met the drummer, dulcimer player and composer Gilbert Paeffgen for an interview.

In the performance “Fugue / Trampoline”, dancer Yoann Bourgeois attempts to climb a staircase. He falls down again and again and overcomes gravity with the help of a trampoline. Falling thus becomes the actual virtuoso dance act, accompanied by the repetitive piano music of Philipp Glass.

The lightness and simultaneous concentration of this performance inspired the jazz drummer and dulcimer player Gilbert Paeffgen to record the album “The Man on the Trampoline”, which he recorded together with his Gilbert Paeffgen Trio last June before a concert at the Chartreuse La Lance in Concise.

He founded the trio 25 years ago. For the past five years, Claude Meier on bass and Fabian F. Müller on piano have been part of it - two musicians with an open mind and a willingness to take unusual paths. Both have a corresponding influence on the creative process.

The autodidact who unites opposites

Paeffgen taught himself to play the drums: on the drums of a school friend in a sacristy. While his school friend lost interest in the instrument, Paeffgen had an intuitive understanding of music right from the start and drumming never let him go. It was not until he was 21 that he took drum lessons from Billy Brooks at the jazz school in Bern. In the early 80s, he toured - as a drummer - with the hammered dulcimer virtuoso Toebe Tobler and then found his way to the hammered dulcimer himself years later via winding paths.

“The two instruments actually contradict each other,” says Paeffgen. While the percussion is a supposedly earthy, wild, archaic instrument in the popular sense, the dulcimer is characterized by the delicate, buzzing sound that comes from the sky and goes to the sky.

According to the musician, he also balances these two forces within himself - the heavy, earthbound and the light, ethereal. Taenzer's performance is also about this ambivalence, about the daily efforts that eventually turn into lightness through practice and composure. “I feel that making music is similar,” says Paeffgen.

“Sometimes something light develops out of something heavy”. The title song “Der Mann auf dem Trampolin” (The Man on the Trampoline) tells of the variation of the monotonous, of the similar, of repetition as a prerequisite for the new. The song contrasts with “Die strenge Kammer”, a virtuoso dulcimer game, in which every note is uncompromisingly set, an intricate song that demands everything in the game, says Paeffgen. And yet the song seems to ripple merrily along, sparkling as if water elves had risen to dance. The classic jazz song “384”, on the other hand, is accompanied by a gentle melancholy. Thoughts have room to wander aimlessly.

When happiness approaches

The song “Glück”, on the other hand, exposes the expectations we associate with happiness. In “Glück”, no cornucopia is poured out. Happiness approaches hesitantly and reveals itself through a smile, a gust of wind, through a lived presence that allows for the unspectacular.

Paeffgen has also taught himself how to compose: “I know frighteningly little about harmony,” he says. “I take what's there, with one resulting in the other.” He is unintentional in this process.

In addition to his own compositions, two new interpretations of Duke Ellington's “African Flower” and “So So Zaeuerli” by Noldi Alder also find their way onto the album with this impartiality.

“The Man on the Trampoline” is better than his other albums, says the jazz musician modestly. In music, he seeks the purifying effect, the concentration that allows him to go into depth. “A composition simply has to be coherent”. Composing has become easier for him over time, says Paeffgen.

He can crystallize what is important and knows better what he no longer wants. And this quintessence flows through the album: although some of the songs are very different, they seem to be held together by an inner strength. It is these meditative elements, such as in the first song “Glockenchip”, the courage to create catchy melodies that combine with the unexpected and open, the finest classical jazz and the joy of improvisation. “Der Mann auf dem Trampolin” invites listeners to reflect on their own lives, on their ideas of happiness, how they deal with daily hurdles and how they persist in certain behaviors and thought patterns. In this way, the album opens the mind to the new. A daydream that raises awareness.

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