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Alphabet Soup - Lado ABC in Warsaw

This guy looks serious and with a dangerously determined smile from the title page of the polish weekly Przekroj. He is neither focussing theater legend Jerzy Jarocki nor actress Danuta Stenka or Roman Gutek, the founding father of the huge film festival Era Nowy Horizonty. Together with these light figures of Poland's cultural mainstream and maybe as a representative of Polish underground Macio Moretti was selected by readers and editors of the popular weekly to be one of the „phenomenons“ of the year 2010. However, only the minority of the Przekroj readers might know this man with the curious smile, the Castro Cap, the serious whiskers and the strangely italian sounding name.

Text: **Bernd Adamek-Schyma**, Fotos : Lado ABC

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Macio Moretti, whose passport has been issued to the name Maciej Moruś is first of all musician, his main instrument the drum kit. With friends he is playing on rotating positions and instruments in – carefully estimated – around ten different bands, on all significant festivals and up and down club country. Needless to say he is not only a drummer but also a gifted improviser and entertainer. And he is one of the founding fathers of the increasingly influential Polish label and cultural microcosm with the name Lado ABC.

Moretti is part of a busy and genre-crossing artist collective which surfaced in Warsaw around the end of the 1990s and had its roots in the Impro- and DIY-scene of the city around the bands Maly Szu, Starzy singers and later Baaba, Tupika, Meritum or Mitch & Mitch. Beside Moretti, you may name musicians Bartek „Magneto“ Tyciński, Pawel Szamburski, Bartosz Weber, Tomasz Duda, the producer-promoter Maciej Gienza and several others who founded the label Lado ABC in 2004 as a platform for releasing the music of their several bands and projects. Today the catalogue of Lado ABC holds around 30 numbers, CDs, DLs, and DVDs. It is probably Poland's most stunning and undefinable interface between Improvised and Experimental Music, Jazz, Electronic Music, Noise, Punk- Post- or whatever kind of Rock.

„Lado started because we grew up with all this classic DIY stuff. It was clear from the beginning that also our label would be such a thing. Maximum freedom to do whatever we want“, says Moretti. In the beginning, the label was a harbor for the numerous bands and projects of the musicians coming together around the year 2000 from different music worlds and meeting in Warsaw in clubs like the meanwhile legendary Jazzgot or Galeria Off.

Today, many of the Lado Acts of course draw on the massive tradition of Polish Jazz, Punk or experimental music. But they do this with fresh daily spice, relaxed and understated but at the same time drawing on and not hiding the classic musical education that through some of the musicians leaks into Warsaw underground and dissolves in a natural and tasty brew.

paristetris /foto ; lado abc warsaw



paristetris /foto ; lado abc

warsaw A major footnote in the label history is the close tie to South America and its music traditions which is shimmering often at the back of the output of the label but also may be pinned down in the real affinity to playing, living and recording in South America – like in the surroundings of the band „Paristetris“ with the singer Candelaria Saenz Valiente from Buenos Aires who has been living in Warsaw for a couple of years. The multitalented singer who is also a filmmaker and writer was trained in Boston on the Berklee College of Music, and there, probably more important, she met her Polish husband, Marcin Masecki, who then studied piano at the same school. Masecki, born in 1982, in his youth was probably recognized as a kind of Jazz-Wunderkind – at the age of twelve he played with his own trio at the coolest Jazz clubs of the Polish capital, with sixteen he won a prestigious Jazz-price and with eighteen he grabbed a grand and took off to Boston to study in order to go from there to London and then return to Warsaw together with his wife. Once partly living in Argentine and Poland, today they do not return to Buenos Aires so often – the success of their several projects and bands keep them tied to Poland - running, recording and playing...

Another path to South America is the portuguese word „Lado“ in the label name – Lado means „Side“ and with a simple ABC the musicians try to reduce the different faces the label has: A stands for Electronic Music or Noise, B for a wide understanding of guitar music and Rock, and C is the home for improvised music Jazz, Experimental Music or other contemporary music. That soon a D would accompany the family was probably not calculated in the beginning – D simply stands for the DVDs releases of the label. Anyhow, a strict **alphabet** was not what the Lado guys had in mind, the ABC from the beginning on was meant to be taken apart and put back together in various combinations. Today Lado offers a delicious **alphabet soup** far from trying to force music into the genre borders of a label ABC.

