

AGNES OBEL

'PHILHARMONICS'

- debut album out 4 October -

(album preceded by 'Riverside' EP on 6 September)



On 4 October Agnes Obel is to release her debut album on [PIAS] Recordings. Called, 'Philharmonics', the album will be preceded by the release of the 'Riverside' EP on 6 September. Feeling musically related to Roy Orbison, Agnes currently lives in Berlin and possesses the rare gift of a songbird's voice, bringing to mind Ane Brun, Joanna Newsom or even Ricki Lee Jones. Play "Just So" to anyone in Germany and they'll tell you it's the music from the Deutsche Telekom television advertisement. It's the kind of exposure many an artist would die for, or the kind of publicity an independent spirit might agonise over - venturing into the commercial arena. Yet isn't it intriguing how a few bars of music can seep into our consciousness and set us off wondering where they came from?

This facebookish world of ours offers us the illusion of getting to know people we don't really know, who their friends are and what they like. Agnes Caroline Thaarup Obel likes Alfred Erik Lesley Satie and Sonic Youth, Debussy and Dylan, Hitchcock and PJ Harvey. She is from Copenhagen but she lives in Berlin. She studied at the University of Roskilde, a town renowned for a Glastonbury style music festival and home to a marvellous viking ship museum.

Then we study the photograph - the owl and Agnes. Their watchful gaze leaves you with the feeling it is they who are looking at us, rather than the other way around. Agnes looks a little like Liv Ullmann in Bergman's "Persona", or Tippi Hedren in self-assured Marnie guise rather than the catatonic figure in The Birds. She appears perfectly balanced alongside the eagle owl, both of them mutually protective of their proud serenity.

*"I walk to the borders on my own
To fall in the water just like a stone
Chilled to the marrow in them bones
Why do I go here all alone"*

Magically reminiscent of Badly Drawn Boy's "Camping Next To Water", "Riverside" begins to draw us deeper into the world of Agnes Obel. Not content to sit in contemplation on the river bank, she becomes one with the current, the translucent quality of sunlight on a stream, the smoothness of pebbles, the singsong of nature. A pastoral idyll in splendid isolation, a heightened sense of awareness she transports back to urban life:

*"Streetlights dancing in the dark, across the park
Guess I just hear every sound on the ground"*

Pascal Comelade comes to mind, his piano haikus of such persuasive clarity, whilst Agnes' voice is ever so slightly evocative of Rickie Lee Jones on "Pop" and somehow less plaintive than fellow Scandinavian sirens such as Nina Kinert, Stina Nordenstam or Ane Brun. She has such poise, elegantly evading the singer-songwriter undertow by being so much more.

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"I don't see myself as a singer that plays piano. It always feels weird when people refer to me as a singer, because to me being a singer is secondary to the music. The songs and the melodies are the most important to me. But I'm not sure what you call that.."

Then again, why give a name to everything? Still, it is tempting to ask, does one come before the other? The piano keys or vocal chords?

"Well the piano and the singing are two equal things to me - maybe not inseparable but very connected. You can say they are like two equal voices, one can accompany the other and vice versa. I don't see any hierarchy in that relation. I use them both when I'm writing songs and making melodies. Sometimes I switch one or the other so the piano role is the vocal role, or I let them answer each other, or simply follow each other as one."

Amongst her own compositions, a cover of John Cale's "(I Keep a) Close Watch" represent one definite locus we can perhaps pin to Ms. Obel.

"I have to say I don't really see an affinity at the moment to anyone. I always felt somehow related to Roy Orbison, or at least to his music." She says, referring to the dreaminess and emotion of his writing, where one is able to make something universal and timeless with a simple and intimate song and melody, "Maybe this is what I'm trying to achieve when I'm making my music ..."