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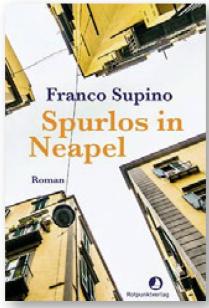
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Lost in Naples



FRANCO SUPINO
"Spurlos in Neapel".
novel, Rotpunktverlag
Zurich 2022, 254 pages,
CHF 33.00.

The ground below Naples is in a constant state of flux. Tectonic plates rub together, creating tension that translates into the city's chaotic, highly strung nature. This particularly appeals to Franco Supino, whose parents hail from the Neapolitan hinterland. The first-person narrative in Supino's latest novel, "Spurlos in Neapel" (Lost in Naples), is that of a Swiss author visiting the city in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius.

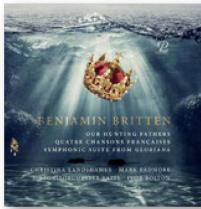
Ostensibly, the author wants to get fitted for a suit at a "master tailor". But he also has a second, secret objective in mind: to track down an elusive mafioso called Antonio Esposito. His periodic visits to the tailor involve working out the whereabouts of 'o Nirone, as Esposito is nicknamed on account of his dark complexion. The narrator, an upstanding gentleman, finds no shortage of locals peddling stories about 'o Nirone – the Camorra can always rely on Neapolitan hearsay and bravado to slip quietly into the shadows, a friend tells him. The mafia are part local heroes, part criminals and part myth.

Slowly but surely, the narrator gets closer to the mysterious 'o Nirone. But how to explain the dark skin of a "conventional" Camorrista? The narrator flips this question and wonders what would have happened to him had his parents stayed in or returned to Naples. The search for 'o Nirone subsequently turns into a retrospective of his own life. He not only remembers his parents' early summer trips "back home", but also the political clamour in Switzerland for Italian migrants to be sent "back where they came from".

"Searching for your own reflection in a complete stranger is anything but a harmless game," says the narrator, summing up the existential crux of the novel. The mafioso holds up a mirror to how the narrator's own life could have been. "Spurlos in Neapel" is a cleverly composed story that flits between reality and fiction. Its autobiographical traits also tell of the fascination of Naples, the city of Maradona, Pino Daniele, Massimo Troisi. "How do the places we grow up in shape our lives?" the narrator asks. And how different would things have turned out had he grown up not in Solothurn but in Naples? Deep down, we could all ask ourselves a similar question.

BEAT MAZENAUER

All about the journey



BENJAMIN BRITTEN
"Our Hunting Fathers
Quatre Chansons
françaises", Symphonic
Suite from "Gloriana"
Prospero Classical 2022

Basel is well known as a city of art. But it is first and foremost a city of music, boasting as many as four different orchestras of international standing. La Cetra specialises in baroque music, and the Basel Sinfonietta in contemporary music. The Basel Chamber Orchestra has a wide-ranging repertoire, while Sinfonieorchester Basel plays opera as well as major symphonies.

Does a small city like Basel really need that many orchestras? Hans-Georg Hofmann smiles nonchalantly. The Basel Symphony Orchestra (BSO) artistic director says that all four ensembles are different in their own way. They do not compete with each other. They even have their own respective home venues. "We make music on behalf of the city of Basel," he is quick to stress. "We are its orchestra." They march to a different beat in Basel. It is all about the journey, less about the destination.

Things look even rosier when you consider that the BSO now plays in one of Switzerland's most magnificent, visitor-friendly and acoustically pleasing concert halls, the Stadtcasino, which underwent a face-lift that was completed by architects Herzog & de Meuron in 2020.

Whisper it, but the BSO itself is also going through a period of renewal, with Markus Poschner (born in 1971) having been elected its new chief conductor in February. The BDO had been on the lookout for a new maestro for quite some time, and has now made an excellent choice. Poschner, who comes from Munich, made a triumphant debut in Bayreuth last summer and has been doing sterling work as the principal conductor of the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana. He also has enjoyed some surprising success on CD.

The BSO is not averse to making its own CD recordings either. It also attracts 60,000 listeners every month on Spotify – proof that rare masterpieces from composers like Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) and Charles Koechlin (1967–1950) have a keen audience. Its CD release containing Benjamin Britten's "Gloriana" suite and other pieces hit a nerve worldwide in September 2022 following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The "Gloriana" suite comes from the eponymous opera, which Britten wrote for the late monarch's coronation. Meanwhile, the BSO is perfectly happy to let other orchestras play Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 for the umpteenth time instead.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS