

## Gianluigi Trovesi – Gianni Coscia

### *“La misteriosa musica della Regina Loana”*

**Gianluigi Trovesi:** alto and piccolo clarinets; **Gianni Coscia:** accordion

This hugely enjoyable and highly inventive album is dedicated to the late Umberto Eco, a lifelong friend of accordionist Gianna Coscia and an ardent champion of this particular duo. Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, a meditation on the nature of memory, inspires Trovesi and Coscia on their own nostalgic and exploratory journey, referencing music mentioned in the novel and free-associating upon its philosophical themes. As ever, the Italians cast a wide net, playing songs associated with Louis Armstrong, Glenn Miller and George Formby, paraphrasing Janáček, dipping into movie music, and improvising most creatively while keeping their dedicatee in view. Repertoire revisits “Interludio”, a piece that Umberto Eco and Gianni Coscia collaborated on 70 years ago, and Gianluigi Trovesi crafts a new composition on the letters of Eco's name. From multiple perspectives, a brilliant tribute. (Taken from official ECM press release)

*There is nothing more seductive than artfulness, when it has the humility to disguise itself as artlessness. And especially when it generates, at every new quotation or invention, a feast of timbre capable of getting the maximum possible out of the instruments, in a natural way ... This then is one way to add a popular dimension to cultivated music and a cultivated dimension to popular music. So there's no need to wonder about in which temple we should place the music of Coscia and Trovesi. On a street corner or in a concert hall, they would feel at home just the same.*

- **Umberto Eco**

The late novelist and polymath Umberto Eco (1932-2016) was a lifelong friend of accordionist Gianni Coscia and an ardent champion of the Trovesi-Coscia duo. The author of *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* wrote liner notes for each of the duo's previous ECM albums: *In cerca di cibo* (recorded 1999), *Round About Weill* (2004), and *Frère Jacques: Round About Offenbach* (2009).

On the present recording, Gianluigi Trovesi and Gianni Coscia pay tribute to their distinguished comrade. Eco's partly autobiographical novel *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (*The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*), is also a meditation on the nature of memory, and it inspires Trovesi and Coscia on their own nostalgic and exploratory journey, referencing music mentioned in the book and free-associating upon its philosophical themes. As ever, the Italians cast a wide net. They play songs associated with Louis Armstrong (“Basin Street Blues”), Glenn Miller (“Moonlight Serenade”) and George Formby (“It's In The Air”, quoted in “Volando”). They paraphrase Janáček's *In The Mists* (fog is a recurring theme in Eco's novel), and dip into movie music (from *Casablanca*'s “As Time Goes By” to “Bel Ami,” from the German film of the same name). And, of course, the two musicians improvise, most creatively, while keeping their dedicatee in view.

Gianni Coscia: “We have tried to run back through some of the book's countless musical cues, as best we could and with no claims to completeness. In some cases, we have also inserted a few things that the author certainly had in mind but didn't express explicitly.”

The album opens with “Interludio”, a piece that Umberto Eco and Gianni Coscia collaborated on more than 70 years ago - when Coscia was 14 and Eco 13. The music inspired the young Eco to write accompanying verse pertinent to the work at hand: “...Musician, absorbed and inclined / Unveiling new worlds of silence / Tender incarnations of phantasms in sound / Vanish, warily, into memory.” (Eco was himself an amateur musician, playing trumpet, cello and recorder.)

“Basin Street Blues” is a particular delight among many here. Recorded by Louis Armstrong in 1928 it is for Coscia and Trovesi “an emblem of the early days of jazz and our musical intention is to stress the dazzling discovery, on this side of the Atlantic, of an art that was all but unknown when not prohibited.”

Writing in *Jazz Times* about *In Cerca di Cibo*, Bill Shoemaker made the observation that “Musicians like Coscia [born in 1931] who made the transition to jazz early on, lacked the musical data to become faux Americans; by necessity, they filled the information void with an Italian sensibility. This produced a shot-in-the-dark synthesis of early jazz and folkloric improvisational traditions”, a synthesis which Trovesi and Coscia have continued to nurture.

As Umberto Eco put it, “We are in the presence of a new transversality where distinctions of genre are vanishing.”

