

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

Perfect Accidents:

The Joyful Apocalypse of Slovak Indie Darlings Longital

There is a psychedelic version of the end of the world, where fish fly over the rivers filled not with water, but with music streaming into the seas. This is the unexpectedly joyous tale of the title track of ***Gloria (release: March 9, 2010; SLNKO Records)***, the new album by **Longital**, Slovakia's best-loved indie band. Spaced out electronics and rockabilly guitar solos, samples of melting icebergs and bowed electric guitar are enveloped by achingly beautiful duets between co-conspirators Daniel Salontay and Shina, the man and woman behind the band.

And as their songs will tell you, Longital do not believe in coincidences. But they love to take chances.

They flip coins, heed dreams of tuba-wielding Herbie Hancocks, put bows to vintage guitars, grab onto sounds both everyday and distinctly exotic. They sound like Camille and Spoon smoking around a Slavic midsummer bonfire, like Animal Collective with a European pedigree. They flit between the old and the new, always traveling light (stuffing clothes into guitar cases, in their unique brand of D.I.Y. style) and always returning to a bluff above the Danube River that inspired their name and a musical breakthrough.

Salontay and Shina—along with virtual band members Xi Di Nim and the Mutant Jazz Lemur—are landing in North America for the first time, with showcase performances at this year's **South by Southwest** and with their precise yet passionate, simple yet subtle songs that reveal the heart of Longital in all their quirky glory.

Magical accidents have shaped the band's sound, like when the band lost not one, but two drummers in quick succession. "After our first drummer left, we worked hard with another drummer, and just at the point that he got very good, he left, too. Just two weeks after our CD release and before a big concert," Salontay recounts. "Later, I realized it was not a coincidence. Even though it looked like a disaster, the situation showed us how to become self sustainable. Now we can travel to gigs by train or plane and don't need to carry drums."

Instead, all they carry are a few small cases and what Salontay and Shina jokingly call their virtual bandmate, Xi Di Nim (minidisc spelled backwards)—the portable electronics that allow Longital to ride the rails effortlessly with a big sound. "It's the name we have for all the sounds and beats apart from guitar and voices," Salontay explains. "It's funny because sometimes concert organizers don't get it. They reserve a room for him, or ask if the Japanese guy in the band is vegetarian."

Xi di min and his colleague, a Jazz Mutant Lemur touchscreen interface (the same machine Björk uses) that controls electronics on the fly, add an unexpectedly organic dimension to Longital's songs, what Salontay calls "the dirt" in their

electronics: wild samples from every possible corner of Europe and the duo's hemisphere-spanning record collection. Cats purr ("My dve" / "The Two of Us"), matches strike, crickets chirp ("Berlin-Grenoble-Arles"). Wherever Longital happens to be, it's bound to echo in their music.

And then there are the samples that arrive via more mysterious and purposeful avenues. "Some time ago, I had a dream in which Herbie Hancock bent to me and said 'this is your sound,'" Salontay smiles. "I suddenly heard a sweet soft sound and saw an instrument which I later recognized as a euphonium. When I checked the sound, it was exactly what I had heard and that's how we got to using a lot of tuba samples on *Gloria*."

Another perfect accident lies behind the group's name. "We moved into a new place, an apartment on a hill overlooking the Danube," Salontay recalls. "We started to record demos here, back in those romantic cassette days, and wrote the name of this place on the tapes, to make a note that it is from here." The Slovak name of their home base, Dlhe Diely, became the band's first moniker, but led to some wacky cross-cultural miscommunications: "We became Diddly Diddly in Finland and Dilly Dally in Ireland," Salontay laughs.

Unsure of what to, Salontay and Shina stumbled across the old German name for their home at the intersection of Austria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic: Longital, the long valley. Which, as it happened, was also a physics term involving excited electrons. Another perfect accident.

Looking for the magic behind chance ("Ani nahodou" / "Nothing By Chance") or the message spoken by the intuitive heart ("Červena modrá" / "Red Blue") is woven into Longital's lyrics, and throughout their lives. "Very often, I ask a question and then open the first book that comes to hand. I read what's there, and there is the answer," Shina smiles. "And Dano tosses this Irish coin with a harp on one side and a bird on the other. It helps us decide between go and stay, fly and play."

"But don't think that we live our lives at random!" Salontay exclaims. Longital, while open to anything, are meticulous in crafting their songs, often working with lyrics, melodies, or instrumental techniques for years until they are just right. "For our song 'Zrklado (Mirror)', I used lyrics I have been working on for fifteen years," Shina reflects. "I was always waiting for some inspiration, how to bring this song to life. And I had to wait these fifteen years. It was really hard work." Chance is always filtered through conscious choice.

Like the commercially challenging but aesthetically pleasing decision to sing in their native Slovak. "There are things that you can only express in the language your mother sang you lullabies in," Salontay muses. "Language is not just the words and their rational meaning. It's also the energy and the vibration. It's a color and bears some meaning. And this is what the Slovak language has for me, and I can use this quality."

The color of Slovak shines through Longital's sound and moves audiences regardless

of their linguistic background. "Even when we sing to an audience that doesn't understand the words, we have a way of getting the meaning across," Salontay notes. "People get the message from the music and from our interaction with them."

"One example," says Shina, "comes during the song, 'Anjel moj (My Angel):' I toss swan feathers into the audience, and they drift slowly over their heads. The feathers are landing softly, while I sing about free fall and heavy landing and hitting the ground. There's contrast, and all it took to say this was some feathers."

This connection with audiences is too precious to be left to chance. For Longital, it opens and closes entire worlds. "At the end of concerts, the world between the audience and us is ending. You cannot repeat this with the audience," Shina smiles. "For your latest world, the end is in this moment. But, like the flying fish and musical river on 'Gloria,' it's a happy end. Another world is beginning."

<< release: 03/09/10 >>

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