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A tale of two languages



ALEXANDRE LECOULTRE:
“Peter und so weiter”.
Translated into German
by Ruth Gantert.
Der gesunde Menschen-
versand, Lucerne, 2024

“Peter und so weiter” is a somewhat bizarre book with the same title in the German translation as in the French original. Geneva-born Berne resident Alexandre Lecoultré tells a tale of a lovable eccentric who loiters around town, occasionally helping out in a shop and being interrupted by the words “und so weiter” (“and so on”) when talking in the pub. Some know him as Peter, to others he is Pietro, the author calls him “Peterli, du Fröschli” (“Peter the little frog”).

Everyone knows him and Peter knows about everything going on in the village without really being a part of it himself. “For some time people have been wanting him to be somebody but Peter doesn’t know who.” He’s always wandering “through all the streets” in all directions so as not to miss anything.

He likes going to the wasteland most. It’s a meaningless wilderness that Peter likes because the wasteland, like Peter, does not readily fit into the orderly world. Something “needs to be done with it”, say the others.

Alexandre Lecoultré’s novel, which won a Swiss literary prize in 2021, accompanies this drifter with empathy and wordplay on his way through the village, which is also an agglomeration and city and, in fact, Zurich. This fuzziness is a recurring feature in the restrained book. The author also creates a spatial buffer through the language. “Peter und so weiter” oscillates between the different ways of speaking. Use of Swiss German dialect, such as in words like “öppis” or “momoll”, creates a surprise effect in the French original, as do the vestiges of French and dialectal phrases in the German version. On occasion, Peter’s tongue is so tied up that an unintelligible hotch-potch comes out “glauche, roichts, lechts, rinks, drechts”.

There is a familiarity about the language among all the agitation. And it sharpens Peter’s awareness of the finer details on the periphery, while the big questions are no more than a distant echo in his world. The quality of this consistent, gentle book lies in its lack of intent. Peter does not conform to the smooth progression of a day at work. The significance of the wasteland is that the excavators and cranes will shortly move in. The “village” has no place for disorder, wasteland or tranquility. Lecoultré’s jovial man about town drives that point home.

BEAT MAZENAUER

Songs of sorrow, longing and warmth



SOFT LOFT:
“The Party And The Mess”
(Soft Loft, 2024)

It’s one of those rare records that jump out at you immediately, albeit in a subtle and gentle way. Imagine being in the record shop with music playing in the background. Normally you would take no notice and carry on browsing, but not this time. This fragile female voice emanating vulnerability and sorrow. This wonderful music rich in range and warmth. Who is it? The employee in the shop in Baden’s old town says, “Soft Loft, a band from Aargau”.

Hard to believe. The band sounds as if it were from Tucson, Arizona, or New York, maybe even somewhere in Ireland – but not Brugg. Nonetheless, that’s where singer Jorina Stamm founded the band seven years ago with her school friend Sarina Schmid. The

formation was initially called Ellas. Three musicians then came on board: Lukas Kuprecht on drums, Simon Boss on the guitar and Marius Meier on bass. Their debut album is called “The Party And The Mess”.

There is something magical about the unvarnished beauty of their first album. The intimate songs sound melancholy with an infectious levity at the same time. They move between indie pop, folk and singer/songwriter. And the general mournfulness fails to mask the consistent optimistic undercurrent. One song, “Joni” is about Jorina Stamm’s role model Joni Mitchell, which pretty much says it all.

The lyrics recount a longing for understanding and benevolence. They are touching and unrelentingly honest. They deal with depressive episodes, pain and separation. The album gives room to feelings, for example in the songs “Open House” and “Safe Space”, and thus overcomes any negativity.

Crystal-clear guitar and warm synthesizers carry the sound produced by Gianluca Buccellati from the US. He had worked with Lana Del Rey previously and was nominated for a Grammy. Together, the band and their producer wrote song sketches, and in February 2022 Buccellati flew to Switzerland for a recording session. Soft Loft spent two weeks with their mentor in a house in Engelberg working on their music and distilling 30 ideas into the 12 songs on the album.

After Switzerland, the next step is to gain a following outside the country. And they may well achieve that. Soft Loft have a lot of potential and the new album is a bona fide gem. Watch this space: soon, “The Party And The Mess” will have spread from Baden old town to the record shops in the big cities.

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