In the eclectic sound-world of Gianluigi and Gianni, Eco said, “the meeting of apparently incompatible traditions conjures up the ghosts of non-existent musical families.” With the application of some ironic distancing, such ‘families’ may even include Italian patriotic songs of the Second World War such as “Inno dei sommergibili” (“The Submariner’s Song”), whose propagandistic lyrics spoke of “the brave marine laughing in the face of Lady Death” – also part of the soundtrack of the last century. Eco notes, in his *Queen Loana* book, that Italian radio in the early 1940s “made it seem as if life were running on two different tracks: on one, the war bulletins, on the other, the endless lessons in optimism and gaiety that our orchestras offered in such abundance.”

In exploring such musical memories, the Trovesi-Coscia duo are also sketching a picture of an era. But they also venture beyond it with their “out of context homage”. The two pieces here called “Umberto” and “Eco” are, Coscia explains, “the improvised, polyphonic result of Trovesi’s gematria on the surname Eco and the name Umberto.”

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Gianluigi Trovesi was born in 1944 in the village of Nembro in northern Italy, and studied at the Bergamo Conservatory, gaining his diploma in clarinet in 1966. Hearing Eric Dolphy play at the Milan festival in 1964 was a significant experience, but Trovesi’s interests and influences embraced virtually every type of music, from Italian folk to the jazz avant-garde. By 1978, he was working as first alto sax and clarinet with the Milan Radio Big Band, a position he would occupy until 1993.

He arrived at ECM in 1994, his alto saxophone and clarinets soaring into the *Skies of Europe* proposed by the Italian Instabile Orchestra. The duo with old friend Gianni Coscia made an immediate impact with *In cerca di cibo*, a left-field recording full of mordant humour, improvisational wit, unrepentant nostalgia, and exceptional musicianship that roved easily between jazz and chamber music, folk and soundtrack music, with a hint of klezmer.

Trovesi’s other projects on ECM include *Vaghiissimo Ritratto*, on which he appears with Umberto Petrin (piano) and Fulvio Maras (percussion, electronics), hailed by the *Irish Times* as “improvised chamber music of stunning quality and adventure, melodic grace and rhythmic freedom” and *Fugace*, a rampant genre-hopping adventure by an all-Italian octet. His album *Trovesi All’Opera – Profumo di Violetta* is a typically quirky Trovesi take on Italian opera performed, as Ivan Hewitt wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, by “a turbo-charged version of a traditional Italian town band”.

Gianni Coscia, born in Alessandria - also Eco’s hometown - was a lawyer for many years, work that relegated music to the back-burner. Even in this period however he played with visiting American musicians including Joe Venuti, Bud Freeman and Sir Charles Thompson. In 1985 he released a widely acclaimed album *L'altra fisharmonica* which featured his accordion in combination with a string quartet and explored variations on Italian popular themes. *La Briscola*, a 1989 recording, signalled a reunion with Trovesi, who has partnered the accordionist in many projects since then. Coscia has appeared with the Giorgio Gaslini Big Band and worked with orchestras playing music of Kurt Weill and Astor Piazzolla, and toured the world as accompanist to singer Milva, also working with Gioconda Cilio, Maria Pia De Vito and Lucia Minetti. He has also collaborated with Enrico Rava, Pino Minafra, Paolo Damiani and other Italian improvisers, and with composer Luciano Berio – who dedicated his *Sequenza XIII* to Gianni Coscia.

*La misteriosa musica della Regina Loana* (album title suggested by Stefano Eco) was recorded at Night and Day Studio, Casinagrossa and mixed in Lugano. The CD booklet includes liner notes by Gianni Coscia (in Italian, English and German), drawings by Umberto Eco, and studio photography by Roberto Cifarelli.

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*One who understands how Paolo Fresu wrote that the duo Trovesi e Coscia is “a symphony orchestra with all the colors of music. An orchestra that sails in the seas of the world on boats from the early twentieth century and that gathers, in its migration, the scents and moods of the world.”*

*It is intelligent and curious music. Cultured and popular. Funny but at the same time profound. It sails in the Mediterranean seas, passing the Columns of Hercules and going as far as the New Continent to return to Italy, passing through Central Europe.*

*Too many trips, moods and luggage for a simple duo... If Trovesi and Coscia don't seem to be for their richness and complexity, it is the Orchestra of their instruments that brings us back to the airy intimacy of woods and reeds, making it one of the most interesting and creative projects of recent years.*

*For Umberto Eco, extrapolating in a single concept the words given by the great Italian writer in the past presentations of the records of the duo, Trovesi and Coscia were simply real "Devils in Music". Probably the ideal synthesis to talk about two rare gentlemen.*

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