

Glauco Venier**Miniatures**

Music for piano and percussion

Glauco Venier: piano, gongs, bells, metals**ECM 2385****CD 6025 4780266 8****Release: June 2016**

For Friulian pianist Glauco Venier, *Miniatures* – his first solo album for ECM - is a kind of journal or diary, atmospherically reflecting upon early memories, early experiences of music, and in turn casting its own quiet spell:

“I grew up in a very small village in northern Italy, and I’m still living there. The Adriatic Sea is nearby, then rivers, lakes, hills. There’s a lot of silence.” There were no brass bands, he explains, in Gradisca di Sedegliano. “My approach to music, when I first discovered it, was through the organ in the local church. And I fell in love with that sound, and with the composers of music for the organ...I have memories, good memories, of playing the organ in the church, in the dark, through the cold winters.” He went on to study organ at the conservatory of Udine, immersing himself in the world of the Italian Renaissance and baroque composers and then working onward through the history of music for organ, concluding his studies with the works of Olivier Messiaen. Before jazz became the focus of his life, he emphasizes, there was church music. “And I think you can hear that in this recording, even if I’m playing modern chords or improvising, in the approach and the feeling, an influence from older music is there.”

Several strands of influence are in fact woven together in the modestly-titled *Miniatures* whose eighteen tracks are episodes in an unfolding narrative. Although we hear mostly solo piano, the recording seems outside ECM’s solo piano tradition. “I was very aware of the great piano recordings made at this label,” says Glauco, “and it was natural to try something different.” Venier is a friend of Udine painter and sculptor Giorgio Celiberti, and had been invited a few years ago to contribute to a documentary about the artist. “He said ‘Let’s just put a piano in my studio and you can react directly to the artworks.’ So that’s what we did. He also had some tuned metal crosses he had made, suspended on strings...” From these, Glauco drew bell-like sonorities. “Manfred Eicher saw this part of the film around the time we were mixing *Stories Yet To Tell* with Norma Winstone and said, ‘That’s a nice idea. Could you find a few other things, to develop it?’” Venier turned to the work of Harry Bertolia, another artist originally from the region, who - decades before the vogue for ambient music - had specialized in what he called ‘sommambient’ sound sculptures. Some of these were added to the instrumentarium for *Miniatures*. “I thought they could provide an evocative element for free music playing.”

Much of *Miniatures* is improvised, but Glauco also brought in material, sometimes from different musical environments. “Gunam”, for instance, is a tune from singer-songwriter Alessandra Franco which Glauco had played with the author on her own album, while the Komitas and Gurdjieff pieces derive from arrangements he had drafted for the trio with Norma Winstone and Klaus Gesing. One context informs another. “Between the percussion

music, the tunes from other situations, and free playing I had a lot of material prepared, at least in my mind...these three elements I felt, could account for maybe 50 per cent of the album, and the rest would be up to the spirit of the moment..."

The plan now is to take the *Miniatures* concept into specially-selected spaces for live performance. "It would be nice to play acoustically in rooms with some natural reverb," Glauco Venier says. "Small churches would be perfect, I think." It's a matter, perhaps, of returning the music to its creative wellspring.

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Glauco Venier was born in Sedegliano, Udine, in 1962, and graduated in organ from the conservatory of Udine in 1985. Originally self-taught in matters of jazz he briefly took lessons with Franco D'Andrea in Milan. In 1989 he was a finalist at the Thelonious Monk Competition in Washington, and in 1991 won a scholarship to study at Boston's Berklee School. He has played with numerous musicians including Enrico Rava, Lee Konitz, Kenny Wheeler, Joey Baron, Maria Pia De Vito, Valery Ponomarev, George Garzone, Hal Crook, and Paolo Fresu.

In the mid-1990s he formed a duo with German saxophonist/clarinetist Klaus Gesing, subsequently expanded into trio with the addition of the great British singer Norma Winstone. In this group, Glauco Venier is pianist, composer and arranger, writing new music and adapting materials from Friulian sources . The group's recordings include three, so far, for ECM: *Distances* (nominated for a Grammy Award), *Stories Yet To Tell*, and *Dance Without Answer*.

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Miniatures was recorded in Lugano's Auditorio Stelio Molo, and produced by Manfred Eicher.