

The kiss of the hyena woman

Myths are inseparable from the world heritage city Harar in Ethiopia, just as the entanglement of its alleyways in the historic city centre and the scents of the numerous markets, on which vendors and buyers bargain over smuggled goods from the near country of Somalia and far away China. One of these legends entwines around the daily feeding of the spotted hyenas, in which these predators come very close to the humans.

Back in the 16th century, when this region at the horn of Africa was still called Abyssinia, the had a high wall built around the city, of which some parts can still be seen today. Instead of making the city safer, the wall ended up causing danger, because hyenas attacked the people more and more often. Legend has it, that the met with the king of the hyenas.

The king told him that the people were evil, because the hyenas couldn't get into the city anymore to feed on leftovers and carrion. When the returned to Harar he had the council of the wise men decide to embed little doors into the wall, so the hyenas could come back into the city to be fed. Since then there has been peace in Harar (and only in Harar) between humans and hyenas, about which zoologist Alfred Brehm once said "Among all the predators, they're undoubtedly the most deformed and nasty".

In this holy city Muslims, Sufi, catholic and orthodox Christians live peacefully together. Three languages are spoken -Harari, Oromo and Somali- without any group of people feeling deprived: A true role model for the rest of the world.

HARAR is the 6th studio album of Mila Mar in 25 years. Ten new songs in between times, in between languages, in between worlds. Ten songs full of surreal beauty.

Popcultural norms never applied to this band, which never fulfilled contemporary stylistic expectations, but instead shaped their own universe of sound.

After the laments about solitude, fear of loss and fugacity that shaped their EP *Haime* the new Album HARAR brings across more of an atmosphere of departure. *Morki*, the opener of the album, has a quite archaic sound and marks the start of a journey that leads through Africa (*Hyäne*) and the Orient and ends in the lands of the Sami (*Ismare*). The familiar cosmos of sound of Mila Mar –Synthesizer, percussion, flutes, violin/cello – is omnipresent, but now sounding lighter than on its predecessors. *Staub* might become the next classic of this versatile band that has its fans in genres like Gothic, Wave, Ritual, Folk, Indie and World music. *Haed* is the most romantic song of Mila Mar so far, spreading a mood suitable of leading us through the spring into summer.

As always, the songs are connected by the unique voice of singer Anke Hachfeld, which seems to sound far less vulnerable on this new album, than on *Haime*. If one takes a closer look at the cover artwork one can see her eyes and parts of her face blend into that of the hyena. She's the hyena woman, the shaman who sings tunes in a picturesque language that melts the ice on the hearts of everyone willing to listen to her messages. What remains is the taste of salt on the lips and a soothed soul.

"It is good as it is now. It feels right." Anke said in an interview with MDR Kultur in May of 2018, when she was asked about the current mood in the band. How right she was can be heard on HARAR. It has become a masterfully arranged, powerful and downright beautiful album.

-Willie Dietzel