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Stories in and around the Sevilla bar



ALEX CAPUS:
"Das Leben ist gut",
Hanser Verlag, 2016.
240 pages, around CHF 28.

"I understand her. She has to get away from this backwater again. It's different for me..." – Alex Capus' latest novel begins with these words. The first-person narrator Max is an author who owns and runs the Sevilla bar in a small Swiss town. His wife Tina now travels to Paris for a guest professorship and leaves him and their three sons alone during the week. The novel is set over a few days during the first week of her absence.

Max recounts day-to-day life in the bar, thinks about his wife in Paris and his own roots in the small town and relates the stories – sometimes succinctly, at other times in great detail – of friends and visitors to the bar. Male friendships are explored, such as that between Max and Miguel, the son of Spanish guest workers, and that between his former teacher Toni and the American Tom. The novel concludes with a great declaration of love to Tina when Max writes her dozens of postcards from the swamps of Florida in a surreal dream-like sequence.

It is not difficult to spot the biographical similarities between Max and the author. Capus owns the Galicia bar in Olten where he has lived since his childhood. But if readers think they have obtained an intimate insight into the author by the end of the book, they would be mistaken. In the final section, Capus takes them into a surreal dream where Max goes on his trip to see the American Tom in the swamps of Florida. Here we see the author's uninhibited storytelling prowess and ability for profound reflection in little stories. Every individual story about the bar's guests is developed into an independent tale that we find engrossing. It is a novel in which nothing earth-shattering happens and nobody is murdered. Subtly written, unpretentious and straightforward, it is nevertheless touching without ever being clichéd. It is a highly pleasurable read that creates a wonderfully positive mood. And the story about the stuffed Spanish bull's head is probably true as one hangs in the bar in Olten.

Alex Capus, born in Normandy in 1961, has a French father and a Swiss mother. As a young boy he moved with his mother to Olten where he still lives today with his wife and five sons. As a freelance writer, Capus writes short stories, reportage and novels, such as the wonderful love story "Léon und Luise", published in 2011.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

On safe ground



YELLO: "Toy", Universal Music

Let's be honest: No one expected Yello to stake out new ground on their thirteenth album. Dieter Meier and Boris Blank have been moving in their own musical cosmos since the late 1970s. They developed their sound early on, one that later influenced generations of electronic musicians and that is more than simply a brand. Combined with their extravagant imagery, it is a unique form of expression. The world discovered this years ago. The dadaist

avant-garde disco numbers and the high-quality aesthetic video clips resulted in major international acclaim for the duo from Zurich. Today, Yello are one of very few Swiss bands to have helped create their own genre and justifiably enjoy cult status.

So, why change the concept now? Never change a winning team! And so with the new album "Toy", 62-year-old Boris Blank returned once again to the successful musical components of Yello, in peppy samples that are sometimes jazzy, sometimes house groove, but always rhythmic. To those 71-year-old Dieter Meier added his familiar deep and rhythmic talking/singing. A typical example is the single "Limbo", a house number with cow bells and unemotional rumblings. In some of the songs there is also the usual ethereal guest singer – this time it is Malia and Fifi Rong. And the song "Magma" features the German trumpet player Till Brönner, who also played on the last Yello album from 2009.

In other words, a lot of familiar stuff. But the mood of "Toy" is somewhat more subdued and quieter than the Yello of the past. Here and there we hear murmuring for several minutes – more like music for the lounge than for the dance floor. These are nuances, however, that do not detract from the overall sound. But even though you can certainly admire the fact that Blank and Meier are still out there creating music, it doesn't diminish the feeling that you could have hoped for more from these two musicians than the anaemic self-plagiarism of this album.

As a result expectations for the concert in February in Zurich are even higher. This will be only the second venue they have played at live in their long career. The first four performances were in October in Berlin. Yello had never performed live before due to Boris Blank's stage fright. So, something is changing in the cosmos of Blank and Meier after all.

MARKO LEHTINEN