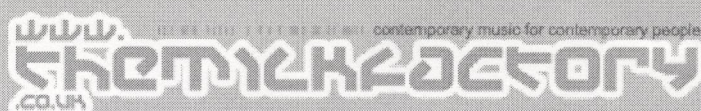


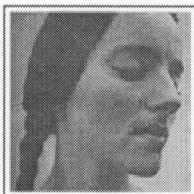
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Reviews March 2003



MAJA RATKJE

Voice

RCD2028

Rune Grammofon 2003

11 Tracks. 47mins53secs

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The human voice is by far the most complex, and perhaps the least recognised of all instruments. Maja Ratkje knows the importance of the voice as a musical element like no-one else. Her first solo album, simply entitled *Voice* and based entirely on her vocal performance, reveals the vast array of sonorities and contrasts that can be found in one's voice.

Born in 1973 in Trondheim, in the centre of Norway, Maja Ratkje has already an impressive CV behind her. Although she claims that her main commitment is with all-female improvisation quartet *Spunk* which she formed with friends in 1995, and with whom she has released two albums, her extra curricular activities, as a composer, singer, violinist and electronics and Theremin player, have won her numerous international accolades. A former student at the Norwegian State Academy Of Music, Maja Ratkje first got noticed through her orchestral and electro-acoustic work in her native Scandinavia, but it is with *Spunk* that international recognition came, when they released their first album, *Det Eneste Jeg Vet Er At Det Ikke Er En Støvsuger*, which roughly translates as *The Only Thing I Know Is That It Isn't A Vacuum Cleaner*, on Norwegian premier experimental imprint Rune Grammofon in 1999. The album offered the perfect platform for the band to promote their tongue in cheek approach to improvisation, and triggered the interest of a wide range of musicians, from Kim Hiorthøy and Phonophani to Svalastog and Lasse Marhaug, eventually developing into a remix project, *Filtered Through Friends*, released last year.

Maja now publishes her first solo effort, only a few months after the release of the second *Spunk* album. Produced by Norwegian duo Jazzkammer, *Voice* is a weird a beautiful record. At times dense and fierce, at others peaceful and controlled, the music presented here never ceases to surprise, amuse and disconcert. Exposed in its most minute details, twisted, filtered, lacerated, layered, the voice becomes drone, beat, texture or wave, deflected from its natural course to rise above its organic structure or crash in convulsive distortions. Using a mixture of Norwegian and English, the songs serve no other purpose than convey the extreme diversity of the vocal input. The frontier between the actual singing and the processed elements is irremediably blurred, and the listener soon loses touch of what's real and what is not. The twelve minute epic centerpiece of this album, *Vacuum*, encompasses all of what makes this voice such a particular instrument. From its delightfully introverted beginning to its majestic peak, which is not without evoking part of Pierre Henry's *Apocalypse De St Jean*, and its uncomfortable silences, the track throws out all expectations by constantly changing focus, as Ratkje toys with the listener's mind and emotions. Balancing the raw recording of her voice on a Dictaphone with digital processing, *Dictaphone Jam* is as unsettling and fascinating. The title track, which follows, opens up new doors again, as the voice seems to be captured in its most natural form. Enveloped in whirlwinds of echoes, almost bare of any other elements, *Voice* is beautifully ethereal. At last the listener is able to contemplate the purity of Ratkje's singing, almost undisturbed by the reintroduction of digital processing on *Chipmunk Party*. The album concludes with the most disconcerting moment on offer here. After an outburst of layered screams and laughter forming the main body of the piece, the three remaining sections cascade onto each other to draw this magnificent album to a close. Very few records give such a space to vocal performance, and very few artists who would be able to carry such a piece of work with ease. More challenging than her work with *Spunk*, *Voice* is a unique experience, at once charming and disturbing, and Ratkje can only be admired for undertaking such a project. Let alone achieving beyond all expectations.

4.8/5

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TRACKLIST

Intro
Joy
Trio
Octo
Vacuum

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Voice

Artist [Maja Ratkje](#)

Album Title Voice

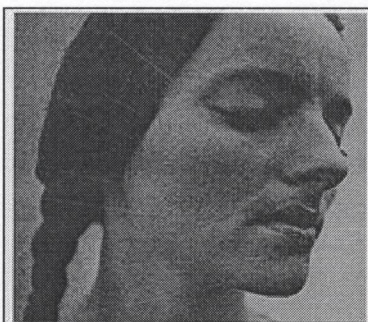
Date of Release Oct 21, 2002

AMG Rating ★★★★★

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AMG REVIEW



Experimental singer Maja Ratkje released her first solo album a few months after the second CD by her main group, [Spunk](#), racked up a fair number of positive reviews from the avant-garde press. Expectations were high and *Voice* surely meets them. The album is co-produced by Ratkje and [Jazzkammer's John Hegre](#) and [Lasse Marhaug](#), although the term "co-produced" remains a bit vague and the collaboration could run a little deeper. The 11 pieces use only Ratkje's voice as a sound source, but they cover a wide spectrum of textures and dynamics, from echo-drenched a cappella singing (at the beginning of "Vacuum") to torturing noise assaults ("Insomnia"),

going through a number of sample- and processed file-based constructions in between. Ratkje is messing with listeners' minds as she toys around with sharp contrasts of quiet/loud, soft/harsh, and seductive/painful. She knows she has a beautiful, flexible voice that can both charm like [Björk](#) and puzzle like [Phil Minton](#) — and she purposefully deceives the listener. "Trio" starts softly with overlaid, droning textures and a voice-derived beat, only to burst into mad, distorted screaming. "Vacuum" is the magnum opus of the disc, a captivating 12-minute composition that takes listeners up close and personal with her voice. "Dictaphone Jam" makes the best out of the low fidelity of the recording device. The closing "Insomnia" is the strangest track: After an outburst of multi-tracked screams interrupted by laughter (probably recorded on a dictaphone again), the piece adds three postludes, each quieter than the previous one, like short dreams. Harsher than what most people were expecting and closer to [Jazzkammer](#) than [Spunk](#), *Voice* hides Ratkje's impressive vocal prowess under a wall of electronics. After the initial shock wears off, one can only admit that it was a good idea.

