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# A CONVERSATION WITH ACROSS THE DELTA

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# On Passports and Souvenirs: A Conversation with Across The Delta

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It's shortly past eight pm and I push open the glass doors of a semi-empty B72, one of my favourite Viennese venues. I'm greeted by **Hannes Tschürtz**, founder of [Ink Music](#) and also the man partly responsible for [Across the Delta's](#) success.

Vienna is a small, small capital city and everyone knows everyone, so there's no need for introductory speeches - I follow lead singer Johannes Reisinger upstairs, where we sit at a table in a corner, with water bottles between us. As we get ready, he mentions the rest of the band is not there because they went to pick up all the merchandise - tonight is the night their new album *Passports & Souvenirs* is officially presented to the public, after an absence of three and a half years.

"I think most of the time we spent rehearsing and writing the songs", says Johannes when I ask him about it. "Our recording process lasted longer than expected, I mean we were expecting it to last that long, but we spent a lot of time mixing.." And has this recording process changed much since their first release? "Actually it hasn't. The huge step, I think, is that the first album wasn't actually meant to be an album. It was more of a demo EP we wanted to use to send out to labels so they'd sign us. All of a sudden Hannes Tschürtz from Ink Music signed us, all of a sudden the EP was an album, so yeah, that's the whole story behind *Dancing to Architecture*".

That collection of eclectic songs was one I couldn't keep off my cd player for ages after it was released, even though, as he says, it is missing a "roter faden", a common thread. "As we started to write songs for *Passports&Souvenirs*, it was really important for us to make an album that fits together well - the first album was sort of bits and pieces put together. Sort of showing everything we could do. There was no link between the songs. And I personally changed the way of writing lyrics. I listen to music and all of a sudden there are pictures appearing in my head, and I realise, I want to write about these pictures. So every single song has a certain meaning, a certain picture of something that's had a certain effect in my life".

I always wonder if musicians can have a favourite track on an album they've just finished working on. A little ashamed of myself, I ask – pointing out I'm not necessarily expecting an answer if it's too difficult to choose. „Well, *Passports & Souvenirs* is the one song that is not really based on guitar – there's no guitar involved, it's definitely a new level we've reached in songwriting; using pianos, not synthesizer stuff. That might be, probably, the biggest step we've done musically. And I don't know about the band, but personally I really like *Passengers inhale*. I love this energy in the chorus, the whole mood, the whole outro, everything really fits together. I just really, really like that song, And I actually wrote it on the plane, flying to Nizza [Nice, Ed.]...so yeah, I love the whole story behind it.“

After seeing them live opening for **Dredg** last year, I felt that maybe some of the analogies to progressive rock might have been lost to (nevertheless good) poppier rock. "I can't actually say if this album is maybe more 'easy-listening', less experimental. My first impulse would be to say yes, but I've been working on these songs for three and a half years, I know every single beat, every single tone, and what's not easy to listen to about it?", he answers jokingly. "The first time we played some of the new songs live, our sound engineer - a friend of ours who recorded our first album - said, 'oh, this is getting more and more complicated, I thought it was going to be more poppy'.." So not everyone is of the same opinion? "Well, but then we started to make small but really good decisions in arranging some stuff, like doing synthesizers, piano, whatever..."

So a couple of decisions that led the album to grow even as the songs were already written. Johannes gesticulates to really get his point across: "This was planned to be an easier album maybe; but leaving out the huge choruses thing, you know, where everything is quite calm and then all of a sudden there's the BIG guitars, where you're like WOW WOW WOW, the huge 'Ausschläge', huge pits! That's one thing we didn't want to have for this album." I nod. One couldn't get more enthusiastic about his own music than this. You can feel that though the band has been playing together for years, ("eleven", as he points out) they are still loving it as on the first day.

Even though there are now only three left from the original formation, formerly known as **Si-Thru-As**: "yes, we changed our name five, six years ago, before the first album. That's when we became **Across the Delta**." I have a soft spot for Michael [Leonhard, Ed.], who has officially left the band to, as Mr. Reisinger puts it, "go make some money", and I feel groupie-like and teary-eyed at the thought of an era ending for the band. Will the arrival of a new bassist change anything?, I ask him. "I really hope that it's going to change the whole process of writing when we are writing together.. I mean, there's something new coming into the band and we are really looking forward to having a new member. It's true that it's a huge thing, 10 years playing with the same people, but at the same time I'm really looking forward to playing with someone we don't really know. It's gonna be a new way of writing, a new way of communicating, a whole new atmosphere in the rehearsal room."

