



WHITETREE

Chose a headline: *Clash of the titans, The definite boygroup re-inventing the wheel of deepness, Classical and electronic music finally make the long-awaited handshake, The best album so far of the 21st century.* Funny thing is: all of these bold statements are true to the core. Being as tabloid-inspired as they may be: Robert Lippok, Ronald Lippok and Ludovico Einaudi have crafted a very special album indeed, requiring not only our full concentration and attention, but, much more important, our whole-hearted appreciation

Inspired and named after a very special, paradise-like retreat in Amos Tutuola's novel "The Palm-Wine Drinkard", the album is the cosiest pair of french mittens, helping to withstand the cold and fast pulse of our technology-driven times. Think about it: "Cloudland" is not the first effort to merge electronics with classical music. Far from it. Carsten Nicolai worked with Ryuichi Sakamoto, Carl Craig and Moritz von Oswald inject Ravel's Bolero with a techno twist, a whole new generation of musicians is as comfortable with a laptop as with classical instruments. Yet brave and remarkable efforts, Cloudland brings across a playfulness, a looseness and broadness which makes the album something unique.

The reasons are obvious: The Lippoks are not your typical electronic music composers. Nor is Ludovico Einaudi your average classical composer. Their individual bodies of art have always been about this special extra mile, an effort hardly anybody seems to care about these days anymore. With their main project "To Rococo Rot", the Lippoks, together with their fellow colleague Stefan Schneider, have not only recorded an impressive yet diverse catalogue, mixing band-based tracks with all sorts of electronic sounds. The project also always benefited from Ronald Lippok's unique style of drumming, giving their music a lush, yet powerful and almost sequenced feel. In fact, it was the style of drumming which got the ball rolling in the first place, when Ludovico attended a show of To Rococo Rot in Milan some years ago. "I liked the concert very much, I remember I was attracted from the interaction between the live drumming of Ronald with the electronics of Robert.

I remember I went to the dressing room after the concert and we just exchanged few words saying that it could have been nice to do something together in the future." Ludovico is no stranger to electronic music. He always drew inspiration from tape manipulations, experiments of all sorts and special piano treatments. While all Whitetree-members found their individual styles and voices to articulate their musical visions, it is this collaboration which brings all their separately developed talents together in a dense, unexpected sequence of songs.

It all started in 2006, when Einaudi approached the Lippoks to do an Italian tour together. A week of rehearsals was all they built their set on. Two weeks of sold-out shows followed. "It was a dedicated club tour", Ronald Lippok remembers, "small venues, sometimes it was almost impossible to get the piano onto the stage." The trio connected well while on the road and decided to record some of the material in the studio. Planet Roc in Berlin was chosen, a place which has "History" written all over it. The former broadcasting centre of East German radio has a reputation for perfect acoustics and all kinds of special my imagination. It was like searching figures and forms in an abstract painting or pulling out emotions from the clouds. Then we were playing for long, losing ourselves into the music, responding to each other inputs, it was like building castles with the sand, no rules, everything was possible."

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The mixture of quiet and loud, the always shifting level of energy is intriguing indeed. The shocking truth: There isn't a single piece on the album which distinctively identifies one member of the group as the composer. The joint effort is,

among other things, what makes "Cloudland" such a unique recording. Be it "Kyril", which starts out as a Satie-inspired pirouette and suddenly develops into a marimba-driven piece of glitched-up electronica. "The Room", the closing composition of the album, could have been a typical piano-based lullaby, but becomes a disturbing yet assuring moment of genius with unexpected subtle digital hiccups. And of course "Mercury Sands", the impossible hit single, the essence of this collaboration, some might say, bouncing around a light melody you want to whistle for the rest of your life, subtle vocoder chords and lush yet incredible tight hihats coming from the drumkit. Still, everything on "Cloudland" is leveled, neither the acoustic nor the electronic part ever tries to overpower the other. A phenomenon unheard of.

"I'm a drummer. I know my instrument and i know how to handle loudness", says Ronald. "I was shocked by the sheer power coming from Ludovico and his piano. I never could have imagined that it can be such a powerful instrument. Then suddenly I understood how we could make this work". Robert Lippok adds: "I always wanted to work with a musician who has an academic background, who approaches things differently. We never work with melodies so fully written out, so defined. Before, we used melodies more on a macro basis. Ludovico opens up the piano, sits down, starts playing and it's there. Energy. Our album has a very physical aspect. Sometimes loud, sometimes quiet, but always lively, open, cheerful."

(Thaddeus Herrmann)

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