

## THE HEART OF BLUES ALSO BEATS IN SIBERIA

### On Maria Marachowska and her “Siberian Blues“

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© Maria Marachowska, photographed by Iris Miniatura, 2010

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s famous quotation “*The limits of my language are the limits of my universe*“ is reduced to absurdity by this music, yet it can be extended in a prodigious way and earns a new significance. What we witness here, is more than a language in its literal sense, it is the universal language of music that knows no boundaries. The fact that Maria Marachowska interprets her songs in Russian, can be understood as a statement. She breaks with the unwritten law under which music, addressing an international audience, knows but one language: English or just a forced imitation. Some German performers, trying to contrast with these lingual dictates, start to recall their mother tongue as a poets' language, whereas most of them either are strangely tempted by a politically incorrect Germaness, mocking themselves or they hopelessly dedicate to a “Schlager” style blissfulness befouled with kitsch. Due to this strong leaning towards a lingual monopolism, the significant contribution, Russia has made to world literature and the development of subtle narrative structures, linguistically powerful patterns and poetic masterpieces, is all too often forgotten. Thus, Maria Marachowska uses Russian language as a skillful trick, allowing us to enter a world of expression far beyond Russian disco, Balkan beats and multicultural folklore. It is as if the heart of blues was at once beating in this smooth intonation and we understand: this language dissolves all barriers. As if it had never been different, we listen to this “*Siberian Blues*“ as something entirely new and still so close, an ancient mood of mankind, that has always existed, long before it was officially born in the Deep South of the United States.

There is no need for a translation to comprehend and feel what these expressive songs are about, conveying deep melancholy, just to inspire through their vital power in the next moment. Their lyrics are borrowed from famous Russian poets who have either fallen into oblivion in the Western world or have not been translated at all, thus reaching a foreign language audience for the first time through Maria Marachowska’s music; other texts are penned by herself. The song “*Scandalist*“, that gives its name to her first CD, is based on a text by Russian poet Sergeij Jessenin and is full of the intransigence and revolutionary energy of François Villon. Maria Marachowska interprets this text with an intensity that is amazing for such a gracile person. When she sings those lines, meaning in the English translation “*I was vulgar and scandalous for the purpose of glowing more.*“, we are capable of feeling the grief, the sorrow and experience of life, but also the pride, contained in these words and it seems in no way insincere.

Not least remarkable is the fact that she interprets her songs in the masculine form of Russian language, an intentional and courageous response to the patriarchic culture of her native country.

Her own texts narrate about longing and the search of beauty, about monsters and the abysses of the human mind and still, there is this light, something radiating, that – in spite of all gloominess - turns towards life. There is nothing sweetish in these songs, no superficial declarations of love, no banalities, they speak of different worlds, of a depth of emotions, an honesty and rough poetry, hardly to be found in contemporary music, these lyrics can be rather understood as a distant reverberation to William S. Burroughs and the beat poets. Yet, this “*Siberian Blues*” stands for itself and is impossible to classify and this is exactly what makes it so special. Interpreted in German, “*Iron Mama*” is an exception within her musical oeuvre, an imaginary structure of thoughts, illustrating how cold Germany can be, whereas the severity of German language emphasizes the striking images of this instantaneous description, relating a complex fate in only 4 verses, a modern street ballad full of rough poetry and melancholy. The inspiration for the song came during a tram ride on a rainy day in Jena, when the artist was absorbed in thoughts and imagined a carelessly discarded piece of iron, slowly rusting away, as a symbol of human loneliness. It is beyond a doubt that Maria Marachowska’s texts are visual and their visuality also shows in her music. Not without reason, movie images are evoked, when we dedicate to this sound and the atmosphere created by it.

There are moments that could do a credit to Angelo Badalamenti and his psychedelic melancholy, in other moments we wish Pedro Almodóvar would discover this new, powerful female voice to add to his painterly imagery of love and passion, the minimalism of the guitar solos, however, recalls Neil Young’s soundtrack to Jim Jarmusch’s mystic high-class western “*Dead Man*”. The solemnity and impressively dramatic intonation of her song “*Emotions*”, conjures up tableau-like images before the inner eye, reminiscent of a Peter Greenaway movie. Yet, imagination knows no boundaries and there is no instance that suggests any musical references. Although this comparison might sound strange, it is obvious in Maria Marachowska’s music that she is also a painter. She claims that as a painter she is able to transform each story she happens to hear into an image, the same applies to her musical work. In her music, this blue haze, that is Blues, takes on the shape of figures and moods, forms poetic words, seems almost meditative. It is a journey into the “*Anatomy of Melancholy*”, too beautiful to wish a remedy for this condition, as it was suggested in the full title of Robert Burton’s work of the same name from 1621.

