

## BLACK LOTUS

**Xu Fengxia**      **guzheng, sanxian, voice**  
**Lucas Niggli**    **drums, percussion**

Xu Fengxia, the Chinese musician living in Germany and Swiss Percussionist Lucas Niggli are working since 2004 intensively together and published an award winning CD on INTAKT Records.

They play an high energy Jazz & contemporary world music with the fascinating combination of traditional chinese instruments, borderless vocals and percussion.

The Duo is called BLACK LOTUS, which suggests a mystery and carries a lot of poetry in it.

Sometimes their music is driven by grooving rhythmic patterns, sometimes they focus on sound exploration.

The music of Niggli and Xu is influenced by many different styles and periods in music, a musical stretching from traditional chinese music, Jazz, Afro and contemporary composed music.

It would be too easy to describe this music with the fashionable term "multi-cultural-crossover". There is a lot more about it. The two musicians speak the same musical language. A deep musical understanding is the key to the breathtaking sound-adventure. Traditional Chinese sounds and techniques perfectly blend with contemporary hip trends. The singing of Xu Fengxia adds to this impression, since she masters a lot of styles including Mongolian throat singing, Beijing opera or the chit chat syllables of sound poetry.

Some press-quotes:

### ***Xu Fengxia - L.Niggli - Duo***

***extreme firmness, with a definite emphasis on the spiritual aspects of the exchange***

*There's a chemistry at work between these two performers — a team both in art and life — the results of which are evident from the initial instants of Black Lotos. Xu Fengxia and Lucas Niggli share a Chinese origin, the latter's mother coming from that country. Considering that he — a Swiss — was born in Camerun, the Asian/African scent occasionally elicited by his sensitive use of percussion and drums might be firmly rooted in this man's DNA. On the other hand, Fengxia may be specialized in traditional stringed instruments — she plays Guzheng and Sanxian on this CD besides singing — yet her influences and experiences have been multifarious, informed by all kinds of accents — rock, classical, jazz, free improvisation — with the late bassist Peter Kowald recognized as a sort of paternal reference.*

*This premise is not useful, in any case, to give a really accurate picture of the scope of these duets, recorded at Cologne's Loft in December 2007. The overall impression is one of extreme firmness, with a definite emphasis on the spiritual aspects of the exchange, a pair of souls fused in semi-consciousness for a large part of the album. In "Ride Over Blue Sky" we were reminded of Saadet Turkoz — another Intakt protagonist — as Fengxia intones invocations and, subsequently, extremely effective melodies that sound frail at first, successively shifting to a higher level of shamanistic intensity, and whose popular derivation and immediate action*

*on the memory do not detract from the pureness of their intent. The instrumental accompaniment, here as in the rest of the program, is functional to the spur of the moment, soberly oriented to the preservation of a primary essence rather than constituting an "alternative" extravagance. Virtuosity, in this particular juncture, is a matter of mixing judgment and quasi-irrational explosions, the couple essentially succeeding.*

*Someone might be tempted to place this record in a "world music" mental shelf, but that would be silly. One only needs to listen to the spectacularly engrossing harmonics generated by the duo at the beginning of the self-explanatory "Bow Blow", a scraping pre-apocalypse perfumed with David Jackman-like harsh holiness, to realize that — come the right occasion — Fengxia and Niggli are ready to fight against the demons of superficiality. When they speed up the procedures in amusing hybrids sounding like Greek bluegrass played in a Shanghai's alley (check "Old Tree"), the positive judgement is supplemented by a good dose of fun. Yes, this stuff can also be the pretext for an outburst of mad dancing. Still, it's the powerful communion of fundamental natures which stands as the most important element to consider when judging this effort a winning bet.*

Massimo Ricci

pointofdeparture.com ( US-internetmag)

***Xu Fengxia - L.Niggli - Duo***

***Tremendous Power***

*...Xu is clearly playing by her own rules, evidently transgressing improvisatory codes as well as Chinese musical traditions. The music here possesses tremendous power (as a singer Xu can approach the wail of Sainkho Namchylak), and it's interesting to hear Xu with a musician who complements and extends the intensity of her more structured work. Niggli can drive the furious rhythmic attack that Xu favors or simply keep time. The title track is an expressionist vocal taking its text from the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum." The structured song "Ride over Blue Sky" begins delicately enough, gradually growing in intensity until Xu's voice takes in shouts and guttural drones and multiphonics. When she turns to the banjo-like sangian, further weird patterns in world music emerge. "Old Tree" sounds like Xu has found the Cumberland Gap in the Great Wall of China, as she revs up a howling vocal and high-speed banjo-like part that sounds like she's prepping for dueling banjos with Eugene Chadbourne. Stylistic purity is the last thing this music is concerned with; instead, its vitality engages tradition and freedom, pentatonics and atonality, and maybe even possessive individualism.*

Stuart Broomer

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