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Three fathers – how did that happen?



NANDO VON ARB:
"Drei Väter" (Three fathers)
Edition Moderne, Zurich 2019
304 pages;
CHF 49 or approx. EUR 39

The story of a boy called Nando – told in graphic-novel format from the protagonist's own viewpoint – provides the answer to this question. Nando's natural father leaves Nando's mother while the boy is still very young. He is no longer there to take care of Nando and his two sisters. Nando's mother, now alone, is a loving parent to her children. But she soon finds it hard to cope, not least because money is tight.

The sprightly Kiko, father of one of Nando's sisters, often takes care of the children. He likes putting silly ideas into their heads. Nando would marry his mother if he could, because he feels she needs someone by her

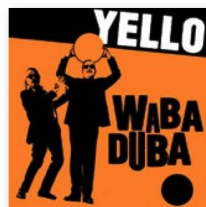
side. As that isn't possible, he begins searching for someone else who would be suitable. Gentle giant Zelo appears to fit the bill with his reassuringly broad-shouldered appearance. Some time later, Nando's biological father begins to show an interest in his son again, taking him to museums and outings in his car. The three men are essentially the father figures of Nando's childhood.

Nando von Arb's debut novel earned him 10,000 francs as the winner of the 2020 Swiss Children's and Youth Book Award. The book not only appeals to older children and teenagers, but to adults too. Von Arb's jagged black-and-white drawings, interspersed with splashes of colour, are an imaginative take on the author's own childhood in a patchwork family. The protagonists are fantasy-like but precisely characterised. Nando's mother is a big bird with affectionate eyes and big protective wings. His father, on the other hand, is a sly fox. Nando looks like a large egg with a black cap, and is extremely endearing. The blurred lines between fantasy and reality lend a wonderful lightness to the occasionally melancholy storyline. It is an extremely expressive comic-strip novel – sensitive in its handling of Nando's childhood, yet neither accusatory nor judgemental in tone.

Nando von Arb was born in 1992 in Zurich. After training as a graphic designer, von Arb studied at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, where he graduated in Illustration Fiction in 2018. He is currently doing a Master of Fine Arts in Ghent. Von Arb can be found on Instagram at @nandovonarb.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Electro-pop stalwarts play it safe



YELLO –
"Point". Universal Music, 2020

Yello are a veritable institution – and both members of the duo have well-established, clearly delineated roles. The process of making a new album begins with Boris Blank tinkering with new sounds in his studio. This can take months or sometimes even years. It is over to Dieter Meier once the music has a fixed structure. Meier takes the material and travels to the other side of the world to write the lyrics. Yello work in stages, not together. It always seems to have been like this. You could also say that their artistic output has barely changed over the past 42 years.

Their new studio album "Point" cements this impression. For example, opener "Waba Duba"

immediately revisits the past with its signature skittish tribal loop. Blank's synthesiser rhythms sound vaguely like baritone saxophones – another Yello affectation. Mix in the odd vocal sample, and what we have is instantly reminiscent of the epochal electro track "Bostich" (1981) or international hit "The Race" (1988). The only difference is that Dieter Meier's own voice sounds quite unfamiliar, for once lacking its inimitable breathy whisper and mellow depth.

"Point" contains most of the usual fare, even if Blank's computer seems to have pimped the beats somewhat. It is an album with that customary sense of fun and effortlessness, sometimes zany but hardly ever absurd, and always slightly sterile and intellectual – typical Yello, in fact.

Are the duo simply sticking to their guns, or is this self-plagiarism? Whichever way you look at it, Yello's reassuringly accomplished "sameness" comes as no surprise. Nevertheless, the danceable electronic mid-tempo number "Way Down" proves that Blank and Meier can mix things up when they want. Barely recognisable as a Yello song, the track actually contains something sounding like genuine lead vocals. "Big Boy's Blues" is another departure – a big, brash track with banging drums and edgy guitar samples. You could almost call it rock and roll.

While these exceptions constitute the album's highlights, most of the 12 songs have a familiar air about them. The duo have recycled themselves and, for the most part, are no longer up to speed with the times. This is unlikely to concern their loyal fanbase. Yello are unlikely to attract many new followers with their latest effort either.

MARKO LEHTINEN