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Poetic tributes to the lonely deceased



MELANIE KATZ
(PUBLISHER):
"Die einsamen Begräbnisse" (The lonely burials) Limmat Verlag
216 pages, CHF 32
einsamesbegrabnis.ch

Funerals are sad events, not least when no one is there to mourn because the deceased has no family or friends. This happens several times a year in the city of Zurich, with the interments taking place at a communal grave. However, such funerals are no longer quite as lonely. In 2017, poet Melanie Katz imported a Dutch project to Zurich called "The Lonely Burial". The idea is that a notable poet attends the burial and recites a fitting epitaph for the deceased. A book has now been published containing 37 of these poems as well as essays on loneliness, death and interment.

The poet lends meaning to this otherwise forlorn event, writes Alexander Estis. People who die a lonely death often leave behind "small black holes" that need to be filled in through research, says Nathalie Schmid.

This is why the poets have embellished each of the 37 poems with an account of how they traced what little information there was about the deceased. Looking for clues was quite a challenge in many cases. "How can I pierce the loneliness without contradicting the facts?" asks Martin Bieri.

Published by Melanie Katz, this book provides an answer. It contains a wide range of different poems and written accounts that sometimes barely skim the surface. "We know little about you/Nothing in fact," Klaus Merz's poem begins. But sometimes there is someone who knew something about the deceased which could then be included in the epitaph. A lonely burial becomes a proper farewell. And the poem communicates solidarity, writes Katz. The result is a wonderfully touching ritual. Many of the memories and scraps of information about the deceased are quite similar at first glance, but ultimately each of the epitaphs has a very personal feel. The people who died may have lived in precarious circumstances, yet each of them had something that made them unique. These varied tributes stand in relief against the often cold, fast-paced, unheeding nature of modern life. Poet Michael Fehr: "Calm and strength are not mutually exclusive."

BEAT MAZENAUER

Back to herself



NICOLE BERNEGGER:
"Back To You",
Alien Pearl Records
2023

It took a while, but Nicole Bernegger has finally broken free as an artist. This is not to say that the Basel singer has not been true to herself over the years, but, after winning reality talent show "The Voice of Switzerland" a decade ago and living through the subsequent hype, she has had to do the hard miles to discover herself again like she did with her band The Kitchenettes.

The music on her new album is testament to this journey. Bernegger has always loved late 1960s soul and makes no apologies for it here. "Back To You" is not purely a retro album but has obvious contemporary influences. Nevertheless, the groove of a long-forgotten era shines through in all nine tracks in some way or another, along with elements of disco, pop and funk.

Bernegger, now 46, used to have to play for a chart position. Those days are gone. Her fourth LP sounds fresh and relaxed. From the soothing "Red Blue Yellow Green" to the sensual "Crescent Moon" – the songs by Bernegger and her trusted band ooze authenticity. To be clear: this is Nicole Bernegger, not "The Voice of Switzerland". She is making the music she wants without the record label forcing her to collaborate with musician xyz or manufacturing some hip new sound for her.

The mother of three is now in full control in every sense. Four years ago, she waved goodbye to the major record companies and created her own label together with manager Steffi Klär. And in making this new record, she even sat in the production chair for the first-ever time. Recorded at One Drop Studio in Basel, the resultant album has an organic, warm, earthy feel.

The likeable singer's outward appearance has also evolved. Bernegger used to stick to a strictly sixties-inspired fashion regime with signature bun ponytail. She has now discarded this visual corset – and taken a further step back from her old television persona.

MARKO LEHTINEN