Maria Marachowska’s music breathes, its strength lies precisely in the slowness, single tones linger on and the thoughts are carried away like in a long quiet flow, there is no tone too much, in this music everything that should make up the blues comes to live. There is no need of a regional classification, no categorization, blues is not tied to a certain place, new, exciting forms generate far from the traditions of the Mississippi Delta, the Deep South or Chicago. It must not necessarily tell of the African-American or simply American emotional landscape, but expresses a universal attitude of life. As we recognize in Maria Marachowska’s music, the heart of blues also beats in Siberia. Whoever gets into this unique experience of “*Siberian Blues*”, discovers an inner harmony, submerges far under the surface and comes across long lost feelings and emotions. The chords only seem simple at the first impression, but listening carefully, the classical sequences of notes contained, cannot be overheard and we realize that they are based on complex musical-theoretical structures. Maria Marachowska owes these subtly distinguished classic influences, lending the adequate dramaturgy and depth to her songs, to her musical education at the E.T.A. Hoffmann music school for the highly gifted in Kaliningrad that she visited from 1989 to 1993. The love of music of her early years has remained unchanged, except that she exchanged her first instrument, the piano, for a guitar.

There is a hint of smoky sensuality in the soft timbre of her remarkably deep singing voice, the way she lifts her voice in some parts, just to become more quiet again, the exact timing of the breaks, everything points to a sophisticated dramaturgical composition in which nothing is left to chance. And nevertheless, it is this apparent lightness and naturalness in her song recitals that make this music performance so appealing. It is amazing to witness a suchlike depth in the work of a comparably young artist, not only in regard of her voice, but also concerning the intensity involved, she must not be afraid to bear comparison with the mature Chavela Vargas.

Consistent with her music, Maria Marachowska's physical appearance is also marked by a strict stylistic intention. The portrait photos of the artist are predominated by classic black & white, reminiscent of Marlene Dietrich's star portraits, cigar smoke, pinstripe suit, dandyness par excellence and sometimes the moon, this mysterious body of light, showing the way to the creatures of the night. It is an elegance as if from another era, something aristocratic about her features and at the same time this mysterious androgyny in her appearance, both contributing to her stage presence. No other young musician plays with suchlike ease with the classic style and takes advantage of it, in order to create her own personality. Beyond preconceived gender roles and stylistic references, she creates an art character who, after all, is none other than herself. A personality who could have slipped away from a film noir.

Maria Marachowska was born exactly 30 years ago in Omsk/ Siberia, her childhood and adolescence were marked by several changes of location, she spent the first six years of her life together with her family in Estergom/ Hungary, afterwards she lived for 13 years in the former East Prussian metropolis of Kaliningrad/ Königsberg, a period that influenced her artistic expression through the strange and enchanting appeal of the place and its faded splendor and not least its proximity to the sea. In 1998 she returned to her native town Omsk for two years to complete her studies of Fine Arts.

In Berlin, where she has been living since 2004, she finally discovered the music as a profession and vocation. "*Speechless, lonely, as a stranger*", as she recalls, she found her form of expression in "*Siberian Blues*". Thus, it is no coincidence that this music form was born in Berlin, although it seems to come from far away, timeless and not rooted in any ethnic pattern. It differs significantly from the so-called Berlin "Avantgarde", just by its deep solemnity and honesty, in this case, the effect is not attained by the parody of mainstream at all costs, she simply ignores the existence of the former and creates her own world. During her numerous performances at the legendary "*Kaffee Burger*", where she also made a name for herself as an event manager with her "*Katharsis*" – series from 2007 to 2009, she already put a spell on the Berlin music scene audience. In her new program "*Scandalist*", she devotes now for the first time entirely to her own musical repertoire and reveals the whole spectrum of her means of expression and her personality.

All the more we realize with whom we are dealing: Maria Marachowska is a strong, new protagonist on the Berlin art horizon, who has a great future ahead of her and can definitely not be ignored. After the two concerts she performed together with Berlin actor and musician Wer.n Wilke at "*Ex'n'Pop*" and "*Art.Gerecht*", where they presented their jointly recorded CD "*Scandalist*", she will now continue her solo career and go on stage alone again. She is fully aware of the fact, that she has the charism of a solo artist, she convinces with her personality and proves in a time, tending towards musical group pressure, that it is something special and outstanding to celebrate this art of minimalism and set a clear, precise and courageous statement against this band consonance. In her own hands, the diamond is polished best and reaches the utmost

brilliance.

The melody speaks, we believe to hear a continuous echo to her singing voice on her guitar, she is capable of a playing technique that in a wondrous way conveys the acoustic illusion of hearing several instruments out of one. In the general effect, there is no need of any other instrument but this single guitar, to produce the drive of a band. It is as if the tones were falling from a distant star, as William S. Burroughs described the divine power of music in his "*Cities of the Red Night*".

Soon we will be hearing more of it in the Berlin scene, and not only there, concerts are also planned for Munich, Cologne, Hamburg and Vienna in the near future.

For further listening and information on Maria Marachowska and her "*Siberian Blues*", please check out:

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