

PROG ROGUE

May 20, 2023

ANA PATAN (ROMANIA) Spice, Gold and Tales Untold



Contrary to popular perception, I am not at all a narrow-minded, only symphonic/neo prog aficionado, as my vast music collection has all kinds of deviations in its ranks, from classical, jazz, new wave, alternative, rock, blues, pop, and electronic offerings. The number of jazz-rock fusion albums on my walls is quite colossal, as I thoroughly enjoy instrumental music perhaps even more than those with vocals. Ana reached out to PROG ROGUE with an unusually kind and heartwarming request for a review. Ana was raised in an unfortunate time in her country's already complex history, a child in a land ravaged by poverty and despair, under the evil tutelage of a 'conducator' (leader) whose only salvation was that his wife was even a worse human being. As I was born in the neighbouring country, where the 1956 Hungarian revolution against the Stalinist regime forced my family and I as a baby into exile, with Soviet border guards shooting at us, so it is fair to say that we share in a similar existential grief that can only be understood by those who escaped or lived in the 'socialist paradise' (it was neither). Ana went to Germany to fulfill her artistic desire to express herself unashamedly (aka without censorship of any kind), learning her craft and finally achieving her musical goals. It took almost a biblical 7 years to get this album done and it is a rewarding experience.

It was hard for me to highlight which of her 2 main talents were the most impressive, her unique guitar style (more about that later) or her incredibly sultry vocal phrasing, which at times felt like coming out of the swampy Deep South of the USA! Her release features some rather impressive talent, with the fluid Jonas Hellborg (Mahavishnu Orchestra, Roine Stolt, Alan Holdsworth) on bass and my fellow countryman Zoltan Csorsz (The Flower Kings, Lifesigns, The Tangent) providing a first-rate rhythm section. This is a very personal testament with little affectation, hyper-glossy production with endless layers of sound. Stripped down bare in order to reveal honesty, inspiration, and utter class, the sophisticated object is to seduce, charm and make one smile. *Spice Gold and Tales Untold*. A simple ditty kicks off the proceedings with "Undeciphered", a brief and minimalist intro with zero effects guitar flicks, a humid voice and Hellborg's lurking bass wobble, all sounding very small smoky stage lounge cocktail aperitif. Elegant simplicity indeed. This is a set up for the entrancing jazzy waltz of "General Conspiracy", a damp southern blues riff (à la Steve Cropper) with insistent vocal athletics that swerve, rise, swoop and dive with unrestrained ardor. Hypnotic, a bit psychotic and definitely acidic, this a fascinating piece of genius. A darling ballad perhaps that would "Trivialize Love", the mood gets exceptionally laid back and smooth as floating silk, her electric guitar swooning in exaltation and her shivering voice deeply emotionally engaged. The arrangement slows down to a turtle-like crawl, another marvel, as Jonas unwinds delicately. "The Human" has a folkier setting, with Zoltan tapping his kit with slick minimalism, as Ana wails with plaintive gusto, followed by some twisting guitar touches. Think singer/songwriter greats like Janis Ian, Joan Baez, Joan Armatrading and Joni Mitchell (the four Js) but Ana can do the guitar thingy very well indeed.

Veering towards a bluesier expanse, "Pure and Plain" showcases some tricky electric guitar phrasings as her voice slips into a clear and yet melancholic stance. She hits the higher notes with ease and conviction, with a little scat to boot. Out of the blue (she does come from a lovely town on the Danube after all), she switches to her native tongue on "Soarele Meu" (my sun), fascinating composition that owns a resemblance to typical Brazilian style jazz (Romanian is a Latin language after all) in that it will make your hips sway to the breezy solar heat emanating from the speakers. Beach music, tanned skin in bikinis, cool beverages, and something grilling nearby.

Okay, enough playful stuff, let's get hot and heavy with some Southern boogie, a loving wink to ZZ Top, Allman Brothers, Atlanta Rhythm Section (a hint of their classic "Spooky"), as her relentlessly repetitive riff burrows deep into the soul. "21st Century Citizen" is her raunchy affirmation that her art is universal, though proud of her roots and her offering is aimed for the world's oyster. She is the nacre mother of pearl. The restrained flutter of "Hot Hot" is intoxicating in its finesse, her fingers shimmering over her fretboard with apparent ease. Its her tired vocals that really fascinate, coming directly from the subterranean crevices of her soul. "How Could We Live Before" is more of the same, perhaps a reflection on her youthful hardship, comfortable with her art and her vision, expressing it without compromise. I believe it's called maturity, and this is what all musicians try to aspire to.

The finale is a fabulous piece that keeps the intensity of her vocal prowess fully on as "Colours on Hormones" is the convincing nail in the proverbial coffin. So, this surely is not prog in its symphonic, neo, crossover, fusion, or metal sense but an authentic musical divertissement that has a time and space well deserved in your daily routine. It's fun, mostly upbeat, original, heartfelt, and enjoyable.

4.5 Wallachian stories

by Thomas Szirmay