The band Baaba for example comes along with Bartosz Weber's electronics, with sampling, loops, drum machines, programming and the whole story. But as soon as the saxophone or flute of Tomasz Duda, Wojtek Mazolewski's double or E-bass, Patryk Zakrocki's violine comes into play, or Macio Moretti's drums, we feel how contra-productive tight musical drawers like ABC might be. The intensity of the experimental piano refuge of Marcin Masecki; the Antony-and-the-Johnsons-like vocal climate of Polpo Motel with their singer Olga Mysłowska; the sometimes hysterically driving Jazz-Punk of Horny Trees; the band

Cukunft of guitar wizzard Raphael Rogiński who currently gives the recognition of jewish traditions and culture an exhilarating and living character, not ignoring but nevertheless not re-writing contemporary classics of this field like that of John Zorn's; the noise escaping the no-input mixing board or laptop of Mem & Wolfram – the brackets around all these totally different approaches is the cosmos and culture of the label Lado ABC.

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Unity in diversity – as artificial and helpless this popular EU-slogan from the tongues of officials of the European Union sometimes sounds – it is maybe a somewhat helpful description of the label's roster and sound. No wonder that several acts represented by the label became highly influential for the overall music scene in Poland – the Lado Acts as well as the label itself seem to have become something like an oracle to the future development of Polish music – and strangely enough this counts for both underground / independent scenes and Pop- or Jazz-Mainstream alike. No wonder that the classic indie/mainstream mechanism still works here: earlier this year, the trio Levity just after the release of their album at Lado was quickly signed by Universal.

Although a small part of the Lado roster was featured at the two „Exploratory Music from Poland“ samplers in two Wire editions of 2009 and 2010, international recognition of the label is almost absent. Although some of the bands left visible traces during several festival gigs in Brazil, UK or Hungary, the label and its roster is almost unknown outside of Poland. But not unlike so many other quality labels around the world the artistic success of the label is not dependent on articles or reviews in the international media or even sales numbers. Moretti says:

„International distribution is difficult. Although of course I want the label to be internationally present also outside of the internet distribution we are not the people who write to hundreds of international distributors. From our side this is more like a we-don't-give-a-fuck-attitude.“ Instead, the musicians work out this topic of artistic identity of Poland ironically and with the specific portion of anarchic Lado ABC humor – as in the liner notes of the Mitch & Mitch Live-DVD “Blackmail/Extortion“. The Mitches come up with a fake identity and present themselves as a weird combo from a not clearly recognizable english-speaking country that is successful only in Poland:

“There is perhaps no band on this planet other than Mitch & Mitch whose career so faithfully resembled the archetypal Rockefeller path. In 2002, in a squalid little rented flat on the second floor of a rundown apartment block, two young musicians met for the first time. The ensuing frenzy of jumping up and down on an old couch, mics in hands, held little promise of what was soon to follow: a nine-person monstrosity mercilessly invading sold-out concert halls all over the world. Ok, maybe not the world, but Europe, Yes. All Right, Jeeesus... Not Europe: Only Poland... The undeniable fact is that we have been playing there all the time. And they keep inviting us. Now, you may think it unthinkable, but Poland is not just the world-renowned hospitality, the gentle poetry of the streets of Crakow, the fascinating history and the ever so palpable legacy of Vaclav Havel. Blunt and insensitive as it may sound, we have grown quite sick of their pothole-riddled roads, greasy food and gorgeous women. Enough is enough. Remember reading articles about bands who were great because they had a number one hit in Venezuela in 1983? That's us. True Rockefeller Style”.

Moreover, the meaning of success is defined by the label in a different sense. The huge collective of musicians and artists around the label are of course actively stirring the cultural life of the city they live in. The club and venue landscape of Warsaw has been fertilized intensively throughout the last years. During the “Lado Week Club Festival” in July 2010, several underground and off-venues hosted the Lado ABC acts so the label shed a light on the alive and kicking Warsaw scene with Clubs like the Chłodna 25 which became sort of the living room of the musicians around Lado ABC.

„Supported by Lado“ – this stamp up to now signaling Lado's friendship, solidarity and support for musical output not appearing in the official Lado ABC label catalogue could thus become a new kind of certificate for Polish independent culture which transcends not only the borders of music genres but also firmly infiltrates into day and night and life of the Polish capital. The first small sprouts of the Lado seeds might become what Moretti nicely and

honestly aims at: „It would be great if we could sensitize people. Sensitize not only for listening and experience music more carefully and enthusiastically but also to maybe think about more general things. Maybe first and foremost about consumption – consumption of music and consumption of any other thing in life. It would be fantastic if listening to music and seeing what we do with Lado ABC could be a first step into that direction...”

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