

WANDA & NOVA DEVIATOR: ARP 339 (Kamizdat, 2015)

by Goran Kompoš / 28. 1. 2015 - 19:00 / Tolpa bumov / Radio Študent Ljubljana

First reactions to the release of the debut album 'Pacification' by the duo Wanda & Nova deViator two years ago were at first relatively reserved, but it was quickly apparent that this was because we had heard the good part of the songs already in the years before the album's actual release. While those who had kept track of the joint work by Maja Delak and Luka Prinčič knew most of the tracks, the album, on the other hand, nevertheless represented the culmination of the duo's first period of their joint musical path. In 2013 'Pacification' ranked second on Radio Student's Best Home Tolpa bumov Chart, thus confirming that Delak and Prinčič not only made a very good album, but that the wider music audience had taken a liking to them as well. Although its aesthetic was rooted in different electronic derivatives, its almost classical songwriting compositions placed the album in the context of highly original electronic music that was aimed to be listened to both on the dance floor and in the comfort of one's home. Based on the same logic, i.e. to make music that functions both in a club and at home, the duo has now developed their second album 'Arp 339', although it should be admitted that their new expression will be (more) suited to the tastes of electronically inclined audiences. While the debut was largely marked by the lyrics, they are now placed more into the background, which means that there is more space left for experimentation and exploration of sound ideas and details.

The changed feel, or put differently, the new derivation of the duo's expression after all depends already on a different conceptual starting point. Whereas 'Pacification' centred around worldly affairs, social phenomena and relations, with 'Arp 339' Wanda and Nova deViator find themselves in a yet undiscovered, imagined galaxy, described in the writing and the catalogue 'Atlas of Peculiar Galaxies' by the American astronomer Halton Arp. Electronic music and astronomical themes have had a long-shared history, which began with the first space flights, continued with the "cosmicity" of German krautrockers, grew with soundtracks for futurist, outer space movies – up until its new chapter was written by the Detroit techno producers. And if techno minimalism of Jeff Mills is, as it were, the perfect soundtrack for a documentary or a retro futurist sci-fi movie, then 'Arp 339' could be used for a dystopian speculation (Elysium!) about a not so distant (cyber) future that holds up an exaggerated mirror image to the delusions of the current (social) system.

It is not known whether this time the duo had had a pre-selected concept for the music or vice versa; in any case, 'Arp 339' is undoubtedly characterised by a great deal of – for music inspired by astronomical themes – as it were obligatory sound adjuncts. In other words, even if one didn't read the accompanying text, it is quite clear that Delak and Prinčič found their inspiration, at least partly, in astronomy and sci-fi. This inspiration is, however, crucially framed by the starting point: they push their expression and the way they set up the feel of the album into their own rails which are then skillfully navigated

through club, artistic, and pop sensibilities. The tracks with vocals do not necessarily sever the ties with the electro-punk aesthetic of the first album; in one moment, they are closer to the minimalism of (Detroit) electro, in another, the tracks reflect psy-trance and EDM reverberations. Wanda and Nova deViator's music is not captive of the rules of the genre – though they are not trying to avoid them either. In terms of the sound, 'Arp 339' is actually a sign, or better a confirmation, that they have apparently found their musical individuality. And even though 'Arp 339' is in terms of subject-matter, atmosphere, and sound quite different from their debut, when you listen to the album – even if you hear only the instrumental tracks – it becomes more or less quickly clear that the music is by Wanda and Nova deViator. 'Arp 339' is undoubtedly a very good album, but it is also true that presently electronic music is moving through a kind of renaissance, which is turning some traditional notions and perceptions upside down. Although it would be unjustified to claim that 'Arp 339' is not in the spirit of the time, the reality is that the album will most probably not significantly expand the duo's audience base.