



VON SPAR

UNDER PRESSURE



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“It’s the terror of knowing what this world is about”, David Bowie sang in 1981, backed by Queen. He performed the remarkable feat of taking a song with such lyrics and creating a hit. Von Spar’s “Under Pressure” also knows what this world is about, with its intimidatory posturing, acute social competition and the fight for survival as we enter an age of surveillance capitalism. The music’s inherent urgency is in evidence from the very first beat, yet it still appears to float freely, creating space for reflection and self-interrogation.

What others call a “band”, Von Spar see as a modular system. The creative community of Sebastian Blume, Jan Philipp Janzen, Christopher Marquez and Phillip Tielsch is in a state of constant flux. Von Spar is an interface, providing access to rediscovery and fresh experience of, to all intents and purposes, the familiar.

“Under Pressure” is their fifth album, not counting their homage to Can (recorded live with Stephen Malkmus). 15 years have passed since their debut “Die uneingeschränkte Freiheit der privaten Initiative”, five since the “Streetlife” album. On closer examination, there is a somewhat chameleonesque quality to Von Spar’s discography. Their records are the result of continuous metamorphosis, opening wormholes to post punk, krautrock and 80s art pop. The constants: rhythmic refinement and harmonic quantum leaps, swirling synthesizer arpeggios, backwards guitars with no hint of retrogradation.

The eight songs on “Under Pressure” were recorded in Von Spar’s Dumbo Studio in Cologne, with guests from Toronto, Tokyo, New York, London and Nashville adding noteworthy contributions. As on “Streetlife”, the formative voice belongs to Chris A. Cummings alias Marker Starling. His distinctive falsetto graces over half of the songs, asking: “Is there a cure for this / Unhappiness, happiness?”

On the opening track, Cummings is joined by Eiko Ishibashi (Kafka’s Ibiki, Jim O’Rourke, Merzbow) in a Japanese dream sequence exploring where they might get to if the shackles of the flesh are cast off. Punk and reggae professor Vivien Goldman (The Flying Lizards) picks up the thread and liberates herself from the ghosts of the past on “Boyfriends (Dead Or Alive)”. Lætitia Sadier (Stereolab) sings on the album’s kraut-pop hit “Extend The Song” which could run and run for ever, powered by motoric energy: “If someone would ask me / Could I go on?”

Less answers, more questions – this is the song’s greatest leitmotif. It is left to low-fi maverick R. Stevie Moore (he of 400 albums) to pose the question on “Falsetto Giuseppe” “Should I Worry?” Of course!

Arno Raffener

Promotion

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Tracklisting

1. A Dream (Pt 1) (w/ Eiko Ishibashi)
2. A Dream (Pt 2) (w/ Christopher Cummings)
3. Happiness (w/ Christopher Cummings)
4. Extend The Song (w/ Laetitia Sadier)
5. Better Late (w/ Christopher Cummings)
6. Not To Forget (w/ Christopher Cummings)
7. Boyfriends (Dead Or Alive) (w/ Vivien Goldman)
8. Falsetto Giuseppe (w/ R. Stevie Moore)
9. Mont Ventoux

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