



## Etta Scollo

### Ora

Artist:	Etta Scollo
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Be in the now: A doctrine that has been propounded by spiritual teachers and philosophers for millennia. But is the "now" worth striving for in these times of crisis and war? With her new opus "Ora", Sicilian musician Etta Scollo provides a musically multi-faceted reply. Not content with simple and easy platitudes, she keeps the dramaturgical tension high, surprising us anew with each piece. In her first home Catania, she and star producer Taketo Gohara have brought forth an album that touches listeners, both poetically and politically, with more than a little glimmer of hope.

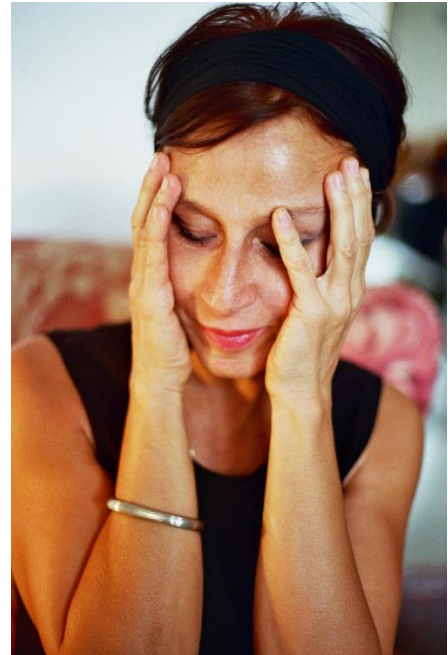
"I stand up, I stand upright, my hand is working, it accompanies a song about things concrete, experienced and immediately reborn. It's time to be - now, now, now..." sings Etta Scollo in the title track and closing song of "Ora." "The pandemic threw us into a musical lethargy," she says. "Suddenly everything was gone, I had no perspective and didn't sing a note. Then I got busy working physically: I hammered nails into the walls of my new apartment, installed lamps, mounted shelves. It was clear to me that I needed to feel my body, to feel human again in this avonbeywful time of isolation." Scollo says that the impulses she needs to create her art come through touch, tinkering, constructing, tactile exchanges. She speaks of the strong relationship she has, not only with her voice and thoughts, but with her hands as well. Out of this touching and doing, out of this reawakening, an album emerges that is shocking in its directness and astounding in its diversity.

It all begins with a circular, four-meter-high room in her new Sicilian home. This she leaves to Taketo Gohara to arrange acoustically. The Milan-born Japanese producer, who has already used his acoustic talents in his work with stars such as the Cantautore Vinicio Capossela and pop singer Elisa, prepares the location, aided by sound engineer Niccolò Fornabaio: "Taketo wanted the production to remain very raw, and he let everything get very close to my voice," says Scollo. "When I was singing, I didn't feel like I had headphones on at all. I felt very much within myself. Taketo recognized which songs needed more intimacy; he also encouraged me to sing softly too, but not necessarily to always intonate 'beautifully'. Indeed, I am not a perfect person, I'm a hurt person as well. And hurt can't be truly transmitted with a voice that only expresses contrived beauty."

Musically, "Ora" captures a whole universe: there are completely naked pieces accompanied only by guitar, sounds from the tradition of Sicily, swirling waltzes and ironic six-eighth bars. There is the subtle coloring of strings, an intimate meeting of brass band and Renaissance choir and electronic textures as well: "Each setting stands for a moment that was once important in my life," emphasizes Scollo. From these very diverse colors, Gohara creates a special dramaturgy. His goal is not to bundle the songs in a "pleasant flow", but to create an "edginess" between the compositions, to allow for disruption, to bring a new surprise with each piece.



The pulse of the words comes once again from the Sicilian poets that Scollo so reveres. There is Nobel Prize winner Salvatore Quasimodo, who in “Alle Fronde Dei Salici” tells of how musicians hung their instruments on the trees out of grief over the German atrocities during World War II. Etta Scollo's musical rendering is a shock-like response to the first day of the war of aggression against the Ukraine. Then there is Ignazio Buttitta, whom she admires for his political commitment to language: In “Lingua e Dialettu”, she uses the metaphor of mother's milk to set his strong images of identity and against the anonymization of language into music, with a gladiatorial yet sensitive march. In “A Notti u rici o jurnu” she honors Franco Scaldati, the friend, the gentle man of the theater and night person. Using only a string arrangement she wrote herself, she creates a nocturnal scenario in which peoples' shadows meet before the actual persons themselves. What a contrast then is her second night song “Cantanotte”, an approach towards to the 19<sup>th</sup> century poet Mariannina Coffa who, every night, fled from an unhappy marriage into her own world of lyricism: what we hear is the original poetry in the form of a festive waltz employing the Theremin, the only instrument played without being touched. It's unique sound perfectly transports the listener into this realm of fantasy.



German actress Hanna Schygulla, a close friend of Scollo's, is a surprise guest. Together they create the bitter Brecht/Eisler song "Of the Kindness of the World": "In Brecht's lyrics, the child is abandoned by its father, it is a war situation, and yet the women seek to convey the feeling of an embrace. With her beautiful dark voice, Hanna then begins to sing the Sicilian lullaby 'Avò: It feels like a light at the end of the tunnel." And finally, continuing with the mother-child theme, another Scollo text, "Fuga In La Minore". Using musical vocabulary, it tells of flight (in Italian, also referred to by the word "fuga", just like "fugue,!"). Here she confronts the reality of today's migration with a bitter, almost cartoonish irony. That, too, is caught again in an embrace and thus resolved.

"Ora" does not flee from the many problems of our time into “feel-good” sound. Etta Scollo's new work faces the challenges of today with profound, committed poetry, the musical ladle dipping freely into many old and new sources. It is precisely through this undaunted creativity and uprightness that it becomes a convincing statement against lethargy, against isolation and “contactlessness.” Indeed "Ora" is even more: a courageous, open affirmation of life in the midst of storm and ashes, of the courage to love without hesitation.

*by Stefan Franzen*

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