

Weit über das Land [Peter Stamm]

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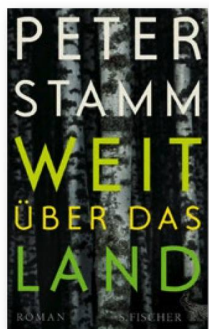
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Alone through the world



PETER STAMM:
"Weit über das Land",
S. Fischer Verlag, 2015.
222 pages, CHF 28.90,
around EUR 20.

"Thomas and Astrid had put the children to bed and were sitting on the wooden bench in front of their house with a glass of wine..." Everything appears to be absolutely normal in this family living in German-speaking Switzerland who have just returned from a holiday by the sea. But Thomas suddenly stands up, walks through the garden gate and simply disappears. When Astrid realises the next day that her husband is probably not coming back, she is left with no choice but to carry on and continue looking after their two children.

In his latest novel "Weit über das Land", Peter Stamm writes about leaving and being left. These two perspectives – conveyed by the two main characters, Thomas and Astrid – are skilfully interwoven. The crisp and pithy sentences typical of Stamm characterise the plot lines, which are enhanced by hypothetical possibilities through the imaginary worlds of the two characters. Thomas continues to wander onwards without questioning the reason for his departure. Astrid remains in the village in their shared home and soon has to abandon the search for her husband. He is restless and in continual motion, yet he remains trapped within the landscape and his isolation. The area he passes through is described very matter-of-factly, and sweeping landscapes emerge where nature becomes a metaphor for freedom. Astrid focuses on day-to-day life and her growing children, remaining in the same place.

We all sometimes feel the urge to escape and question our own lives. This novel does not provide answers nor does it pose moral questions or judge human behaviour. It sheds light on the relationship (of love) between man and woman – the further the two move apart in terms of geographical distance, the greater their inner bond becomes. Tension builds that is only dissipated after many years. We will leave the how to the reader to discover.

Peter Stamm, born in 1963, studied English, psychology and psychopathology for several semesters after a commercial apprenticeship. After long periods spent in Paris, New York, Berlin and London, he today lives in Winterthur. Since 1990 he has written several radio plays, theatre plays, short stories and novels as a freelance author. His first novel "Agnes" (1998) was translated into many different languages. He is one of Switzerland's most significant contemporary authors.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Chilled-out dance on planet jazz



SIMON SPIESS TRIO:
"Stardance",
Unit Records

Simon Spiess began his musical journey in Olten where the 'zero kilometre stone' is found at the station and there are only transit routes. The native of Aarburg is one of the brightest talents amongst the emerging Swiss performers. As a youngster he listened to a record featuring Roland Philipp, a saxophonist from Olten. He was soon having lessons from him and Fritz Renold from Aarau. He later studied at the Basel jazz school. This is how Simon Spiess became the musician he is today – firmly rooted in the jazz tradition but also receptive to electro, indie rock and other styles of music.

His trio's latest album is entitled "Stardance" and is unadulterated jazz. It delights with its simplicity and relaxed musicality. Clear themes, melodic lines and a laid-back sound are the saxophonist's traits. Singing motifs are sometimes heard over the groove while at times the beat drops and the timbre of a ballad is whispered in the room. Jazz cascades are blended with oriental embellishments on tracks like "Basic Needs".

After several albums, Simon Spiess reformed his trio last year, bringing in experienced bassist Bänz Oester and the drummer Jonas Ruther. Having returned from extended stays abroad in New York, Berlin, Paris and Mannheim, the saxophonist is re-establishing himself on the domestic jazz scene. He has made an impressive statement with "Stardance". The trio provide variation with some upbeat yet laid-back tracks.

Spiess can also sometimes really let rip, supported by a rousing rhythm section. Listeners are then captivated again by the airy sound that comes into its own in the atmospheric tracks. The pieces are openly arranged, providing the three instrumentalists with significant room for manoeuvre. But nothing is overworked or forced out.

As on the previous trio albums, Simon Spiess invited a musical guest to feature on one track – the rapper Nya from French-speaking Switzerland. In contrast to the collaboration with Erik Truffaz, for example, where Nya's flow of words was put to beats and electro sounds, a reduced jazz rhythm provides the backbone here. Musically this draws on the Kerouac jazz beat generation but is very contemporary lyrically and in terms of technical articulation. This is a coherent combination that would be well suited to an entire album.

PIRMIN BOSSART