Speaking of rehearsal rooms, I cheekily point out that there's an urban legend about how the vocals were recorded... „Yeah, that's true. The vocal parts were recorded in a closet. Or, rather, in-between two closets, with Toph from **Trouble Over Tokyo**, in his bedroom. he has a really huge bedroom, actually, and we put a mattress in-between the closets and I stood the whole time there. You can see it [on a YouTube video](#), we recorded the whole album there.“ And what happened afterwards?

... As we were finishing the record, we concentrated on making good artwork, a good video, whatever." A video, *Unit Exploded*, which is miles away from their first video *The Intensive Alibi*, a clean, slightly dark, and beautifully directed video which was on air for weeks on Austria's very own music video channel. In their latest, they've done most of the work themselves - camera, directing, and the hundreds of drawings, all put together into a 4-minute-long stop-motion tale alternating with images of colored mountains.

"It was probably the best and worst decision we ever took," he declares. "The reason why we did it in the first place was that we had no money. That's a fact. Having the opportunity to do this was really cool, because we all sat together and had these massive ideas for this video, everything that should be in there, but then we didn't have a camera and all of a sudden it all got really complicated..." So then, what? „At some point, I started doing some short videos on holiday, in summer, with my girlfriend, and realised how easy that is. And THAT was the worst decision.“ Because it took so long? "Ivo [Thomann - the drummer, Ed.] spent a whole month on the drawings. For sure we are going to do this again, in the future, but maybe not before a year, half a year or so because of all the time we spent shooting, editing... But it turned out to be a good experience. I'm really proud of everything we have done; I can really say that's how we wanted to represent things, the song, in the video."

*Passports&Souvenirs*, in direct contradiction, maybe, with *Dancing to Architecture*, feels like an album about movement. Maybe indirectly also because of the title, which triggers images of travelling straight away...I wish I could travel every weekend, to somewhere new... But the reason why I chose this title.. Well, during travelling I realised how good I feel when I am not at home, and then I always ask myself why I feel so stressed out when I am in Vienna. I realised that my environment does that, it influences me so much, that I just get exhausted, you know?„ Yes, I know. There is actually a certain restlessness to living in a middle-sized capital in our time, where everyone can be reachable 24/7 via email, skype, cellphone. "As I wrote *Everlasting Sound* I sat in the room, completely alone, no sound of the traffic or cars going by... I all of a sudden realised that the reason why Vienna makes me feel like this is that there's always a stressful sound - it's the traffic, the way life goes in a big city. And that my room is pretty empty, but at the same time full of loud sounds. That was the first time I realised that this is my

way of communicating with the nearby environment. It was some type of dialogue with myself, this realisation."

So in daily life, where are the passports, and where are the souvenirs? "A passport is some sort of validation that you get, to have the ability to go away to another country, and the souvenirs are something you get out of it again, that you remember for a lifetime. Here in Vienna, or when you go around to some other place you've never been before, the passport is the tricks, the certain way to talk to someone. There's a moment when you get the impression that he really understands you. Like for example, take people who are part of a clique: they have certain way of communicating to each other, and you stand there and try to break the code, and they understand you want to try and understand their way of communicating. Once you start to communicate with them, everything you get out of it, that's a souvenir. "A discrete way of saying that you don't have to always be on the move, and that travelling can also be done in one's head. It's not really travelling to a foreign country, but more like running through the city and enjoying the outside environment. That's travelling too. I mean, meeting someone new I've never met before - experiencing a new communication, a bit like being in another country and talking to the locals... I can have that same quality in Vienna again, but I just use it differently. That's the main thing behind *Passports & Souvenirs*. It's about listening, and learning.. and talking, getting new experiences for your personal life."

*Passports&Souvenirs* hit the stores on May 28th, 2010. You can order it [here](#).

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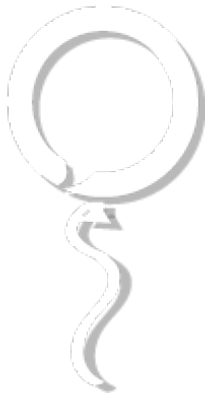
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