



”Profound and darkly uplifting”

Interview with perpētuum

Creating a new and unique sound is a serious challenge for any band these days, but perpētuum manages to do it flawlessly. When they sit down to ”cook”, as they like to call songwriting, they always come up with a result that will please jazz, rock and electronic music lovers alike. After releasing their first EP ’Fade’ and two singles, the quartet are now working on their first full-length album, White Canvas, soon to be released to the public.

You mix many different genres into your music. Which trends have influenced you, and how did you eventually find your own sound?

Fruzsina Girincsi: I studied at the jazz department of the Academy of Music in Budapest, where me and Dani (Dániel Takács - guitar) were classmates. We were full of enthusiasm, we were having jam sessions all the time. I would often go and sing at his trio’s rehearsals, these were the first moments of perpētuum. Now there’s only the two of us left from that original line-up, but all the four current members come from a jazz background. Still, we never wanted to go mainstream. In the beginning we just wanted to play modern arrangements of jazz standards and nothing else, but as we introduced more and more new ideas into our songs, the rehearsals became a real cavalcade of styles. We like to experiment a lot, so we started out calling our sound experimental art pop, which became more crystallised as we recorded the album. Eventually we decided to classify our style as alternative pop, the word ”alternative” referring to the fact that it builds on many different genres. When Áron (Áron Sárosi - bass guitar) joined us in January 2019, our experimental spirit became even stronger. Ati (Attila Telek - drums) arrived shortly after with his own ”musical baggage”, and at this point we had to find the inevitable musical consensus. We decided to abandon the covers and develop a repertoire that would make an hour-and-a-half show. We really work a lot, always looking for new paths, so our style has evolved a lot in these past two years.

Dániel Takács: We didn’t have in our mind any particular path to follow, but we wanted to find a direction that perpētuum represents. Up to this day, there are various elements of jazz, metal, psychedelic, drum’n’bass and indie in our songs, but now the sound is more unified, so you don’t get the feeling that every song is played by a different band anymore. I think the songs on our album tell you about the road that we’ve travelled to get here where we are now.

Who are the bands that influence you the most?

Fruzsina: For me, Radiohead are a huge inspiration. They’ve also come a long way, and you can really hear it in their albums, because each one has a different sound. I’m also influenced by Massive Attack, London Grammar, Hiatus Kaiyote, and maybe Alt-J.

Dani: Yesterday, listening to one of our demo recordings, I was really surprised to notice a Rammstein influence in the guitar theme. This is just an example of course, and actually it shouldn’t be so surprising, since Spotify tells me that they were the band I listened to the most in 2020. John Coltrane came in second, by the way. In general, when we look at the evolution of music, it’s pretty clear that all musicians are very much influenced by everything they hear and listen to.



How do you write the songs? What's the creative process like?

Fruzsi: We call it "cooking". The basic ingredient is usually just a melody and a chord progression that I sing and record on the piano at home. Then we start to work on it together with the others, everyone adding something of their own ingredients. The final result often turns out completely different from the original idea. Once we took a soft, melancholic tune and turned it into a raging song, but it can also happen vice versa. Sometimes a jam session will spark a good idea, which is how the song 'Outro' came about, for example. My chord progressions aren't fixed, everyone gets a free hand to put their own spin on the song we're making. Which is probably how we can consistently mix a lot of styles into our music.

Tell us a bit about the upcoming album!

Fruzsi: As part of the Szimpla Lemming programme, we gave a farewell concert to our previous repertoire in September 2020, because we felt that an era had come to an end. We had a lot of new ideas that we hadn't at all worked on yet, so we decided to put together a completely new material, with an even more coherent sound. The album still has an experimental edge to it, but the sound is a lot more defined and pure. We also really put an emphasis on the music being in harmony with the message of the lyrics. Apart from 'Outro', all the songs were recorded on separate tracks.

Dani: This album tells many little stories, inspired by our own lives. There is something very profound about it, and something darkly uplifting, too. It grabs you in the gut and then lets you go. When it really speaks to someone, they will become totally captivated by the music.

