

Will Dum (Muzzart, France)

Mr Diagonal (aka Dan Barbenel) has gone through many projects whose common feature is being quirky and collaborative. Born in Dundee (world capital of jam) in 1970, he also went through various jobs, a severe backpacker (he was seen, as a resident, in Glasgow, Brussels and Los Angeles), and refined his work with North Pacific, fifth album of an adventurous, elegant, choppy pop and not reluctant to take the tangent (the very Tom Waits, high-end, with a lively and deviant jazzy tone, 21st Century Cats). The saga starts off nicely, to the sound of this tastefully chiseled pop-folk Bannerghatta sung with presence. Serendipity House then takes the hand, velvety, in distinguished piano-voice that imaginative sounds decorate.

We are, for the moment, in a certain tranquility. Indian Ocean is a bit of a change, keeps us in a safe, calm halo, again well put and racy in his clothes. Mr. Diagonal takes care of his arrangements, transcends pop, takes him enviously to lands born of his fertility as a well-established musician. I was going to write wrinkled, but his music, in a breeze of novelty, sweeps our faces and relieves their features. Hyoryu No Tegami (floating letter), sober, completes the picture without failing or marring it. Before that Red Lighthouse, with a nicely nervous jazz background with appreciable rock kicks, will have had its effect.

North Pacific is not a predictable record, it's among other strengths what makes it special. Another bottle in the sea makes her almost 80's groove pop, loose, unfortunately too short. Mr Diagonal does not only draw straight lines, he creates a variable geometry disc. What do you do with a cassava, with a retro flair, demonstrates this brilliantly but surrounded, briefly, by more obscure and triturated sounds. There is in this North Pacific, from start to finish, an address in the setting in climate, the use of catchy tones, which makes the opus endearing... especially when, as here, it starts to "branch off". The voice shifts there, changes tone, intonation. A little island far away, maritime, produces the effect of the sea spray. At the same time, it offers infinite finesse. Here is some good, very good even, with not so laid back as it seems.