

Lucia Cadotsch Speak Low II



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We Jazz Records

Berlin-based Swiss vocalist **Lucia Cadotsch** returns with her celebrated **Speak Low trio** for their second album, released by **We Jazz Records** on 27 Nov. "**Speak Low II**" features the long-standing and road-tested ensemble of Cadotsch on voice, **Otis Sandsjö** (of Y-OTIS) on tenor saxophone and **Petter Eldh** (of Koma Saxo) on double bass. This time around, the band also introduces guest artists **Kit Downes** on Hammond organ and **Lucy Railton** on cello. "Speak Low II" picks up where their genre-bending and forward-looking debut album left off, introducing new shades into the band's sound and also diving even deeper into the songs they tackle. The group picks apart their hand-picked material, exposing the very essence of the compositions, treating the songs in a way which is at the same time lovingly respectful and naturally fresh while assembling them anew.

"Speak Low II" comes almost five years after the band's lauded debut, and proves the depth of the band's approach right from the start. At the core of the trio's operation is an openness to their love of the music and to their surrounding scene(s). The album comes across as a unified collection of songs made truly theirs and found through listening to records and spending time with their musician friends, often on the road. The highly evolved band sound and the equality of the musicians shines through on the Speak Low sound, as the group uses their 100+ performances together as a vehicle for the development of their music.

"The first album was filled with pretty famous songs, but that was actually not at all intentional" explains Cadotsch. "Those were just my favourite songs of the previous 10 years and we started working on making them ours, musically. We were playing around with concepts for the second album, but soon realised that we just needed to find the right songs and adapt them organically, which comes through in how we interact with the songs and each other. This time around, we wanted to dig deeper and made finished arrangements of around 20 tracks, half of which we ditched in the process. The ones that made the cut have been through a lot and they just felt right for us."

The opener and also the first single of the album, "**Azure**" by **Duke Ellington**, is a testament to the band's process. A highly rhythmical track without any percussion instruments, the "Speak-Lowed" version of the composition morphs into a sort of matte sonic liquid, dryly acoustic yet spacey and fluid. An additional shade comes courtesy of Kit Downes on the organ, feeling like a natural extension of the group sound rather than a feature, per se. The rhythmic element is carried on from another project involving Petter Eldh, and the original encounter with the composition came courtesy of pianist Pablo Held, whose Cologne session Cadotsch featured in.

P.T.O. to read more



The ECM recording organist Downes initially joined Speak Low on stage at a London date years ago, his musical mindset proving the right fit for Speak Low's already full-bodied yet lean sound. With songs like "Azure" and "Black Is the Color Of My True Love's Hair", it seems like his space has been right there for the taking all along. But also that the spot is a very specifically shaped one and not a mere "feature slot". The same can be said about the space now occupied by cellist Lucy Railton on "Black Is the Color Of My True Love's Hair" and "Ballad Of the Drowned Girl".

"We also play all of these tracks featuring extra players with the trio when we play live" confirms bassist Eldh. "Then it's also about being sensitive to the surroundings and creating new music with the room. Some of these versions on the album have already travelled a long way with us, 'Black Is the Color...' being one of the very early ones that have stayed with us but only now made it to the record."

As far as Speak Low sonics go, the vocalist often draws the main attention as the narrator but it would be downright impossible to change any of the musicians in the core trio. Just watch them live once and you'll notice how tightly-knit a unit they are. The kismet is real, and the freedom within the songs is evident on the album. Just practicing wouldn't bring about such closeness. Add chemistry and some six years of active touring and you're getting closer. Then there's the "it" factor, too elusive to describe in full.

As noted above, "Azure" is an example of the band's community vibe and influences ranging across a large part of what is considered "contemporary European jazz music" today (just look at their respective CVs). "Black Is the Color...", on the other hand, brings forth their Alan-Lomax-esque regard for the tradition of folk song passed on from one generation to another. But perhaps it's the double-header "What's New / There Comes a Time" which really hammers home the point of how organically Speak Low operates.

"We were really diggin' the Ahmad Jamal Trio version of 'What's New' [from 'But Not for Me / At the Pershing']" says Lucia. "It was Lucy Railton who originally showed the track to Petter, especially highlighting the hip-hop-esque break in the song just before the two-minute mark. So modern for the late 50's! This combination of being traditional and avantgarde really resonated with us as we started to work with the track. Then the Tony Williams song 'There Comes a Time' started creeping in, too, becoming the second part of it. We were really inspired by the mood of that one and I really love those lyrics, how he sings 'I love you more when you're spiteful.'"

In a way, the Speak Low approach could be described as archaeological. Three music lovers connecting with songs found at various sources, readily throwing away any ideas that don't seem natural to them, and hanging on tight to the ones that do.

Turns out there is a concept to "Speak Low II". It's the band itself, their shared musical development and their love of music.

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