

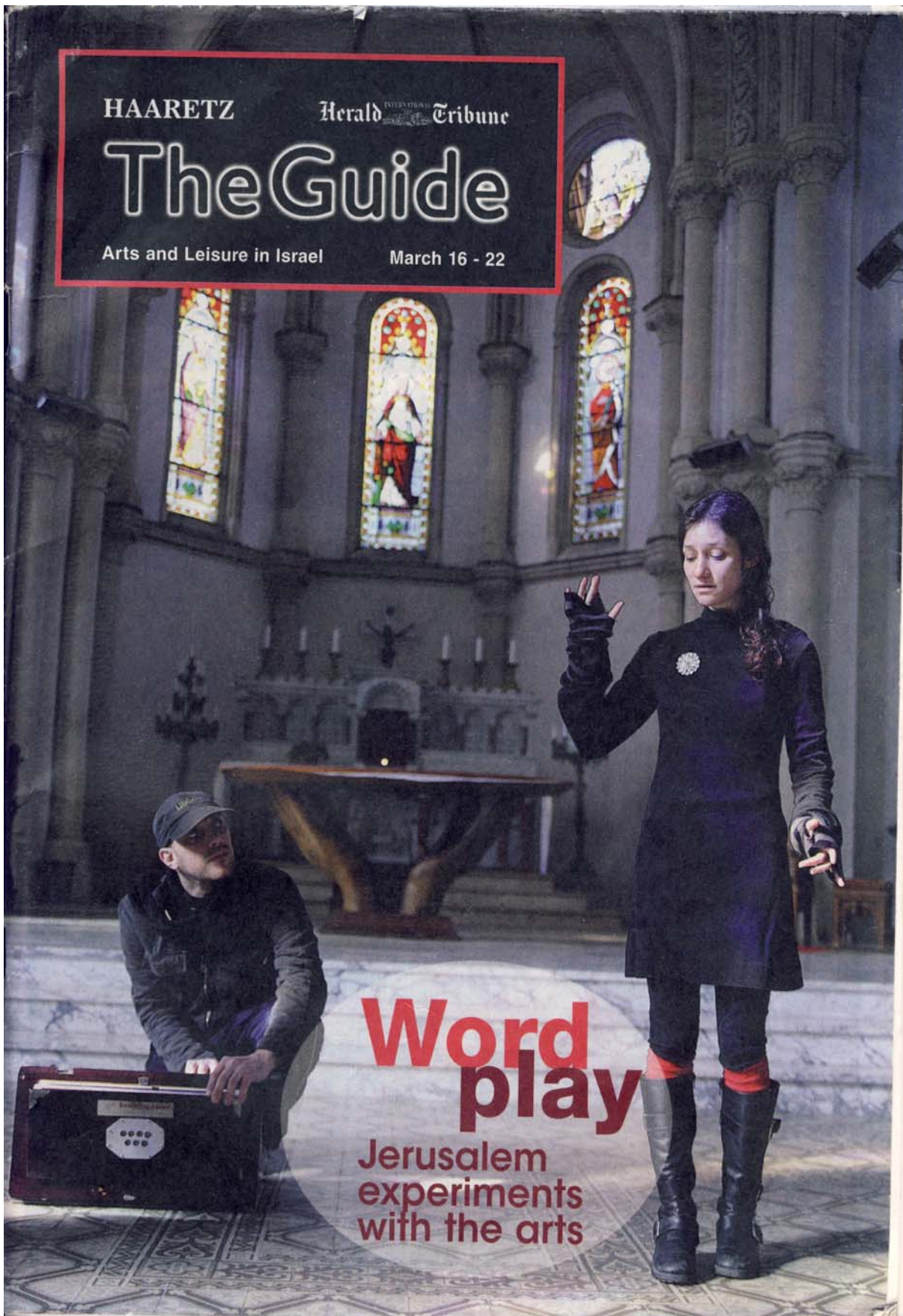
HAARETZ

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The Guide

Arts and Leisure in Israel

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Word play

Jerusalem experiments with the arts

Winter Family is a duo made up of vocalist Israeli Ruth Rosenthal and French musician Xavier Klaine, who mans the piano, organ, and harmonium. Together, they build up relatively simple pieces with all the height and gloom of rotting cathedrals. Rosenthal speaks in English and Hebrew. Klaine takes advantage of the organ's versatility, while Rosenthal swaps languages between verses; with these clever change-ups, they reap a diverse crop of ideas from some pretty simple germs. Each song seems written on a different template (the shortest is less than two minutes, the longest over thirteen), yet almost all of them convey some aspect of horror and the agony of remembering. In short, this is some scary shit.

