



asphalt tango records presents

OANA CĂTĂLINA CHIȚU

Sweet songs of sorrow - old world tango from Bucharest "Da-mi gurita s-o sarut" (give me your mouth, so I can kiss it) was sung by the Romanian tango star Jean Moscopol in the thirties. When Romania's King Mihail was forced to abdicate in 1947, many artists left Romania, crossing the green border to the West. The voices of the elegant tango and foxtrot singers were gone, Jean Moscopol had emigrated, the Gypsy singer Zavaidoc had died and Cristian Vasile had fallen silent: There was no place for "decadent tango" in the Socialist People's Republic of Romania.

"Da-mi gurita s-o sarut" is also sung by Oana Cătălina Chițu who lives in Berlin. Although she does perform in sequined dresses and costume jewellery true to the style of the era, she has done more than just don the melancholic tangos and songs from the repertoire of Maria Tanase as if they were a costume to wear on stage, perfectly mastering the passionate gestures of the tango performers from back then. While the singer and her band have mainly ventured through the music of the Balkans up to now, she has recently come back to the songs of her childhood. Even though tango classics like "Mina Birjar" by Jean Moscopol were not played on Romanian radio in the seventies and eighties, Oana Cătălina Chițu's father sang them every evening on his way home from the village pub where he worked. Snatches of music from another time Oana only knew about from the tales she had heard, but which aroused her curiosity. She learned more from relations in Bucharest who ran an antique lottery shop from the thirties and owned countless old gramophone records by the tango stars. Oana Cătălina Chițu grew up in the backwaters of Romania in rural surroundings and she sang in the church choir of her home village as a child, already learning guitar in her early years. She arrived in Berlin in the nineties, after having made many stops along the way, and studied piano, jazz and opera singing. In 2000, she formed the Balkan band 'Romenca' with the accordion player Dejan Jovanovic who comes originally from Serbia. However, her yearning for the elegant Romanian tangos never left her and, when the Romanian writer Mircea Catarescu wrote an article about the beautiful Gypsy girl Zaraza, triggering off speculation about dramatic jealous scenes between the singer Zavaidoc and his rival Cristian Vasile, this finally urged Oana Cătălina Chițu to give all of those old tango melodies their rightful place and bring them into to the present. In the autumn of 2007, supported by the Romanian Cultural Institute in Berlin, she brought her musical and theatrical performance "Bucharest Tango" to the stage. The theatre was not only filled with Romanians living in exile, but also tango fans who had never previously heard of the tango metropolis of Bucharest. Oana Cătălina Chițu interprets the texts, which mainly deal with love and were mostly written for the tango stars by male composers, with the same sensitivity as the songs of the unforgotten Maria Tanase. Chițu has been a great admirer of Tanase for a long time and her songs have been part of Chițu's repertoire for years. During her concerts, the Romanian singer proffers spontaneous and charming translations of the highly poetic texts of the Tanase songs again and again to the audience.



Oana Cătălina Chițu's warm and sonorous voice does justice to Tanase and to the tangos; the arrangements are original and yet remain in touch with tradition. No other singer of the younger generation from Romania has been able to approach the tangos à la romanesque so authentically and yet so freely. Only a few musicians have attempted to perform the old music, and the unlovingly arranged tango versions with keyboard accompaniment that can be heard in Bucharest restaurants are best forgotten. Although Romania is a country with a rich musical tradition, everyday life there has been dominated since the revolution by cheap pop music. Factory-produced Manele squeezed out the virtuoso music of the suburbs into existence on the cultural periphery, although there has recently been growing interest in the muzica lautareasca.

Oana Cătălina Chițu, now resident in Berlin, and her virtuoso Eastern-European Balkan tango orchestra bring the Tanase songs back to life with a suggestive potency and lend the rather melancholic tangos a different emotional nuance. Chițu's musicians combine tango hits with Jazz, Sinti Swing and Flamenco, take a look at the period between the Wars without a false sense of nostalgia and open the doors to tangos and songs from Bucharest, the grubby Paris of the East, which were up until now only known to insiders.

Grit Friedrich

Songlines Magazine

"...Chițu brings these songs alive with an excellent ensemble of violin, accordion, sax, guitar, cimbalom and bass. The songs are nostalgic and romantic and given a dark, Oriental tone by Chițu's chiaroscuro alto voice and the way she draws out the introduction to 'Aseară Ti-am Luat Basma' surrounded by filigree cimbalom flourishes is gorgeous."

Evening Standard

"A sense of longing pervades this music. With performances like these, Maria Tanase might win that wider recognition, as should Oana Catalina Chitu in her own right."

Radio Bremen

"... Bei solch stilsicherer Interpretation der oft beklagten Vergänglichkeit allen Lebens lässt sich diese doch ganz gut ertragen."

Discography

2013: "Divine"

produced & released by Asphalt Tango Records

2009: "Bucharest Tango"

produced & released by Asphalt Tango Records

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