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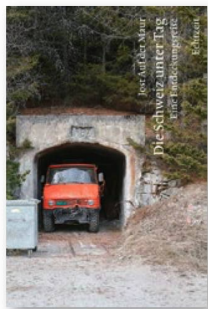
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Travelling to the lower levels of Switzerland



JOST AUF DER MAUR:
"Die Schweiz unter Tag. Eine Entdeckungsreise". ("Switzerland underground. A journey of discovery") Echezeit Verlag, Basel 2017, 139 pages, CHF 33.90.

reports from the underworld are enriched with facts boxes and a detailed information section for all those who also want to visit the lower levels of Switzerland. This is because an amazing number of facilities are open to the public.

The author takes a very close look, always retaining the sober view of a professional reporter, but never shying away from levelling criticism. At times he takes an historical perspective, before returning to talk in detail with contemporary witnesses. His discussions with miners in the Gotthard Base Tunnel that opened in 2016 are evocative, for example; this was a masterly technical achievement, but one with a dark side. Because, even today, building a tunnel is incredibly tough; the workers "all look older" than they actually are. "They wear themselves out down there," writes Auf der Maur. For him it is incomprehensible "that Switzerland today can still be so nonchalant over the truth about the mutilated, the invalids and the dead that the construction of underground Switzerland has claimed over the last 150 years". We should not just count those who died because of accidents, but also consider those who passed away because of silicosis or the hygiene conditions. Auf der Maur cites a figure of roughly 10,000 dead, and at least 50,000 scarred for life.

The highlights of the book include the report of the Swiss Federal Council bunker built during World War Two near Amsteg, but which was never used. And the depressing report from the bunker town of Sonnenberg near Lucerne, one of the world's largest civil defence facilities from the Cold War era, a building for 20,000 people that proved to be full of deficiencies during testing and ultimately considered useless.

The book does make one thing clear: You cannot understand Switzerland completely if you do not know about its massive subterranean infrastructure.

JÜRGEN MÜLLER

An all-round pianist



YANNICK DELEZ:
"Live/Monotypes",
 Unit Records, 2017

Yannick Delez makes contemporary piano music that has its roots in jazz, but also manages to enthuse lovers of classical music and improvisation. The 44-year-old pianist from French-speaking Switzerland, who has been living in Berlin since 2011, has astonished people with his latest double album – a solo achievement. "Live/Monotypes" is a substantial solo work, which can be listened to again and again. The individual compositions and tracks are wide-ranging and powerful enough to get a sense of how masterfully and intuitively Delez moves in his music.

The musician, who was born in Martigny, fell in love with the piano at a young age and taught himself to play. In 1990, he began his professional training at the Ecole de Jazz de Lausanne, which he successfully completed, receiving his diploma for piano in the field of jazz/performance. He played with various bands on the Swiss jazz scene and was also a member of Piano Seven, an ensemble of seven pianists with whom he recorded four albums and toured Asia and Latin America. In 2003, he published his first solo album "Rouges"; a year later, he founded his own trio.

Since then, Yannick Delez has been fine-tuning his sophisticated piano skills. The critics agree that he is in a class of his own. "He has produced a stunning solo piano album, for which comparisons are hard to find," wrote the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung about his most recent work "Boréales". The Tages-Anzeiger newspaper characterises him as follows: "Delez offers a rare mixture – he takes a sense of trance from minimalism, of improvisation from jazz, and of harmony from romantic piano literature."

His latest double album is an impressive exhibition of his piano talent. The first CD is a live concert in which he weaves his own compositions and standards, showing off his skills as a first-class jazz pianist. CD 2 is dedicated to "Monotypes" – spontaneously improvised pieces which he recorded in the Beethoven House in Bonn. Here, Delez has selected 17 shorter pieces from his many hours of material, and carefully linked them.

In the opus, the genres blend weightlessly as virtuosity and precise motion are overlaid with impressionistic moods, jazzy flow, opulent outbursts and song-like moments. "When I make music, I want to take the listener by the hand and go with them to a place they wouldn't have gone to by themselves," Yannick Delez recently told the magazine "Jazz'n'More". There are plenty of such places to discover on "Live/Monotypes", and all are worth the trip.

PIRMIN BOSSART