Recommended, but definitely not for the faint at heart. — **François Couture**

SONGS/TRACKS

1. [Intro](#) (Flink/Ratkje) - 4:20
2. [Joy](#) (Ratkje) - 2:22
3. [Trio](#) (Ratkje) - 4:45
4. [Octo](#) (Ratkje) - 0:59
5. [Vacuum](#) (Ratkje) - 12:02
6. [Dictaphone Jam](#) (Ratkje) - 3:06
7. [Voice](#) (Ratkje) - 6:16
8. [Chipmunk Party](#) (Flink/Ratkje) - 2:24
9. [Interlude](#) (Ratkje) - 0:11
10. [Acid](#) (Ratkje) - 1:34
11. [Insomnia](#) (Ratkje) - 9:46

CREDITS

[Kim Hiorthøy](#) - Artwork

[Audun Strype](#) - Mastering

[Jazzkammer](#) - Producer

[Maja Ratkje](#) - Voices, Producer, Executive Producer, Electronics

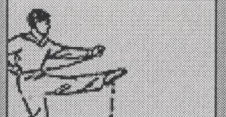
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2002 CD Rune Grammofon

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Maja Ratkje - Voice Supersilent - 6

4/5

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On vous a récemment dit tout le bien que l'on pensait du magnifique troisième album de Spunk, quartet féminin d'improvisation libertaire et sans limites, on est donc heureux de vous parler du premier disque solo de sa vocaliste et chef de file Maja Ratkje. Un disque de chanteuse à voix doublé d'un monument d'étrangeté, qui risque bien de devenir une pierre angulaire de l'art vocal. Le concept dudit disque, équivoquement et sobrement intitulé **Voice**, est d'emblée ambitieux : les acrobaties vocales de Maja sont à la fois le sujet central de l'album, et sa seule source sonore.

Un peu à la manière de *Guitar* de Derek Bailey, de *Tenor* de Joe McPhee, ou du *Classic guide to strategy* de John Zorn, autres grands improvisateurs et casseurs de murailles musique/non-musique, la norvégienne explore les milles et une possibilités, jolies pas jolies, que lui offrent ses cordes vocales (vibrations) et son organe oratoire (textures, brisures, sifflement). Alors bien sûr l'exercice pourrait se révéler périlleux, voire aride, mais la norvégienne, qui a décidé de la suite dans les idées, s'est acoquiné du duo noise Jazzkammer pour enrichir son propos et étendre encore un peu plus le vaste territoire de sa voix magnifique. Brisant le cou à la contrainte de départ, le trio n'hésite pas à transformer le matériau jusqu'à l'inhumain et jusqu'à l'impossible, bouclant, molletonnant, accélérant les vocalises pour les faire muter en autant de mélodies, rythmes, pulsions, nappes et bouillonnements tout autant modernistes qu'ancestraux. Maja éructe, charcute, siffle et hume les langues (norois, anglais) et quelques mots leur appartenant, invoque la furie ("joy", "chipmunk party") tout autant

ACTU! MUSIC

15/03/2003

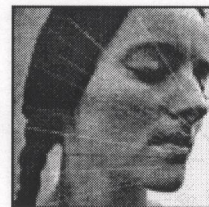
Faites des tubes, c'est mathématique !

Dominique A on ze web

Le Meilleur de Daniel Darc

Depeche Mode solos

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FORUM



STUPEFLIP

Le crou défraye
la chronique.

Méchant désaccord dans
la rédac : Stupeflip,
réellement stupéfiant
ou franchement
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que l'apaisement (les prouesses ambient pop "voice" et "vacuum"), le groove de Sarah Vaughan ("dictaphone jam"), brasse l'avant garde de Shelly Hirsch ou Iva Bittova à la pop romantique de... Bjork. Et n'oublie jamais d'écrire, de composer, de faire de la musique. Ce qui donne à ce disque une ambiance très particulière et une allure digne des grands albums pop. A qui ce disque majeur parlera ? Impossible de le savoir... Mais on en discutera encore certainement dans longtemps.

Dictaphone / Morgan
Caney & Kamal Joory

Sutekh / Random Inc.

Fennesz
Field recordings
1995-2002

Le très reconnu combo improv Supersilent fait pour sa part un étonnant pas de côté. Après la furie de 4, les envolées de 5, le groupe rentre en lui-même et prend le chemin de l'introspection. Ce qui donne un étonnant résultat, à mille lieux de la musique improvisée traditionnelle, voire des soubresauts éternés du jazz nordique : des propensions accentuées vers les variations purement modales et dissonantes mais à part, on se rapprocherait presque ici par moment d'une certaine manière de pratiquer le rock atmosphérique, voire le space-rock. L'ambient caverneux de Deathprod, extrémité électronique de la formation, a semble-t-il contaminé toutes les couches instrumentales, pour les engluier dans de vastes espaces glacés, visuels, presque cinématographiques (évoquant Bergman ou les B.O. de Takemitsu plus qu'Hollywood), frisant le kitsch mais ne tombant jamais complètement dedans. Un disque qui laisse perplexe, mais dont l'ambition et l'originalité laissent pantois.

Olivier Lamm

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