

## **The Young Gods, polytheist music**

The trio is the guest of the Antigél festival this Thursday – an occasion to revisit three decades of musical plasticity and sonic adventures with Franz Treichler and Cesare Pizzi.

By Philippe Simon

Paradoxes have the annoying tendency of only being apparent, whereas one would rather they remain locked into the strangeness of their internal contradictions. But one only need think about it a while longer: a paradoxical statement is not illogical, it just goes against the grain of popular belief. Let's take the example Olber's paradox: "How can the night be black when the sky contains an infinite number of stars?" A good question, to which modern cosmology replies: "The night sky is dark because the light of the majority of stars has not had the time to reach our eyes".

### **From one cosmos to another**

Let's move back down from the eternal cosmos to the level of gods – of The Young Gods more precisely: Here too, we find an apparent paradox: since its founding in 1985, Franz Treichler's band has never ceased to produce unclassifiable music, which is immediately recognizable despite its variability. The songs of the first albums – from *The Young Gods* (1987) to *The Young Gods Play Kurt Weill* (1991) – navigated between industrial darkness, cabaret expressionism and a punk-like rage; *TV Sky* (1992) gave itself over to motorized rock; *Only Heaven* (1995) drifted towards almost ambient stasis; and the rest of the discography – up until *Everybody Knows* (2010) – constantly remodeled these multiple atavisms. And yet it all invariably "sounds like The Young Gods". This is of course due to Franz Treichler's voice, but also to the structured loops that characterize their compositions – the spinning sound that so impressed David Bowie, as he confessed in 1995: "The Young Gods had the extraordinary idea of taking a guitar riff, sampling it, putting it into a loop, and presenting it as a motif that was sufficiently coherent to be able to structure an entire piece of music".

The music of the Young Gods is not protean, strictly speaking. It is more like a crossroads with multiple branches through which different genres pass. Perhaps this is what explains the group's great plasticity, which can be gauged by the stages they share: they have played on the same bill as Fred Frith or Henry Rollins, or Psychic TV or Neurosis; this coming Thursday, in the context of the Antigél festival, they will play on the evening given for metal music (with, among others, the legendary Geneva band Nostromo); in April, they will play in Bologna with epic rockers New Model Army; in May, it will be Germany, in the company of the gothic Fields of the Nephilim.

But the festival line-up connections do not tell the whole story. Perhaps The Young Gods' versatility is best illustrated by their capacity to dialogue creatively with other people. Such collaborations speckle their career: with the Lausanne Sinfonietta, with hip-hop powerhouse Dälek, with anthropologist Jeremy Narby, with the Brazilians of Nação Zumbi (who themselves already melded the music of Pernambuco with rock, funk and rap), with the improvisation trio Koch/Schütz/Studer, with Erika Stucky, with the string quartet Barbouze de chez Fior, or the collaborations conducted by Treichler on his own,

with choreographer Gilles Jobin or trumpeter Erik Truffaz. Not only are these exchanges successful, they also reveal the fluency that characterizes The Young Gods' music: it welcomes very diverse expressions and modes, and invites others to recognize common patterns, rather than force them to adapt.

### **Free circulation**

Clutching a series of espressos in a Geneva café not far from place Cornavin, we discuss the paradox of this strong yet flexible identity with Franz Treichler and Cesare Pizzi – who took over on keyboards after Al Comet's departure. The group is currently working on a new album due out next Autumn – “atmospheric pieces, longer and slower than usual”, promises Treichler, who also says that the album grew out of the jams they conducted under then name The TPT Experience during the Cully Jazz Festival in 2015. One further branch at the crossroads, the existence of which Treichler explains in the following manner: “It is a tendency of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to compartmentalize music. There is no escaping this, because it helps understanding; but music is basically one single art form, one single language”. And it is a language in the strict meaning of the term, if we are to believe the memories Pizzi brought back from Brazil during their collaboration with Nação Zumbi: “Here we can talk about music and intellectualize it among artists. There, it was simply ‘Play!’ and we did not communicate in any other way”.

The Young Gods do not take down frontiers, they help us understand that frontiers do not really exist – to a certain extent, this is the group's founding myth. Treichler: “I come from rock, but was trained as a classical musician, and I was always frustrated to see that my colleagues at the music Conservatory did not understand the blues, and that my pals with whom I listened to punk could not imagine that Stravinski also challenged people's habits”. This frustration stimulated in a more or less conscious fashion the original conception of The Young Gods' music: “From the start we proposed different universes from one song to another: it could come out as rock, cabaret, industrial, or classical,” Treichler explains. “The point was to tap the source which is Music with capital M, and create something new by showing for example, that we could make rock music with violins or an accordion”. Revealing the passages between genres, and re-contextualizing them, is the essence of a postmodern body of work. It also means banking on surprise, which is augmented by The Young Gods' initial technological choice of working with samplers. Says Treichler: “You know more or less what kind of sound a guitarist standing on the stage is going to make; but you don't know what someone standing in front of a sampler is going to produce – you hear something alright, but you see nothing. And the audience's receptivity is enhanced by this state of surprise”.

By dissociating the musical gesture from the sound it produces, and by juxtaposing heritages and welcoming those of others, The Young Gods have been playing for more than three decades at creating hybrids. Leading us to understand – and this is perhaps the real paradox – that in the end, nothing separates the parts from which we thought they were made.

Translation by Jeremy Narby.