

Anna Maria Jopek : ID – the art of coexistence

Anna Maria Jopek is as Polish as one can be – not only with her gentle beauty, but first of all with her music, coming straight from the heart. Yet her latest project features a bunch of true giants from around the world. The Brazilian bossa nova genius Oscar Castro Neves meets serene ECM recording pianist from Norway Tord Gustavsen. An exotic voice of Tunesian oud virtuoso and vocalist Dhafer Youssef blends with brave and adventurous notes of Branford Marsalis' soprano saxophone. Richard Bona's trademark Douala vocals and bass lines coexist with sensual French singing by percussion wizard Mino Cinelu. Manu Katche and Christian Mc Bride provide powerful grooves... yet then there is this amazing, sophisticated vocal (in fact – about a zillion of them so carefully layered!) by Anna Maria that makes it all work. That makes this dialogue of such different cultures not only possible, but fascinating to observe. That makes this music unique, one of the kind. Personal.

'All these people have been my inspiration for the last decade – Anna Maria says humbly. It's an amazing experience to have finally met them, to exchange energies and ideas, to learn from them and – hopefully – to create some original music with them in mind. I am Polish. I come from the vast meadows of central Poland, I've been brought up with its musical traditions, but it does not make my ID complete. Especially now, with the world getting so much smaller every single day. I truly believe that the new music might emerge from coexistence of so many so different voices, influences, traditions, religions. By far – this is the most important work I've ever done.'

In Poland **ID** went platinum in just two weeks. The triumphant tour, featuring Dhafer Youssef, Mino Cinelu and Richard Bona followed with sold out venues and standing ovations. Parts of these events will eventually turn into a one great live album in the fall of 2008.

It was not, however, her first experience with the world-class masters and musical heroes. She's been known for probably the most influential and groundbreaking project in Polish popular music.

'Just thirty seconds of Anna's tune belong to the most beautiful music I've heard in months' - Pat Metheny said at the press conference when their album 'Upojenie' went gold on the day of its release back in 2002.

'I couldn't think of anything more inspiring, motivating and ear opening than working with Pat. He's been my first and most important mentor for years, but to actually make music with him was the most thrilling experience in my life...' - Anna Maria Jopek commented on their project. 'Anna Maria Jopek and Friends with Pat Metheny: Upojenie'. The unique tribute to the master composer, guitarist and 18-time Grammy Award Winner became an instant classic, selling of over 80,000 copies in just thirty days.

Anna Maria is a classically trained pianist and graduated from Chopin's Academy of Music in Warsaw, Poland. After briefly studying in Manhattan School of Music's Jazz Department Anna decided not to play Mozart concertos anymore and trade her beloved Ravel for Keith Jarrett. Philharmonic Hall for small, smoky clubs and theatres.

'Please do not file my music under jazz', Anna Maria Jopek says though. Nor under pop, folk... whatever. I embrace a lot of influences. Jazz is by far the most important in its freedom, its harmony and its sense of time but I was brought up with the old Polish folk songs. So I'm kind of rooted here in all these Slavic landscapes and sounds. With 14 albums of her own Anna Maria Jopek performed and

recorded with all the important artists in Poland including numerous concerts and recordings with an ECM-based trumpeter Tomasz Stanko. During the Jazz Jamboree International Festival 40th Anniversary Gala in 1998 she performed with one of the greatest jazz saxophonists of our times: Joe Lovano. In 2008 she's scheduled to perform with yet another all time hero of hers: Bobby Mc Ferrin at the Warsaw Summer Jazz Days festival on July 5th.

In 2003 at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw, invited by the First Family, Anna gave a small recital broadcasted live and dueted with the pop icon, former King Crimson frontman, Gordon Haskell. Although she plays open air gigs for 5,000 fans, as happened in Warsaw in June of 2001, and 8,000 in Augustów in July 2003, Anna prefers an intimate setting to a huge concert hall and performs about 100 concerts each year, from Toronto to Vienna, London to Berlin. Yet her Carnegie Hall appearance (as a special guest in her friends' project) on January 4 2004, remains one of the most cherished and memorable thrills of her professional life. Yes, she has been given awards, including Michel Legrand's Personal Award in Witebsk in 1994, not to mention literally all of the Polish prestigious awards and Gold and Platinum records. Nevertheless Anna Maria Jopek is known for saying: 'Music itself is the highest award for me. And the greatest challenge. With so many questions remaining to be answered'.

Let's leave the last word to Pat Metheny: 'Anna is original, unique, different. She's brave, she's modest, she's open. She's a great musician. What she's been doing all her life is just trying to choose the best notes.

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