

“Jazz De-a Dreptu’ “

**In a relative order: Mircea Tiberian/Toma Dimitriu – The Pale Dot**

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I hope I am not mistaken in saying that *The Pale Dot* is the first Romanian jazz album in which the performers are two pianists, Mircea Tiberian and Toma Dimitriu. Even though similar initiatives most likely existed before (recently I had the chance to attend the live performance of another duo of pianists, Sebastian Spanache and Teodor Pop from Timișoara), one of the merits of the current album is that it fills up this empty space in the Romanian jazz discography. Issued in 2015, at Fiver House Records, *The Pale Dot* was recorded during a single day at the National University of Muzic in Bucharest.

Prominent figure of the Romanian contemporary jazz, Mircea Tiberian chooses (or is perhaps chosen) as a partner for this record by the younger pianist Toma Dimitriu, a name with which probably just few readers are not familiar. At first glance, *The Pale Dot* might seem a collaboration between master and disciple, but things are not so at all: the nine tracks on the album are all musical interactions taking place on an equal footing between two mature musicians with well articulated speeches. Although not directly related to the artistic product I want to discuss here, I can not help but appreciate Mircea Tiberian’s availability and trust he affords – as a character already established – to a young musician at the beginning of his career.

I said above that the album contains nine tracks, but the first artistic act with which *The Pale Dot* welcomes the listener is a poem signed by Ioan Es. Pop. I will not venture any interpretation that might explain the link between the original poem and the music that follows and I do not think that such explanations might have some stake in the situation. I confine myself to noticing the naturalness of this succession, the more so that Mircea Tiberian has long been concerned by the junction of poetry and jazz.

What can rather easily be remarked about the music of this album is the lack of any excessiveness, of any rough touches or parades of virtuosity. Even if the stylistic range covered is quite extensive, the music has in every moment its own coherence, its own internal logic that allows itself to go beyond the concreteness of harmonic progressions of blues, of habanera rhythms or allusions to walking bass or free jazz techniques. Of course, a major contribution to this feature has the way in which the pieces were designed from the outset (most belong to Mircea Tiberian, two are written by Toma Dimitriu and two are collective creations). The subtlety that characterizes Tiberian both as performer and composer is shared by his partner. The final artistic product is thus protected from the recourse (and addiction eventually) to common places of jazz performance that may confer the music an easy, shallow appeal. On the contrary, here musical ideas follow their natural flow unencumbered.

The first track of the album, *Dragonfly Blues*, already sets a framework (aesthetically and stylistically) for the entire subsequent development of the musical discourse. With the very first bars of the theme, the ear is surprised by a fine and passing gap between the two performers, a one that manages to imprint the music with a bedimensional shape. Moments of incomplete

overlap appear throughout the album (most prominently at the beginning of the piece *Like a Thief in the Night*) and, even if they are not the defining feature of this disc, they play, however, an important role in enforcing the "imperfections" (regardless of whether they are intended or not) as a viable source of expressiveness. Jazz is essentially a musical genre that exploits imperfections, inconsistencies and disparities, and this approach is even more necessary today, in a society of the spectacle in which standardized products, with a perfunctory "good structure" are considered examples of artistic perfection (a symptom not even jazz is safe from).

Artist operating equally well in several stylistic regimes, Mircea Tiberian moves away from the daring experiments that have characterized some of his recent albums (*Intelligence* is all around, *Ulysses*) to engage with the exploration of more conventional harmonical and melodic structures. Therefore, the merit of the current album is precisely that it succeeds in shaping firmly its individuality within a language apparently exhausted. To achieve this, the two musicians knew how to simplify and essentialise various classic jazz structures (either melodic, harmonic or rhythmic), to use later in a slender shape and partially detached from their usual meanings. On this foundation, Tiberian and Dimitriu discreetly inserted their own creative interventions the final outcome being a diverse, well-proportioned product, able to articulate its own vision on means of expression defining for the jazz universe.

Of course, moments of spontaneous improvisation, clusters of dissonance or non canonical piano performances (*The Pale Dot* or *Restless Needle*) are not missing, but all these are only contrasting colours in a diverse spectrum of sound. From the alert swing of *Lydian Glow* to the southern rhythms and discrete melancholy of *Habanera* (piece that, according to my tastes, is the "hit" of the album), to the serenity of *Slow Motion*, all the energy of the two musicians is directed towards the coherence and expressiveness of the musical message. The melodic lines flow naturally, both at times when gushing with unpredictability in different directions (*Time Capsule*) and in the linear passages when improvisations are usually carried out. It should not be overlooked that, in addition to stylistic homogeneity and conceptual unity that emerges throughout the album, at the interpretative level, the two musicians make together a seamless/flawless team. Despite the fact that Tiberian and Dimitriu have a completely different and uneven experience, it is extremely difficult to distinguish the two in their solo performances (I, for one, gave up on this challenge). Lacking such a fluctuation, *The Pale Dot* has many moments where the music seems to be performed not by two, but one person. Although they might be accused of a lack of individualization of each instrumentalist, I still think that giving up on this aspect in favour of the unity of the final artistic product was, in this case, an inspired decision.

In the rather poor aesthetic landscape the Romanian jazz, *The Pale Dot* comes to fill a position that is hardly disputed, a means of expression too sparsely used: in precious terms (perhaps inadequate and quite inaccurate), the album could be placed in the area of tempered modernism, well balanced in the synthesis it achieves between the canonical and the actual, between the common and the particular. The album is all the more compelling since this balance is achieved precisely by integrating freedoms (not in improvisation but in the general architecture or instrumental performance), a dose of indeterminacy, which gives the music a "relative order" (should we make use of the lyrics of Ioan Es. Pop). This "rest" which is inserted in the interstices of the music is the element that gives this album its particular touch.