

Cultural Daily

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Anna von Hausswolff: Soaring Pipes, Divine Sounds

Tod Hardin · Tuesday, November 26th, 2013

“A huge ocean wave coming to shore and pulling you against the ancient mountain cliff”

Anna Michaela Ebba Electra von Hausswolff. That's quite a mouthful of a name, but it belongs to a young woman from Sweden whose soaring vocals and pipe organ ways are well worth every last letter of your attention.

OK, let's cut it down a bit. She goes by [Anna von Hausswolff](#). She's a wonderfully talented 27-year-old singer, songwriter and pianist. With solid reviews, and comparisons to Kate Bush, it's hard not to like her before hearing a single note. But take a listen and you'll quickly find that you won't be disappointed.

Whether it's her debut album from 2010, *Singing From the Grave*, or this year's follow up, *Ceremony*, you'll discover a soothing voice that evokes emotion, yet one capable of soaring to reasonable heights. At times I get the feeling that perhaps her voice doesn't quite go as far as the listener would like, but that's easily forgiven and made up for by the songwriting, instrumentation and elsewhere.

Ceremony is a highly unique experience, as it brings into play a true rarity in popular music ... the traditional church pipe organ. Who else is using that?!? I can guarantee that the answer is: Not many. The instrument lends a richness and almost cinematic flavor to the album, as von Hausswolff masterfully uses it to bring a connective element to the entire release. That, along with her beautiful voice and interesting themes in her songwriting, make this a must-have album for my collection.

National Public Radio's Bob Boilen had this to say about *Ceremony*:

“I hope to find one album like *Ceremony* every year — a rare, thoughtful, inspiring record for a night on the couch or a candlelit evening — and now I've got one for 2013.”

Those are some pretty high words of praise, but judge for yourself. Enjoy our interview with Ms. von Hausswolff and the videos that accompany it below.

Fun Fact: Anna is the daughter of internationally acclaimed avant garde visual artist and composer, [Carl Michael von Hausswolff](#).



Anna von Hausswolff. Photo: Anders Nydam

TOD HARDIN: In a brief sentence, how would you define your music?

ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF: A huge ocean wave coming to shore and pulling you against the ancient mountain cliff.

TH: You are one of a rare breed of recording artists ... one that is incorporating the pipe organ into

popular music. How did you come to discover the instrument and what draws you to it?

AVH: Four years ago I moved to Copenhagen, and I left my piano at home in Gothenburg. I started to compose songs on my synthesizer instead and the only sound that I liked was the St. Peters organ. I wrote a lot of songs for this sound but after a while I felt that I missed the organic feature that you get from an acoustic instrument. That's when the idea of using the church organ came up. That instrument could provide me with a thick heavy texture and at the same time sound organic and original. Huge range of pitches, loads of different sounds, great dynamic possibilities.

TH: Earlier this year you performed for the first time in the US. What was that experience like and how was your music received?

AVH: I played one show in New York at the Glasslands and that was fantastic! I played with a NY band since I couldn't afford to bring my original band with me. That made the whole experience even more exciting. It seemed like it was very well received. I did not have any expectations of the show, so I was quite shocked by the emotional output the audience gave me. They screamed and cheered and it really helped me to push the show to a higher ground.

TH: Any difference between a US audience and a European audience?

AVH: The European audience can be different, but it depends on the city, arrangements, time etc. So, it's hard for me to draw lines between the European audience and the American.

TH: You are a former architecture student. If your music was any building in the world, which one and why?

AVH: It would be an 18th century house, situated in the deep forest of Kisa, Östergötland, Sweden. When I was a kid my family owned this house. It was so beautiful. I know every corner of it, and still I can't figure this place out. It carries a wisdom beyond words. It was an epic, divine, a bit ugly, threatening, and welcoming place. I want my music to behave like that.

TH: I understand that your grandfather passed away recently. Losing family is always a horrible thing to experience, but it also allows us to reflect on lessons learned from those that we are close to. How did your grandfather help shape *Ceremony*?

AVH: Before he passed away he encouraged me to only write about things that matter to me, and when he died I decided to write an album about the frailness of life. His death became an important rite of passage and a good starting point for me to become more concerned, and passionate about life.

TH: What other artists have inspired and influenced you?

AVH: Lots of artists. Just to mention a few: Jan Welmers, Klaus Schulze, Goblin, Earth, Sunn O))), Diamanda Galás, Cocteau Twins.

TH: If there was one song from your youth that you could re-make utilizing the organ, which one would it be?

AVH: "Fattig bonddräng", music written by Georg Riedel and lyrics by Astrid Lindgren!

TH: What's one thing you can tell me about yourself that I'd never find through a Google search?

AVH: That I like to have secrets ?

TH: What's next for you after *Ceremony*?

AVH: I will release a record as a part of the group Hydras Dream, on Denovali Records. That group consists of me and Matti Bye (Swedish silent picture pianist). We meet, drink coffee, improvise and record. We made this album in three days and I really look forward to share it with the world. It's based around the story "The Little Match Girl" by H.C. Andersen. Besides that I'm making plans for the next Anna von Hausswolff album.

Anna kicks off a 10-stop US tour in early December. Visit her [website](#) for more details.

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