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Luck – what's that?



CLAUDE CUENI:
"Der Mann, der Glück brachte"
Lenos Verlag 2018
275 pages;
CHF 29.90, € ca. 23.90

"Now you've got your life back." 'What life?' I looked down at the park, (...), the people (...); they all had a plan, whereas I had none." This is how the novel about Lukas Rossberg begins. He was seriously injured after being shot in the head and through the lung as a bystander in a casino robbery. After seven years in a coma and extensive rehabilitation, he is about to resume his old life. He is going back to a world that did not expect his return. His girlfriend has left him, his company no longer exists and in his career as an IT specialist he now belongs to the old school. The long-term effects of his injuries and pain also blight his everyday life. A former colleague, Robert Keller, who is now director of the lottery company for whom Rossberg once developed software programs, gives him a job. His task is to break the good news to people who have just won millions on the lottery – he is the man who delivers good tidings. Rossberg soon realises that Keller does not have a clear conscience and is not telling the truth about events on the night of the robbery. He starts to do some investigating and before long discovers irregularities and even criminal activities at the lottery company. Rossberg attempts to get to the bottom of the story and to find some peace of mind.

The author Claude Cueni is known to a wide audience for his lengthy, mainly historical novels. Readers will want to read more after finishing this 275-page novel, despite the first-person narrator not enjoying much good fortune and the lack of a happy ending. The budding romance, which is not without problems, between Rossberg and a saleswoman produces a feel-good effect. Cueni, who suffered from leukaemia several years ago, masterfully draws on his own experiences in life and work without being melodramatic or moralising. In an interview he revealed that he wanted to write intelligent, entertaining novels. He has done so with aplomb here.

Claude Cueni was born in 1956 into a French-speaking family in Basel. After leaving school, he travelled around Europe earning a living from casual jobs. In the 1980s, he started to make a name for himself as an author of novels, radio and theatre plays and later also as a screenwriter for film and television. He also developed computer games and founded a successful software company. His novels have been translated into many languages. The author lives in Basel today.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Sounds

Nine languages – one sound



ELINA DUNI:
"Partir", ECM

The young Albanian-Swiss jazz singer and composer Elina Duni is a force of nature. Her voice is just as impressive as her personality and appearance – captivating, multilingual, vibrant, lithe and filled with French charm and nimble wit. She is a dedicated performer who possesses depth and a feeling for melancholic music.

She was born in Tirana in 1981. Her mother was an author and her father a director, which meant she grew up in a creative home. She began performing on the stage at just five years of age, learned to play the violin and then the piano. She came to Switzerland from Albania when she was ten with her by then divorced mother, living briefly in Lucerne before moving to Geneva. "My poetic idiom is still Albanian," she reveals, "but my intellectual language is French." She also speaks Bernese German delightfully.

She studied song and composition at Bern University of the Arts. Here she got to know Colin Vallon, the acclaimed pianist from Lausanne, with whom she founded her quartet. Her idols included Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Shirley Horn and Sheila Jordan. But she also enjoyed listening to rock and world music.

Her new and third CD "Partir" has been released by leading label ECM. Elina Duni performs without her trusted band here and provides her own accompaniment, switching between the piano, the guitar and percussion. She sometimes also sings a cappella. She has selected 12 songs from all sorts of different countries. The album features folk songs from Kosovo, Armenia and Macedonia. She also includes Portuguese fado and an Italian track by Domenico Modugno. Jacques Brel is invoked with "Je ne sais pas", while Switzerland is represented by "Schönster Abestärn".

It sounds like a real global hotchpotch, but the opposite is in fact true. This album is a delight. It adopts a reflective tone despite representing a new departure. It is not a euphoric or frivolous change of direction but rather a considered and at times wistful one. Elina Duni sings about it with an earthy presence and masterful power.

"Partir" is much more than a secondary album. As a soloist Elina Duni gives her all here. She negotiates every potential pitfall without a safety net. She is captivating and a pleasure to listen to.

MANFRED PAPST