



interview
Lena Kovačević

JAZZ SINGER

Serbia must go forward

THE SITUATION IS COMPLICATED, THE CRISIS AFFECTS BUDGETS, FUNDS ETC. ALL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS ARE STILL ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THE 20TH CENTURY. HOWEVER, NOTHING COMES FROM REGRETS. AS ONE OF MY CLOSE COLLEAGUES WOULD SAY - "WE'RE GOING, WE'RE WORKING"

BY LJUBOMIR RADANOVIĆ PHOTO KI ARCHIVE

Lena Kovačević is not only Duško's beautiful daughter, but also a successful jazz musician, composer and songwriter. She is appreciated in Serbia, but even more so out of our country. She recently released her second studio album "San" (Dream), which critics say is one of the most pleasant surprises on the local scene in 2013. The songs were released under the label PGP-RTS as a collage of pop and jazz, where, in addition to several original songs, there are incredibly successful and innovative cover versions of the hits of famous artists like Bajaga, Dino Merlin, Vlado Georgiev, Borec Marjanović and others.

In this interview for Kurir International, this jazz singer and member of the jury for the first series "The first voice Serbia", talks about music, why she decided to return to Serbia, her son Vuik and father Dušan Kovačević, whose plays she could easily have been one of the characters in, because she listens to silence and knows the secret of the desert.

Your new album leans more towards pop. Why did you decide to make such a shift?

- This album is actually a collage of pop

and jazz music. In my opinion, it's not a big change from the first album in that sense, the story is still acoustic. Pop music in my mind has some other elements and this combination is just what I love.

You included covers of the tracks "Silence", "The Master of kisses", "Heart of Honey", "Whistle at eight" etc.

- These are songs that I love, belonging to different genres and times. It is always nice to hear how good songs sound in a different way. That was simultaneously also a challenge.

How did your son react to the new songs?

- Vuik has listened to this album and is awaiting the third CD.

Is it possible to realise your dreams in Serbia?

- Everything is possible, wherever you live. If it does not immediately go the way you wanted, it might be a good time to change something in your approach, but I'm trying to realise my dreams and I'm slowly but surely working on that.

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The lyrics for the song "San" (Dream) were written by your father Dusan. How did that track emerge?

"Dream" is the title track and one of my favourite songs on this album. The song was written for me by my father Dusan and our friend and great composer Vlada Marković and given to me a few years ago. It has now found a place on my new album and I'm very happy about that. "Dream" is a kind of homage to Laza Kostić and the song "Between reality and dream", because I was always fascinated by dreams. It also reminds me of the wonderful times of Darko Kraljić, whose music remains a great source of inspiration.

Who are your musical influences? Many call you the Serbian Luz Casal

I have always loved unusual voices, timbre that can immediately be recognised. She is just such a singer and that's certainly a great compliment to me. I love singers like some ladies who do not sing "pretentiously", for whom the song is more important than proving vocal capabilities, such as Diana Krall, Norah Jones, Liz Wright, Anita Baker, Randy Crawford and many others.

Did you know from an early age that music would be your future profession?

I definitely did. Since childhood I did not want to deal with any other profession. Music was a hobby, now I am lucky that it is much more than that and it brings me equal joy.

What will you remember your first public performance for?

The Beatles song "Yesterday"... I was ten years old and was deeply moved by singing about the "pain" for some past times.

Why did you fall in love with the piano?

The piano as an instrument is, in my opinion, and not to insult other instruments, like a kind of king, the emperor of all instruments, like its own orchestra almost on its own. I'm still in love with the sound of the piano today.

In life did you find it a burden or "serendipity" that you are the daughter of playwright and academic Dušan Kovačević?

I think I've said many times and like to repeat that to be the child of such a wonderful man brought me great happiness and was never a burden. By coincidence, my father Dusan is a public figure, but luckily we do not do the same type of work.

Do you go to the theatre and which of your father's works is your favourite?

I've always experienced the theatre as a second home. I love the smell of the theatre, the people in it, the plays, socialising and gathering at the theatre. "St. George Shoots the Dragon" is one of my favourite texts and we are unusually related to it in a family sense. Of all the texts, and it is not easy for me to single out, "Balkan Spy" is my favourite. "CIA, liss, CIA."

You work as a lecturer in a talent school. What kind of advice do you give your students?

Singers, musicians in general, are like athletes. It is important that they have the talent and they start practicing and learning as young as possible. In the Netherlands I taught singing lessons and I'm now teaching at the Lekart educational centre. I always advise that they start from the basics, that they learn singing techniques, breathing; that the young singer knows what they want and loves to sing; that they know how to see themselves and their career and that they work on it diligently and patiently.

You have said that your wish is to deal with applied music. Would you like to do music for film, plays, opera or ballet?

I would generally like to try my hand at writing applied music. One step at a time.

Can one make a living in Serbia from jazz music?

Jazz is not the music of the masses in any country, but one can still live from music, otherwise everyone who is not engaged in a very commercial kind of music would give up on the music they love. The media

FOREIGNERS LOVE OUR KAFANA BARS AND MUSIC

Which sights of the capital do you like to show your friends from abroad when they come to visit you?

Certainly some of the wonderful hidden places of Belgrade, where I like to go by myself. There are also a number of kafana bars that one must not overlook, with the "atmosphere" of good food and good music always going on.



also influences the taste of the public. It's time to get some good music back on the radio and television, for there to be more of it.

Why did you decide to return to your native Belgrade after completing your studies in the Netherlands?

First of all, I wanted to be with my family and friends. I never thought I'd be happier anywhere than among my own kind, surrounded by loved ones, and possibilities exist for all other steps and desires.

What is the state of Serbian culture like today?

The situation is complicated, the crisis affects budgets, funds etc. All cultural institutions are still organized according to the principles of the 20th century and we are already deep into the 21st century and serious reorganisation is required. However, nothing comes from regrets. As one of my close colleagues would say: "We're going, we're working".

What best represents us as Serbia in the world? What are our greatest attributes?

We are best represented by talented and hardworking people. Those are the real ambassadors of the nation.

As a woman with international experience, can you say what the difference is in the perception of music as a job in Serbia or in the Netherlands?

Production abroad is definitely "richer" and the organization is at a much higher level, but that is totally natural considering the standard of life itself. I think that Serbia can always do better, but there are a lot of talented people whose work and quality is put out "on the surface". In Serbia individual quality is more prominent and it all depends on personal effort, while in the Netherlands you are part of the system and you progress in accordance with that.

In which field of art does the state urgently need to invest more money?

It's hard to single out any area, because they all need money. The state needs museums, exhibitions, concerts and theatre, while quality films are also important. Ways of funding that will be sustainable need to be devised.

How can we entice people to visit our country and get to know our culture and the history of our nation?

Positive publicity is very important for every country and with us I would single out friendly people, good food and a very colourful and diverse natural beauty and cultural heritage. Emphasis needs to be placed on all of this through promotion, which must be a state project with a clear plan. I hope it will really be that way in the years to come. ■