Fruzsi: We didn't want it to be just a bunch of happy and sad songs. While you're listening to the album, you'll be completely immersed on this journey with us. It's a constant ebb and flow, just like life itself. Throughout the songs, we recall moments and emotions that we can all relate to on different levels, like being a child without a care in the world, or feeling anger, or feeling unbridled happiness. White Canvas is a collective journey through our world of experiences and memories that we all relate to in different ways, because we are all different but in a way the same.

How did the COVID situation affect you? You wrote a lot of songs in 2020 as well, didn't you?

Fruzsi: When the first quarantine hit in, I was really happy thinking that I would finally have time to write new songs. But then the inspiration just didn't come, and I didn't even touch the piano for months, apart from my online classes. Then there was a sudden "click", and 'Oh Silence' was born. It was inspired by the virus situation, the quarantine, and by spending time sitting in a room. It's about not letting go of ourselves and each other, not letting go of hope. Because even when we can't see a way out, it's very much up to our choices how our destiny turns out. After writing the song, something seemed to have dissolved in me. It seems that during the silence of the previous six months I'd had a lot of ideas, and a lot of new songs were born. But not all of them had made it to the album, some are still sitting in the drawer waiting for me to start working on them again and show them to the guys.



Fruzi, you write most of the songs in English, but there are also two songs in Hungarian on the album. Was this a one-off, or do you want to write more Hungarian songs in the future?

Fruzi: Basically, I find it easier to write and sing in English, and besides the fact that many lyrics sound better in English, my singing voice is also quite different to that in Hungarian. I don't want to force myself to write lyrics in Hungarian. I once translated a song that I had written in English into Hungarian, for a competition where we really wanted to play it and we needed it to be in Hungarian. Unfortunately, it turned out badly: you could hear it in the lyrics that they were originally written in English and then translated. Still, I'm not shying away from singing in my own mother tongue, and I'd really like to write more Hungarian lyrics, too. So I try to put down on paper all the little bits of lyrics that in Hungarian, and then work on them, because I think I'm gaining more and more courage to open up to the audience in my own language. We often hear that the best way to succeed on our local market is to write and sing songs in Hungarian, but in my opinion, the audience can feel it when something doesn't come from the heart. I don't want to feel uncomfortable under such expectations, so I sing every song in the language that it was born in. Mind you, it wasn't only me who wrote lyrics for the album. 'Foolish' came from Dani, and I really hope that he will write many more lyrics for the band in the future.

Perpētuum has already won several awards in Hungary. Which one was the biggest honour so far?

Dani: We are really grateful for each award we got, so it's hard to pick just one. It was a great experience to perform at the 2020 MüPa Jazz Showcase and win the Audience's Choice Award. Similarly, we were blown away by all the love, support and community-feeling we got from the Szimpla Lemming Program. Winning the 2019 Budafok Cellar Talent Showcase was also a very memorable moment, because it was the first time we'd ever won a prize. But perhaps the biggest accolade was winning the Babel Laureate Jazz-World contest in 2019. We were ecstatic when they announced the results. To be honest, we didn't think we had a chance, simply because we don't play jazz in the classical sense anymore. With the prize came the opportunity to tour the Netherlands and to record the album, which was a 180-degree turnaround in life of the band. So we are really grateful to Babel Arts Management, who organised this event and made the tour possible.

Fruzi: I think the reason that we never really believed we had a chance to win any jazz contests is that jazz in Hungary means something different than what it means in many other countries. In Hungary, it's mainly mainstream jazz that falls into this classification, while elsewhere in Western Europe your music can be called jazz and you'll be invited to international jazz festivals even if you have a more pop sound. Think of Tom Misch, Hiatus Kaiyote, Anomalie, The Free Nationals, for example. Nowadays there's a lot of fusion of different musical styles, and there are many bands whose sound can not be categorized under one easily defined genre.

What's the plan for the debut concert?

Fruzi: The date and the venue are yet to be announced. We'd like to do some gigs in Budapest, and we also want to go to summer festivals around the country, but unfortunately the pandemic situation still doesn't allow us to make any concrete plans so far ahead. What's for sure is that we won't leave our audience without any new content in the meantime, as we have many things scheduled for next spring for showcasing the new songs.