Music as Free Geography

In 1953 I realized that the straight line leads to the downfall of humanity.
The straight line is something cowardly drawn with a ruler,
it is a line which does not exist in nature, which is the rotten
foundation of our doomed civilization.
Friedensreich Hundertwasser

A psychedelic Oriental-Balkan jazz fusion with a meditative-hypnotic sensibility, created by a tireless, culturally integrative globetrotter.

That's it! Maybe even that is too much.

Those of us who write about music – and are at least somewhat familiar with the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, arguably the most important philosopher of the 20th century – often ask ourselves about the purpose of our vocation. Most of the time, following Wittgenstein's work (as an anti-philosopher, in fact), we feel powerless to communicate the listening experience in a meaningful way that would offer some sort of transcription of music into text. And for that text to be so formulated and structured that it conveys something "significant" to the reader – something that enriches their perception of the music, or, if they are unfamiliar with it, introduces them to it. And mind you: by reading a text about it!?

Impossible: in both cases.

Given all this, writing about music (especially the music on this album) can only find its justification if it manages to add something to its emptiness. If anything can be said with a reasonable degree of certainty about music – understood as an empty sign – it is that it should be conceived as the emptiest of all signs, compared to the other arts. Namely, every work of art, understood as a sign, is immediately subject to semantic expansion, offering possibilities of freely playing with and interpreting that sign in countless directions. Music in particular, because it refers the least to the representation of external reality. In that context, the only option left to the "expert" intent on writing something about it is to approach music narratively – to supplement it with something extra-musical, something that would maneuver beyond its temporality. What this means is the following: something fixed on "digital paper," composed of lines of text, formed into sentences which, ideally, would attach themselves to the empty sign of music – not in order to describe it, but to freely contemplate around it.

Hence, the idea is for the music to become an initiation for something else – to be expanded and enriched with a story that levitates along the edges of various associations arising from the subconscious. If, however, we attempt to describe the music, such an endeavor borders on madness. Because this is not an album meant for casual listening. It needs to be experienced. More as an open sound, than as a composition. More as a journey, than as a point of arrival.

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What does it mean today to create music that is not based on genre classifications, nor on culturally determined predispositions, but on a deeply intimate, arbitrary map of the world? When music is not "ethno", nor "jazz", nor "ambient", yet still carries improvisational substrates from all those genres? Then it is a music that transcends the aforementioned provisional classifications.

Yordan Kostov, Macedonian accordionist, composer and restless musical traveler, has been shaping such a sound for years: a sound that does not emerge so much from territories as from movements through them – without a preference for one over another. A music that springs from wandering, from openness to otherness, without stereotypical assumptions. And if his previous 40+ albums have accustomed us to his ability to improvise in the language of Japanese-Oriental fusion, to recognize jazz phrasing in a folk vocal line, or to reinterpret the specific pulse of Brazilian percussion through the filter of the Afro-American avant-garde – then the *Maglota* album represents his most concentrated, integrated and poetic testimony to where it all leads.

The album doesn't offer a narrative structure or a specific musical concept. It is a diary of a deeply internalized geography. That is why its title – *Maglota* – doesn't mean anything specific. It is a word without a definition, but with an impulse. It sounds like something we've heard before, yet can't place. Like a word from a language being invented while the music is played in multiple languages at once.



The Vietnamese đàn bầu (zither)

The central force – Yordan Kostov's accordion – is not just a musical instrument. It is a mobile laboratory. In its tones – often fractured, sometimes on the edge of silence, other times massive like an orchestra – the entire fusion unfolds. Kostov manages to create from all the constituent elements a sound that is simultaneously urban and archaic, structured and open, technically precise and lyrically free. The music of *Maglota* is an agent of sonic disorientation – not meant to lose ourselves in it, but to free us from the expectation that music "must" be clear, recognizable, local or genre-tamed.

Listening to this album, one gets the impression that the music is only provisionally divided into five compositions. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the collaboration between Yordan Kostov's accordion and the Vietnamese musicians – Lê Thuý Linh on đàn bầu (zither) and Vũ Thùy Linh on đàn t'rưng (bamboo xylophone) – feels like they had a long history of continuous musical interdependence, rather than originating from completely different musical traditions. The second is that the album initiates an impression that the music on it feels like One,

and is merely divided into five parts to ease the listener's experience. It seems that, if we were to dissect those parts and analyze them separately, we would lose the holistic experience that comes to the forefront during a committed listen to *Maglota*.



The Vietnamese đàn t'rưng (bamboo xylophone)

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"At the invitation of Robert Rogner, Austrian visual artist and architect Hundertwasser accepted to design and project the hotel and spa facilities in Bad Blumau, Austria, creating them as an architectural landscape in harmony with nature. Various architectural concepts, such as the 'eye-slit house', 'the forest courtyard house', 'the rolling hills' and 'the shifted hills' houses, were constructed there for the first time. All buildings are completely overgrown with vegetation, and can be walked upon. In the undulating hills of the complex, nature, art and architecture are united into one. The human longing for togetherness – where architecture would be in tune with nature – became a reality there. Architecture that collaborates with nature can heal and harmonize."

This is a text from Hundertwasser's website, which offers a brief insight into this unique project. We have used it here as one of the possible destinations where the "extra-musical" or "non-musical" from the album *Maglota* might lead us. The coexistence and interdependence of various musical traditions, harmoniously interpenetrated in the album, practically guide us to a new journey. Namely, if it turns out that the geographic-historical distance between one European

instrument and two Vietnamese ones is just a myth begging to be demystified by musicians operating on the principle of maximum openness to cultural appropriation – then one of the possible associations arising from that openness might find its extra-musical momentary stabilization in such an architectural project.



Hot Springs Village in Bad Blumau, Austria, designed by Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1993-1997)

Can we not assume that Hundertwasser was guided by similar ideas when he first envisioned integrating architecture into nature and vice versa? The straight lines on which architecture had operated until then are incompatible with the ever-changing forms of nature. It seems that the attempt to merge the two was impossible. But Hundertwasser believed it was impossible only for creatively limited minds. Nothing is impossible to unite if integrative principles are the main guiding idea. The spa complex in Bad Blumau and the album *Maglota* are excellent examples of projects that would not exist if artists worked only within strictly defined fields.

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In the world of *Maglota*, nothing is fixed, nothing is played to the end – everything is in motion, en route, at the intersection between intuition and sound. This is not music that can be summarized, grasped or translated; it is a reminder that listening is an act of surrender through free decoding. With its open form and intercultural depth, the album does not demand attention, but participation. And right there – somewhere between the abstract geography of sound and the unnamed languages of feeling – *Maglota* becomes an inspiration for something else. That "something else" could be a concrete place emerging from a dream, or a dream initiated by a concrete place.

Liner notes by Vangel Nonevski