

KLAUS DOLDINGER'S "PASSPORT TO MOROCCO"

Morocco is a source of inspiration. For example: Taking a taxi during their latest visit to Marrakech Klaus Doldinger and his wife were not driven to their hotel as requested, but were brought to the Djemaa de Fna (Place of the Beheaded) in the city centre - where they were informed that they would soon be picked up. In a few minutes a young man with a handcart showed up and loaded the luggage and then lead the couple for a good 15 minutes through the crowded alleys of the Medina until the little procession finally reached the Riyad el Cadi via an inconspicuous side door. And as so often happens in this country, the guest from faraway was astounded. For amidst the impassable confines

of the old city a wonderful Oriental courtyard opened up, a dreamlike space that had grown historically and that made one forget that this was actually "only" a hotel. Klaus Doldinger was so overcome by this magical place that he dedicated a song to it. One of ten to be found on his new album "Passport To Morocco".

However, the history of this production began much earlier, to be precise in 1964, as Doldinger explains: "At that time I undertook a big tour of the Near East with my quartet, Ingfried Hoffmann, Klaus Weiss and Helmut Kandelberger, sponsored by the Goethe Institute. The main part of the trip was in Morocco, which deeply impressed me because it seemed to be the most liberal country that we visited. The people were very friendly and so open for us and our music that it has remained in my memory." He continues to rave and tells about his impressions of this first trip that took place when it

was an unusual experience to stroll across an Oriental bazar, eat couscous with lamb and to listen in the background to musicians who cultivated a completely different sort of entertainment than one was familiar with in Europe. "I was fascinated by these impressions and looking back I think that this trip also made a mark on me musically. In any case strong memories remained and I came up with the idea of returning after so many years to see if my positive impression would be confirmed. And that is exactly what happened". A concrete musical project quickly developed from the trip. Klaus Doldinger contacted one of the best experts on the world of contemporary Moroccan music: Majid Bekkas from Sale, a virtuoso of the camelhair bass, the Guembri, singer and lecturer for string instruments at the Conservatory in Rabat, and an absolute insider on the local scene. Equally familiar with local styles and with European jazz, Bekkas has already worked with Louis Sclavis and Archie Shepp.

The cultural traveler from Germany joined him on his tour last year, once again supported by the Goethe Institute. Bekkas was to become Doldinger's link to the country and appears on both live recordings on the album, as well as on one of the studio tracks, the traditionally inspired "Merhba". Also joining the production were two Moroccan musicians who live in Germany: the percussionist, singer and Guembrist Rhani Krija, as well as the percussionist, singer and mandole player Momo Djender. Both decisively participated in turning the original plan of a creative post-production project into an extraordinary album that is easily one of the most exciting Passport recordings in the more than 30-year history of the group.

Except for two traditionals, "Merhba" and "Barma Sussandi", and a co-composition with Momo Djender and Rhani Krija, "Zidane", all of the pieces were written by Klaus Doldinger. Besides saxophones and clarinet he also plays a bamboo flute (on "Riyad el Cadi" - the flute had reposed in his collection of instruments until finding use to enhance the Oriental flair.) The live sound of the production, that was recorded in a Munich studio, is reminiscent of the acoustic sound of Passport's creative fusion years. Klaus Doldinger even allowed himself a bit of nostalgia by integrating "Sahara Sketches" in the album, a track that he wrote in the mid-Sixties while under the impression of his first trip to the Near East.

At first glance it is remarkable that the Moroccan and jazz styles complement each other so well. In the artist's perspective, this was a homogenous and simple combination, as Doldinger explains: "It is mainly Gnawa music in which I see a strong connection with jazz, as well as to Irish folk music, by the way. It is melodic music, that for example in the piece "Merhba" has an obvious connection to our own notion of sound. And one shouldn't forget that there were always close cultural ties to Europe due to the proximity of Spain. If we take the mediaeval Gregorian structure and its sound we recognise a

connection to the music that exists today in Morocco." Doldinger and his band try out these points of contact and overlapping with as much pleasure as they occasionally ignite a volcano of fusion. None of which disturbs the flow of the album.

"Passport to Morocco" is a dynamic and unusual album, not only in Klaus Doldinger's discography, but also in the international jazz scene. And it comes at a special time. On the one hand, Germany's most successful jazz musician celebrates his 70th birthday on May 12 and on the other Passport celebrates its 35th anniversary on stage. The fact that this album comes at just this time is something that Doldinger sees as a signal: From the very beginning his music has brought different cultures together. In times when the differences between the Orient and Occident are being emphasized around the world, it is significant to show these can also be so carefree and entertaining.