



SUSANA SANTOS SILVA

BY JOHN SHARPE

Stockholm-based Portuguese trumpeter Susana Santos Silva displays a relentlessly searching attitude and, as a result, has developed into one of the most daring European players, appearing with an increasingly starry circle of improvisers, including Fred Frith, Hamid Drake, Mat Maneri and Evan Parker. Though spending much of her time in free situations and collectives, she also leads the quintet Impermanence, which has just issued its second album.

Her love of music came from her grandfather, a marching band enthusiast, who taught Silva her first notes on the trumpet. Music school and college in Porto followed, first with classical, then later jazz studies, as well as further study in Germany and the Netherlands. But at the same time she got on-the-job training. "When I was 17 I joined the Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos, which is a big band here in town." It was there that her interest in jazz grew alongside an appreciation of the likes of Miles Davis, Clifford Brown and Freddie Hubbard. "I started to listen more and more and I discovered more things. It was like a very natural and slow process of falling in love with that music, only to figure out later on that I also wanted to move forward a bit on my own playing, maybe I didn't have to exactly play what those folks played then."

Her move into free improvisation was part of a natural evolution. "I was trying to figure out where was the truth for me in my own playing. Playing traditional music or when I played standards, it was super fun, but I never felt it was my own music. I just kept on exploring and trying to find things that really spoke with me. Then I discovered all kinds of musicians that play more freely, free jazz and even further away from that, totally improvised music. Somehow that is what made more sense to me, because then whatever came out it would be myself. And, of course, inside that playing are all the influences that I have since forever, all these trumpet players, all kinds of music I played and listened to. It really made sense to me. OK, I can do whatever I feel like and it will be right!"

She drew on that process of self-discovery during lockdown, which caught her away from Sweden but in the apartment she maintains in Porto, the outcome being the recording and digital self-release of an album of solo trumpet, *The Same Is Always Different*. "When I look out of my window it is always the same view I see every day, but if you sit and look outside there is always something new to discover." On each track, Silva investigates a discrete sound world, exploiting myriad different techniques. Opener "The" is an astonishing nearly 20-minute circular breathed tour de force. "It's very minimalist in a way, but within that sound there are millions of things happening. I wanted to mirror my existence during this lockdown when we were stuck at home and every day was the same, but not really."

She took a different approach for *Life Is A Mystery* on the Belgian Matière Mémoire label, which offers an almost psychedelic array of timbres. It's part of a series

of solo LPs by 20 different artists during 2020, with music on one side and artwork on the other. "It's a super interesting thing that I was very happy to be invited to do, because most of the other musicians are maybe in the electronic world, as well as drones and noise sometimes. I also manipulated sounds on my computer. There's some trumpet playing, there's also some field recordings. That was also a lot of fun to do because it was something new for me that I didn't do before."

While much of Silva's activity is as a free improviser, in a range of ad hoc and ongoing groupings, she also composes for her quintet Impermanence. "This is the only band I have that I actually write all the music that we play. Because for me it is really difficult to find the balance between what is written and the freedom that you give to the musicians and the improvisations. I've always been interested in trying to meld these two together in a way that you can't really understand when one ends and the other begins." *The Ocean Inside A Stone* sounds looser than the band's eponymous debut, even though the personnel remain unchanged: Silva (trumpet, tin whistle, voice), João Pedro Brandão (alto saxophone, flute, piccolo), Hugo Raro (piano, synthesizer), Torbjörn Zetterberg (electric bass, voice, qraqeb) and Marcos Cavaleiro (drums). "From the first record to the second I tried to write even less, so the musicians are not so focused in the written music but they have space for improvisation."

She also tweaked the instrumentation between records, seeking to emulate the input of sound artist Maile Colbert on the first album. "I wanted to explore a little bit more this electronic world, but in a way without using computers, but use instruments that had that feature, like the electric bass with a bunch of pedals that Torbjörn uses, or the synthesizer together with the piano. So that was my idea so they could bring that characteristic to the music and we could go different places, instead of being completely acoustic."

Coming up on Clean Feed Records is a release from another outfit to which Silva has contributed compositions, called *Hearth*, a collaborative project with Slovenian pianist Kaja Draksler, Danish saxophonist Mette Rasmussen and Argentinian saxophonist Ada Rave. "The music is pretty free, but we have concepts, some things that we worked out. Each one of us brought something to the table and we worked on that."

While Silva was pleased to perform her first concerts in front of a live audience in Portugal in early August just days before talking, she still has regrets about an experience she missed out on as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. "I was going to play with Anthony Braxton in Lisbon and in Oslo. I was very happy to get the invitation of course. We were going to play trio with an accordion player from New Haven. It's just very sad. So we will see if the future will bring it back." ❖

For more information, visit susanasantossilva.com

Recommended Listening:

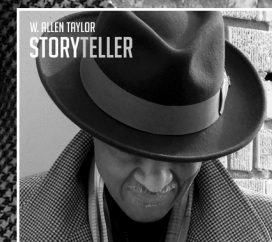
- Susana Santos Silva — *Devil's Blues* (Toap Music, 2010)
- Susana Santos Silva/Torbjörn Zetterberg — *Almost Tomorrow* (Clean Feed, 2012)
- Kaja Draksler/Susana Santos Silva — *This Love* (Clean Feed, 2015)
- Torbjörn Zetterberg & The Great Question — *Live* (Corbett vs. Dempsey, 2017)
- Susana Santos Silva — *All The Rivers* (*Live at Panteão Nacional*) (Clean Feed, 2017)
- Susana Santos Silva — *The Same Is Always Different* (s/r, 2020)

"His natural swing and taste allow him to revisit well-throttled standards with gusto and originality..."

A welcome debut by an artist who definitely deserves wider exposure and appreciation."

—The New York City Jazz Record

watjazz.com



88.3fm
WBGO.org

PLAYING THE MUSIC
FOR YOU

