



Slagr Straum, stille



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On Slagr's striking second album, tradition and modernity are entering into a darkly beguiling liaison. Eschewing obvious quotes or clichéd references, the minimalist chamberfolk trio from Oslo blend the brittle, drily poetic string stirrings of Norwegian tradition with the nocturnal eroticism of Jazz, the rhythmical patterns of Steve Reich and the sparse canvases of Morton Feldman. Pieces evolve slowly and almost imperceptibly, as Percussionist Amund Sjølie Sveen places sustained Vibraphone-droplets and glassy harmonics on top of the closely intertwined melodic motives and austere chord progressions of Anne Hytta's Hardanger-Fiddle and Sigrun Eng's Cello. As part of a deep and trance-like process, the band carefully and slowly arrive at a resonant, sonorous continuum of sounds that is as concise as it is poetic.

Instead of rushing in after the success of their „Solaris“-debut, Slagr took a full three years to hone and refine the follow-up. Recordings took place at the Sofienberg Church in Oslo, renowned for its cathedral yet clear and intimate sound, and under the auspices of producer Nils Økland, himself a famous commuter between the worlds of Folk and contemporary classical music. The focus of the sessions lay on evoking „contemplative, meditative“ moods and accordingly, „Straum, stille“ („Stream, Silence“) has turned out even more otherworldly than its predecessor, walking the tightrope between acoustic soundscapes and ambient songwriting.

At some of their frequent concerts, Slagr have performed arrangements of contemporary Norwegian composers alongside their own material. One might have expected „Straum“ to fan out into a similar direction, but Hytta, Eng and Sveen have concentrated on the hypnoticism and mantra-like qualities of their music instead to create a dense and dream-like work in which their diverse influences have been amalgamated into a single, indivisible voice. This idea is also reflected by the album's title, which Hytta explains thus: *„The more obvious title would have been "stille straum" („silent stream“), but by changing the order of the words and adding a comma it becomes more of a poetic phrase. What I reflected on is that our music is peaceful and quiet, but that there are greater contrasts, streams and energies hiding underneath the surface.“* As such, „Straum, stille“ reinforces an old wisdom: Even things that once seemed old and withered, can gain in freshness when approached from the right angle.