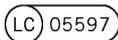




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Release January 22, 2016

Strom & Wasser Reykjavik

Heinz Ratz: vocals, bass
Ragga Gröndal: vocals
Egill Ólafsson: vocals
Sævar Garðarsson: trumpet
Hallvarður Ásgeirsson: guitar
Gudmundur Pétursson: guitar
Ingo Hassenstein: guitar
Enno Dagnus: keyboards
Jóhann Ásmundsson: bass
Haukur Gröndal: clarinet, saxophone, bass
Claudio Spieler: percussion, vocals
Burkard Ruppenner: drums

Strom & Wasser - Reykjavik

In the past years Strom & Wasser [Power & Water], lead by their singer, songwriter, bass player and producer Heinz Ratz, have concerned themselves primarily with German realities. In 2011 Ratz visited many local refugee camps on his Tour of a Thousand Bridges. He thereafter put together the award-winning project The Refugees with musicians and vocalists that he had met there on his tour. Prior to this, Ratz, born in 1968, called attention to homelessness and pollution with spectacular campaigns; three of his productions received the "Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik" [German Record Critics' Award]. With the double album *Reykjavik*, a new cycle begins. It is the first of a planned series, in which Strom & Wasser work together with musicians from different European cultural metropolises. To Ratz this project is also about unforeseen encounters, fresh impressions and lively exchange.

Why turn the attention towards Europe now? While the whole world is discussing the debts of Greece and other southern countries, Heinz Ratz is irritated that the originally humanistic European idea is increasingly being drowned in financial discussions. "In the many conversations with refugees during our last project, I also noticed a huge discrepancy between how we as Europeans think of Europe and how refugees perceive Europe," Ratz explains. With *Reykjavik* and the planned following productions in other cities he wants to draw the attention once more to the cultural richness of the continent. This of course involves reflections about homeland and the foreign, the volition to overcoming borders and the pursuit of freedom, the contemplation about the own identity and the joy of a productive togetherness.

First and foremost though, Ratz wants to create a space for poetical encounter, to find out what develops, when Strom & Wasser are thrown into foreign countries. How much do albums recorded with Icelandic musicians at first, later with Basque, Russian and Albanian musicians differ from each other? Which answers are found in the far north, which stories are told down south? How do myths, landscapes, metropolises or mentalities affect the music and how well does the German language mix and blend with other European languages?

"At first I knew nothing about Iceland," Heinz Ratz describes the initial situation before his first trip to Reykjavik, "so I took a look at the island and went to many concerts there, to approach the musicians afterwards, of whom I intuitively believed that they would go well with my idea on a personal and on a musical level." Ratz' aim was to come as close as possible to Iceland's character, without switching

completely to the terrain of traditional music. And so he found the musician and author Egill Ólafsson, whose songs often revolve around the mysticism, ghosts, heroic sagas and the eternal forces of nature ever-present on Iceland. Ólafsson, born in 1953, has been composing for film and theatre for almost four decades and performs as an actor as well. With his band Studmenn, he was touring Europe in the summer of 2000. During Iceland's debt crisis Ólafsson also had his say politically and in 2013 he ran for the Democratic Party in the parliamentary election. The singer/songwriter Ragga Gröndal, born December 15th 1984, has been present in the Icelandic scene since 2003 already, and in the past few years has been internationally active as well. Statistically, one out of every ten Icelanders owns a Gröndal album. Formerly folk-oriented, she has been moving towards an international pop sound on her more recent albums; nevertheless her gleaming vocals convey a kind of Icelandic spirit, even when you cannot understand the lyrics she's singing. Ragga's brother Haukur will celebrate his 40th birthday end of December, lived in New York from 2001 to 2003 and as a clarinetist and saxophonist he has worked with big names like Chris Speed and David Krakauer. The 39-year-old guitarist and composer Hallvarður Ásgéirsson has spent some time in New York as well; the drummer Jón Indriðason was a founding member of the funk-jazz band Jaguar back in 1998. Guðmundur Pétursson is among the most sought-after and most creative studio musicians of Iceland; on countless albums he exhibits his impressive versatility. Bassist Jóhann Ásmundsson is one of the four founders of the band Mezzoforte, in whose studio "Paradís" Strom & Wasser now also recorded parts of *Reykjavík*.

Altogether Heinz Ratz spent almost four months on the island; "the bizarre volcanic landscape and the attitude towards life there have left a strong impression on me as well. That is why my lyrics turned out more poetic this time." But of course Ratz doesn't entirely refrain from those sarcastically biting side blows, which have always underlined his political stance and his unflinching dedication.

The diverse music of the album is largely a collaborative work of Strom & Wasser, Ólafsson, Pétursson and the Gröndals, completed by ideas of additional musicians, for instance the Austrian percussionist Claudio Spieler. "We [Strom & Wasser] had pre-composed two songs before the Icelanders came to the studio in Hamburg with their drafted ideas," Heinz Ratz tells, "with a session approach we then collectively developed everything else together." The recordings in Hamburg were made with a consistent, unchanging lineup. "Naturally Ragga and Haukur are very well attuned to each other", Ratz tells, "therefore we gave them and Egill a lot of space, also to create an equal balance between the Icelandic and our aesthetic." At the later sessions in Reykjavík, pianist Enno Dugnus and guitarist Ingo Hassenstein were also there regularly alongside Gröndal, Ólafsson and Ratz. Burkard Ruppner and Jón Indriðason took turns on the drums; there was an endless coming and going of various Icelandic instrumentalists at the studio.

The sound of *Reykjavík* combines earthy rock and transparent folk-pop, at the same time everyone involved avoids the obvious stereotypes. The song "...Lism" distinctively points the way right from the start, with gripping vocal textures, clarinet, oriental percussion and stirring rhythm. Ragga Gröndal's and Ólafsson's vocals and Haukur Gröndal's flute sounds particularly poetically evoke the island-mysticism in the ballad "Fernlaternchen" and the shamanic sounding parts of "Furðudyr". A notable highlight is also Ragga Gröndal's atmospheric musical rendering of two verses of Heinrich Heine's poem "Minnegruß in Þú ert sem bláa blómið". "Lavamädchen" and "Professor Muck" develop completely different facets: here the familiar vehement Strom & Wasser-mix of harsh rap, edged funk and wild ska-punk flashes. Altogether the 19 pieces on *Reykjavík* exceptionally lively recount what quality can emerge, when one concerns oneself with people, ideas and attitudes towards life from a different region. In this way Strom & Wasser's *Reykjavík* is again a plea for communication and understanding in the form of sound and a successful example of what develops when different cultures meet on an equal footing.

Live:

21.01.2016 DE-Berlin, Wabe
22.01.2016 DE-Plauen, Malzhaus
24.01.2016 DE-Lutterbek, Lutterbeker
25.01.2016 DE-Hamburg, Birdland
26.01.2016 DE-Karlsruhe, Tollhaus
27.01.2016 DE-Bonn, Pantheon
28.01.2016 DE-Darmstadt, Centralstation
29.01.2016 DE-Ravensburg, Zehntscheuer
31.01.2016 DE-Wiesbaden, Schlachthof

Links:

Web: <http://www.strom-wasser.de>

Traumton: <http://www.traumton.de/label/releases/?id=284&lang=de>