

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 49 (2022)
Heft: 2

Rubrik: Sounds : a soulful production

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Download PDF: 28.04.2025

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Life without electricity



SIMONE WEINMANN:
"Die Erinnerung an unbekannte Städte."
Kunstmann Verlag 2021,
272 pages, CHF 35

The sky suddenly turned dark in 2030. Out went the lights. Infrastructure crumbled. And the world reverted to a state of pre-industrial gloom. That was 15 years ago. Since then, humans have reconciled themselves to a frugal existence.

In her dystopian vision of the future "Die Erinnerung an unbekannte Städte" (Remembering unknown cities), author Simone Weinmann paints the oppressive picture of a new dark age after climate meltdown and the collapse of technology. People had been unprepared for the disaster that struck. Everything they were used to disappeared in a flash. At the village school, teacher and former pro-

grammer Ludwig continues to coach now-obsolete subjects like maths and grammar, as if there was a future for such things. In doing so, he attracts the ire of sectarian worshippers who have put their faith in God. Young Nathanael wants nothing to do with their religion and would like to become a doctor. He therefore decides to leave his strict parents. Vanessa accompanies him, because she is fleeing from a broken family. Both dream of the legendary tunnel that is supposed to lead to warmer climes on the other side of the mountains. Their respective parents assign Ludwig as the person to bring them back home.

There are many dystopian novels, with George Orwell and Aldous Huxley having set the benchmark. Simone Weinmann very much belongs to this genre, yet she finds her own voice. Power, control and the struggle against both are a feature of stories like Orwell's "1984". Weinmann, on the other hand, patiently and lucidly unravels a world in which people have to organise themselves through primitive means and without government protection. In an atmospherically coherent narrative containing subtle details, she describes how life without electricity could be – and cogently illustrates why a small handful of people like Nathanael, Vanessa and Ludwig choose to leave this world behind. Instead of fighting back (whom would they fight anyway?), the protagonists simply try to find happiness of their own accord. Weinmann's image of the future is neither totalitarian nor violent, but anarchic and miserable. Scrap and debris on the side of the road afford us a glimpse of the old world. "What do we lose when culture and civilisation break down?" asks the author. The three runaways give us an answer. We lose everything, except perhaps the last glimmer of hope. Weinmann wisely chooses not to tell us whether this hope is fulfilled.

Simone Weinmann is an astrophysicist who lives in Zurich. This is her debut novel.

BEAT MAZENAUER

A soulful production



ZIAN:
"Burden",
Sony, 2022

It was one of last year's biggest Swiss hits, taking the charts by storm virtually overnight. The song was "Show You", the singer Zian. No one had heard of him before. Who is he?

Zian is 28 years old, lives in Basel and goes by the real name of Tizian Hugenschmidt. He used to tap the drums at the Basel carnival as a child, before graduating to a proper drum kit. Growing up, he also played the guitar and piano. Otherwise, his musical education was low key. Much like other lads his age, he listened to rock, metal and Swiss-German rap. His love of a good pop song only came later.

But once things started moving, they moved very quickly. Under a professional management team as well as label giant Sony, Zian released his first song "Show You" in collaboration with in-demand producer Henrik Amschler. It was an impressive ballad, carried by piano and bags of pathos, in which Zian's exceptionally soulful voice stood out. There was no shortage of admirers: "Show You" stayed in the Swiss charts for five months, handing the Basel singer his breakthrough.

Debut album "Burden" is the next chapter – and the singer has pulled it off again. Another Henrik Amschler production, this LP has an expansive, living, breathing sound imbued with synthesisers, piano and drum machines. Besides this sophisticated feel, Zian's vocals also live up to last year's billing. The emotion is authentic, lending gravitas to what is a reflective and at times sorrowful, serious tone. "Burden" touches on sombre themes such as fear, sacrifice, loss, and a young man's existential angst, delivering these with pomp and poignancy at every turn.

Produced to within an inch of its life, this album blatantly targets a young, mainstream demographic. Be that as it may, Zian is certainly not a one-hit wonder.

MARKO LEHTINEN