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Mr Brechbühl is Looking for a Cat



TIM KROHN:
"Herr Brechbühl sucht
eine Katze"
Publisher: Verlag Galiani
Berlin. 480 pages; around
CHF 28.90/EUR 24

Sixty-five short stories that make up a novel – Tim Krohn's new book is set in a Zurich apartment building at the beginning of the 21st century. Students, single women, immigrants and pensioners live in this typically Swiss rental accommodation. Right at the outset we are introduced to the retired tram driver Brechbühl, who feels he is living a pointless existence, and later the single mother Julia, who is juggling her career with bringing up her child. The tender relationship of Mr and Mrs Wyss, an elderly married couple, and the illness-plagued marriage of the Costas, an immigrant couple, are sensitively portrayed. Every reader will be able to identify with one or other of the residents. It emerges that while living in an apartment block can be torment, it is also a place where new friendships can be forged. The characters – with their desires and fears – are described in great detail. The novel – constructed like a TV series – produces a pleasurable, riveting whole. Readers will not want to miss the follow-up.

The story has a fascinating background. The author started a crowdfunding appeal online to fund the project by selling the stories before they had even been written. The project is still running successfully today. Buyers select a human feeling from the list which the author is continually adding to. Expressions like cheerfulness, pride, tranquillity and happiness were chosen in this novel. The buyer can also give three personal words or numbers which are then woven into the story. The buyers, or the readers, therefore provide input into a story which the author skilfully creates and narrates, and incorporates into his plot for the residents. The author's language is colourful, humorous and straightforward. This book is not just highly recommended for homesick Swiss but for anyone who enjoys an entertaining read and is able to laugh at themselves. How and why does a cat find its way into Brechbühl's life? We will leave that to the reader to discover. This novel is the first volume of a work that will eventually comprise 15 volumes. The second volume will be published in the autumn.

Tim Krohn, who was born in Germany in 1965, grew up in the canton of Glarus in Switzerland. The author himself lived in an apartment building in Zurich for many years. Today he works as a freelance writer and lives with his family in Santa Maria Val Müstair in the canton of Grisons. He writes novels, stories, plays and radio dramas.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

The music's black...



ZEAL & ARDOR:
"Devil is Fine" (Radicalis).

Huge hype surrounded this musical venture, even before there were any recordings. The Basel musician Manuel Gagneux wondered what combining black slave music and gospel with black metal would sound like – a previously inconceivable blend. It was a whimsical project, but Gagneux put his all into it.

Just under a year ago, the vocalist and guitarist, who previously lived in New York, put the initial results of his experiment online under the name Zeal & Ardor – triggering an absolute frenzy. A journalist from the eminent American music magazine "Rolling Stone" heard the "Devil is Fine" track and was so impressed that he proclaimed his love for the obscure project from Basel worldwide.

The media attention was unprecedented – a full European tour with sorties to the USA was booked, and no less a figure than Slash from Guns N' Roses lauded Zeal & Ardor as one of the most exciting music projects of recent years, even before the debut album had been released.

The time has finally arrived – the album ironically entitled "Devil is Fine" has now been available for several months. It certainly lives up to all the hype. This very short album of just under half an hour combines black roots music with white black metal in an astounding way. Passionate gospel is interspersed with furious screeching and rapid blast beats. A fusion of mainstream and underground, groove and hard metal is produced. Gagneux has a powerful voice, which he demonstrates in intense bursts. He has a flair for metal, but also produces great melodies.

It comes as little surprise that Zeal & Ardor ultimately appeals to a broad pop audience just as much as to the introverted black metal scene. One small note of concern – the appeal begins to wear off over the course of an entire album. It will be interesting to see whether Zeal & Ardor can maintain the suspense and interest in their venture with a future album.

MARKO LEHTINEN