

Manuel Maverina (Music Map, Italy)

Then maybe we will also talk about music, so en passant, but to start we need a gem.

"North Pacific" - three years of gestation, a new work by Dan Barbenel, aka Mr Diagonal, a multifaceted Scottish-born artist, Belgian by adoption, for a long time on the stage, first as leader of the Black Light Orchestra, then as a soloist - is available in three formats: CD, download and message in a bottle.

It is not a gag.

I say: message in a bottle.

In the sense that by ordering it in this capacity you will receive at home a 20 cl bottle containing a map - like a pirate treasure map - on which the download code is present and which should be used - the map, not the code - to reach the Neverland owned by Dan, as if it were an invitation.

In addition to this, you will also find a link to a video that explains in detail how to build a paper boat with the origami technique to get to the aforementioned island. Once the bottle has been emptied, the owner of the same can choose whether to keep it on the shelf together with the other records he has at home, to put it in the passito cabinet or to (re) throw it into the sea after entering a second download code specifically provided. in order to allow another castaway - equipped with a PC - to continue the chain.

Mr Diagonal is a gentleman not of the first hair, one who in his career has played around with Damien Rice and with Divine Comedy, as well as having released a couple of absolutely negligible records with the aforementioned Black Light Orchestra between 2008 and 2011. Spirit free, creative mind pushed to the limit, intellect parked on the fleeting border between reality and fantasy, between genius and madness, between nonsense and visionary.

In the fourteen tracks of "North Pacific", which Dan himself defines as a "desert island disc", everything ends up: in a bubble of yesteryear music mixed with assorted tropicalisms, jazz, lounge, cabaret and every anachronistic legacy of unspecified distant decades, cheeky moods and outdated melodies outline the perimeter - indeed rather bland - of a collectable album, only rarely pigeonholed into known and recognizable categories.

Between cinematic suggestions, unlikely echoes of Convertible and Neutral Milk Hotel (the title-track, uh!), Theatrical boutade ("Maybe I'll build a boat") and sound splinters that openly flirt with divertissement, it seems at times to hear a Randy Newman tipsy playing pieces by Frank Zappa.

From the patina à la Al Stewart that covers the opener "Bannerghatta" to the soft bossanova of "What do you do with Manioc?", From the crooked boogie of "21st century cats" to the joke sung in Japanese by "Hyorio no tegami" (Mr Diagonal is quite well known in the Land of the Rising Sun, however, for reasons that deserve separate narration), passing through the musical air of "A little island far away" that Kurt Weill does so much - I also tried to sing over it "The room below" by Marc Almond with moderate success - or for the indolence âgée of "A thousand sunsets" halfway between The Voice and Paul Simon, Dan leads the dances always on the razor's edge between serious and humorous, in a gigantic trompe-l'oeil in which it is pleasant to get lost (or rather: to be shipwrecked).

"North Pacific" sets up a "Wave on Wave" scenario, without the listener being ever precluded from considering it real and not just a movie set: at the other end of the camera, or simply in front of you with a garland of flowers around his neck, Mr Diagonal stands there with a sly half smile to secretly see the effect it does.

For the record, Mr Diagonal is no longer on Facebook: he moved to Mastodon.

His works are not available neither on Spotify nor on any other streaming platform.

But now enough talking about music, I have to finish the boat, which then we leave.

And you: below with that map, see you there!

Have a good trip. (Manuel Maverina)