

Rain Sultanov Influence



Himmlische Dimensionen

Music has always been an affair of the heart to Rain Sultanov. But even for him, Influence carries a particularly deep meaning. On Mugham – Megham and his expansive Anthology of Jazz in Azerbaijan, the Baku-born saxophonist explored the musical roots of his home country. His new solo album now traces his personal footsteps to their creative sources. On seven epic ballads, Sultanov pays homage to the musicians that have shaped his style. Over the years, some of them have turned into companions. Others will forever remain "virtual friends". But all of them have one thing in common: They contributed towards making him the musician he is today.

The concept for Influence had been on Sultanov's mind for years. On his long journey, his inspirations, role models and teachers have changed repeatedly. But he never lost his heartfelt gratitude towards those whose music once touched him. First, there were the records by Michael Brecker, which his brothers in Azerbaijan would bring home. As a young boy, Sultanov would study Brecker's licks for days, transcribe them and make them his own. Then, there were gigs with English trumpet player Kenny Wheeler, which left an indelible impression. Last but not least, there were the encounters with the great Joe Zawinul at the Baku Jazz Festival, which left Zawinul impressed and Sultanov inspired.

Only very rarely do these compositions bear any resemblance to the style of the dedicatees. That, however, was never the idea anyway, as Sultanov explains: "My intention was never to play music which was similar to my musical heroes. I didn't even try to write something they might have liked. I simply wanted these pieces to be tributes to those who provided me with new insights, new love, new emotions. Even though I have today long found my own style of playing, I'll never stop listening to them. And I will always keep their thoughts in mind."

Just as with his previous albums, spontaneity was key to the music on Influence. Although Sultanov had booked the Rainbow Studio in Oslo well ahead of time, he had barely finished half the pieces a few weeks before the recording sessions. The remainder, as he casually explains, was written "en route to Norway". On location, the entire material was then taken apart again, re-imagined and recorded in just a few takes. To make this daredevil approach work, Sultanov relied on the support of two exceptional musicians: Swedish bassist Nils Ölmedal and pianist Isfar Sarabski. Both, as Sultanov puts it, "know what to listen for in my music and what kind of mood I am looking for."

Getting the mood right was obviously of seminal importance for the atmospherically dense, almost otherworldly pieces on Influence. The stylistic scope of the record ranges from the eight and a half minute long exorcism "I know that you'll never come back" (dedicated to Miles Davis) via the dreamy "Morning Flight" (for Pastorius) through to the bittersweet "Solaris", which Sultanov wrote in honour of the Sophisticated Giant Dexter Gordon.

All of these different inspirations blend into a spiritual work which reflects both on Sultanov's influences, himself and something beyond: "I am realistic enough to understand that all of these artists are no longer with us", he says with a pensive smile, "On the other hand, they will always be there for me, maybe just in another dimension. That's something I truly believe in."