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Gjon's Tears – the Swiss voice making the whole world sob

After years of success on TV and YouTube, the Swiss singer with Kosovan roots has brought out his first album. “The Game” is packed with poetic pop songs tugging at heartstrings the world over.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

The Swiss singer Gjon's Tears released his first album, “The Game”, in April. However, this young man, who hails from Gruyère but now lives in Paris, is by no means a new-comer to the music industry. He already has hosts of fans, after representing the country at Eurovision and appearing on TV talent shows. His fame has also been amplified many times over by YouTube views, with “Tout l'Univers”, Switzerland's 2021 Eurovision entry, attracting comments from more than 3,600 users. He came third in the contest, notching up 55 million views. Gjon's Tears came to fame on the internet, which continues to serve him well. A user named Domups wrote “World class, our Federer of singing” about his song “Cancer”. “You've got me crying in bed at 00.42 in the morning,” wrote another fan. The song conveys an unfathomable sense of melancholy. Gjon Muharremaj, who performs on stage with trademark blue or black tears drawn onto one or both cheeks, has devastated listeners with the lyrics about how the disease will catch up with you and cause insomnia before taking you in its embrace. “I cried listening to ‘Cancer,’” wrote acid-lullaby on YouTube, who admitted to not understanding the words but explained they were moved by Gjon's Tears' hauntingly high voice, which made them “feel the song with my heart”. The track in question is dedicated to a friend who died of leukaemia.

Duet with Géraldine Chaplin

“The Game” showcases the full range of Gjon's talents, with a voice that spans several octaves. It expresses sadness, melancholy and joy. Some tracks simply have chart smash written all over them. A case in point is “Pure”, which is built on an electronic bassline and has a very slick video – like his others – that begins with a conver-



Gjon Muharremaj – fake tears, real feelings.

Photos: Keystone (left), Jo&Co (above)

sation with Géraldine Chaplin. Gjon sings that life is hard, but it's worth it, and when it's pure, my God, it's beautiful. He evokes the need for sharp elbows in order to succeed, but also backstabbing. There are parallels with the setbacks that Gjon encountered after moving to Paris. “The world of show business is not always a very nice place to live,” he explained in an interview.

A musical childhood in Gruyère

This sensitive young man's story can be read as an ode to a pluralist Switzerland. Gjon Muharremaj was born in



“La grande peur dans la montagne”

Saanen, in the canton of Berne, on 29 June 1998. His Kosovan father Hysni is a crane operator and bricklayer. His Albanian-born mother Elda worked at the Cailler chocolate factory after the family moved to Broc in 2000, according to his Wikipedia profile. Gjon grew up in the village of Gruyère. He fell in love with music when learning the piano. The story goes that two years later he moved his grandfather to tears with his rendition of Elvis Presley’s “Can’t Help Falling in Love”. This is where his rather unusual stage name comes from (NB: Gjon is pronounced like the English name John).

Influenced by The Cure and Björk

Gjon, whose live performances call to mind those by a lyrical singer, borrows from a number of genres. His debut album cover shows him wearing a black frock coat and Doc Martens, paying homage to the New Wave movement and The Cure in particular. Listeners can also detect a love of disco in “The Game”. Gjon, who played Bach as a child and has also tried yodelling and Indian chanting, cites Cesária Évora, Grace Jones, Björk and David Bowie among his influences. The tone and profundity of his lyrics give a poetic, literary edge to his pop songs. When he plays the piano solo, Gjon might call to mind the French chanteuse Barbara, Jacques Brel or, closer to our own time, the Belgian singer Stromae.



“La grande peur dans la montagne”, CHARLES FERDINAND RAMUZ/QUENTIN PAUCHARD, CHF 35 (available in French only)

Helvetiq publishing house has come up with the inspired idea of bringing out its Collection Ramuz Graphique, retelling classic Swiss literature in graphic novels – a format that enables all manner of liberties to be taken with form. “This was a way of connecting young people to the classics and inspiring in them a desire to read the originals,” explains its CEO, Hadi Barkat. “La grande peur dans la montagne” (Great fear in the mountains), which came out in April with illustrations by Neuchâtel artist Quentin Pauchard, is the second in the series. It transports us to the Alpine pastures of Sasseinère, in the French-speaking part of the Valais, to which a handful of peasants young and old are determined to lead their animals. The area had been abandoned 20 years earlier, after several men died in mysterious circumstances.

After a few days, the cattle fall sick. The village vet imposes a quarantine. Fears and superstitions start to spread, and the pasture turns into a prison.

Pauchard, who was born in Val-de-Ruz in the canton of Neuchâtel, travelled to Evolène in the canton of Valais to capture the local ambience. He felt that he was walking in the footsteps of Ramuz. “Like a lot of people, I encountered his novels in school, but I didn’t remember them very clearly. As an adult, I’ve taken a lot of pleasure from rediscovering them and seeking to make Ramuz’s work accessible, while still capturing its essence,” he explains. His illustrations use sombre blocks of colour, illuminated in places by rosy or golden rays of sunlight, taking the reader by the hand and drawing them into the book. We share the sense of despair when young Victorine risks all to find her lover, trapped high up the mountain. The men’s fears are transformed into phantoms that rattle the roof at night. The sickness rages. The mountain that should be providing nourishment oppresses the men. Ultimately, the graphic novel sparks a desire to re-read Ramuz.

The same is true of “Derborence”, the first volume in this collection, which was published in 2022. It tells the story of another mountain pasture in central Valais that was devastated by a landslide in 1714. Fifteen people and many hundreds of animals lost their lives. “Ramuz has a sparse writing style,” says Fabian Menor, the young illustrator, who hails from Geneva. “He doesn’t include a lot of descriptions of landscapes or the relationships between people; he simply presents the story. When I read “Derborence”, I filled in the gaps in my own head. I can use my drawings to show what Ramuz did not put to paper.” Gems to discover.

STÉPHANE HERZOG



GJON’S TEARS: “The Game”, 2023, Jo&Co, Paris; CD (EAN 3700187680213) and vinyl (EAN 3700187680220)