

STEPHANE SPIRA I GIOVANNI MIRABASSI

spirabassi

Tenacious is probably the adjective that best describes Stéphane Spira's nature. He's one of the rare French jazzmen to have started his career as a musician late in life. Now 43, he's releasing his second album. In order to write this new page – dedicated to his father who passed away in 2007 – he invited Giovanni Mirabassi, a pianist with a stellar journey. The great complicity between these longstanding friends generates a climate that's conducive to the work at hand. In it, Stéphane Spira reveals his love for composition and song, and confirms that he's an artist endowed with a rare personality, just like his partner.



What is the purpose of music? Cioran, the great master of the definitive aphorism, has a magnificent answer: «*Music, a farewell system, evokes a kind of physics, the starting point of which is tears rather than atoms.*» Here, on this beautiful record with a tenderly nostalgic tonality, it's the tears of a son, who, through his saxophone and the music he carries within, wants to revive the memory of a father who died in November of 2007: Max Spira, an earthy character of the Paris nightlife, an antique dealer and music enthusiast. One never gets over the death of one's father. One only learns, in time, to tame the absence, to sweeten the missing feeling, to cope with the void. Thanks to music, one can nevertheless manage to transform the mourning into a celebration and the pain into a tribute. «*This record did me a lot of good*», says Stéphane Spira today. «*It allowed me to turn my grief into a positive, to express it, and then to finally get over it.*» Therefore, it's no coincidence that the record opens with «*21 place des Vosges*,» the address of his late father's antique shop, and ends with «*Pra dizer adeus*» («*to say goodbye*»), a sublime melody by Edu Lobo.

On this album without any pathos or narcissistic effusion, this «Song for My Father» of a new kind, Stéphane Spira, with the exception of a single tenor track («Dear Lord» by John Coltrane), favored the soprano saxophone. *«I now have the feeling that with this instrument I've found my true voice, the most natural, the most intimate. On it I express myself with more freedom, probably because contrary to the tenor, there are less names that dominate its history and tie down my inspiration. I recently became aware that when I'm invited to play with other musicians, I spontaneously take my tenor. However, when I'm really working on my own music, I hear the soprano very quickly.»*

For this very first duet with Giovanni Mirabassi, the use of the soprano hence appeared as *«a flagrant evidence,»* since the voice takes precedence over any other musical priority. *«I love to sing,»* declares Spira. *«I claim to have been equally influenced by Shirley Horn and John Coltrane, Carlos Jobim and Miles Davis.»*

The same lyrical standard is true for Giovanni Mirabassi. This is a pianist who has no equal when it comes to making his keyboard sing with the subtle art of melodic sliding and harmonic coloring that's as pearly as a Tuscan twilight. Anything can happen, each of the two accomplices has to constantly lie in wait and be perfectly tuned in to the other. The slightest weakness of presence is fatal. The slightest weakness of attention is immediately audible. Double play is fateful. That's because the duet comes under the art of the most intimate conversation. It requires knowing how to listen and speak at the same time. Only music allows such a miracle.

The prime success of «Spirabassi» is based on the fact that the dialogue is perfectly balanced throughout the tracks. Neither of them ever tries to take over. The only thing that counts is the two-voice speech. Stéphane confesses, *«It was as if a certain magic took place between us during the recording. Giovanni, through his singing fluidity far removed from that of a simple accompanist, presented himself to best advantage. Likewise, my music and compositions aimed to enable him to express himself as freely as possible.»* The challenge of the triumphant interaction is here completely overcome! To sum it all up in one sentence, Cioran, once again, found a magical expression: *«Only music can ever create an indestructible bond between two people.»*



Pascal Anquetil