On "Nous Les Vivants" the organ dominates, blasting upward with tyrannical abandon. It's almost five straight minutes of climax that confronts the listener with the listening experience normally expected from a noise CD-R. Hot on its heels is a winsome piano piece reminiscent of Max Richter's *The Blue Notebooks* – the only English lyric sung over the tinkling chords: "You wish to wash yourself but you can't." The clean, loving tones of the piano that appear later are not enough to cleanse the listener of the prior fury of Klaine's organ.

"Psaume" (the French word for "psalm") consists of suffocating, twitchy organ static and layered, reverbed vocals. It's wonderful. "Ray of Light / No Bad Animals" takes the same concept but flips it on its head: it's a handful of piano notes and a few chords scattered over Rosenthal's fable about warring animals. This time the words smother and lacerate while the music floats, until the end of the song, when they both stumble over each other through a crescendo.

"Auschwitz" is a barrelhouse piano number about its titular subject. Yes, a number; yes barrelhouse. The song's irony is terrifying. It's narrated by a little girl who tells the story of a snow globe full of people who are dying because they forgot to bring their coats with them to a cold place (guess which). Rosenthal keeps up a twee, happy-go-lucky tone throughout, while the piece bounces on top of a rollicking piano line and the occasional twang of... a Jew's harp.

This is decidedly a winter album. I first listened to it this summer when it was hot and I was pretty terribly in love. I thought it was kinda okay. Now I'm lonely, it's fucking cold out, and it sounds revelatory. *Sub Rosa* gives its artists all the space they want to exercise a concept; this can lead to albums that feel a little overstuffed or indulgent, but in the case of *Winter Family*, it has yielded two discs full of beautiful music. This one should make more year-end lists than it will.

tinymixtapes.com

Bubbachups top 10 albums 2007

Winter Family consists of Israeli artist Ruth Rosenthal and French musician Xavier Klaine. Together they make a strange, yet highly enticing combination of spoken word and piano compositions. Ruth Rosenthal reads her texts in English and Hebrew. Underneath her words, Xavier Klaine lays down a wonderful carpet of sounds coming from piano, harmoniums and pipe organ. The remarkable thing about this album is the diversity in sound in which they explore their collaboration. Some songs consist of nothing but fragile piano compositions with Rosenthal quietly reading her words on top of them. Other songs – like *Nous Les Vivants* – have loud church organs creating massive, echoing soundscapes with Rosenthal dramatically shouting at the listeners. And then there's a lot in between.

Xavier Klaine's compositions in themselves are easily strong enough to make for a beautiful album. Comparisons could sometimes be made with this year's also rather excellent album by Rafael Anton Irisarri called *Daydreaming*. But the combination with spoken word is what really makes this album such a hugely compelling listen.

moteldemoka.com

Winter Family, a French Israeli, sacred duet in a concert tonight at the Saint-Sulpice church in Paris. It was on last March in the high back of the severe Saint Elisabeth church a long organ's drone penetrated the silence. A fragile silhouette appeared in front of the altar, pale and beautiful, her braided hairs are dark; she raised her thin, white arms. Her low voice petrified the audience. The words spring up like a bustling torrent or a calm stream. She recites, chants, whispers, speaks, delivers and shines. Her lamentation full of sadness and of endless compassion like it was coming from the night of times. She tells of biblical tales, of wandering stories, of brotherhood hostility, of jealousy, of grief and suffers, of love too. She speaks the war, the wounds of life, the sacrificed children; she mimes the sounds of bombs explosions. In English or Hebrew her inconsolable voice slides imperceptibly over the intoxicating loops of the organ and harmonium. The 'mass' completes in an apotheosis, in a shout of the pipe organ and with a cry "us the alive!" We exit the church converted into Winter Family.

Suitcase. She is Ruth Rosenthal, from close with her big pale eyes; she's not less intimidated. She is Israeli who grew in Jerusalem ("a dead city") before moving to Jaffa, the Arabic side of Tel Aviv. It's on her door that he came knocking with his suitcase. He saw her only once before at mutual friends; he is Xavier Klaine a sinister Lorrain from Maxeville: a winner of a first prize in piano from a conservatoire and holds a MA diploma on geopolitics, specialized in central Asia, ex-bass player of the grind-core group Blockheads. She offered him to stay in a condition he'll write the music for one of her theatre projects.

Since then, they moved to Paris, recorded in a parking lot crammed with the awkward instruments: piano, Indian harmonium, a centenary pump harmonium and a celesta that he restored. Together they improvise. He plays with his hat on his eyes, his head in the keyboard. She sinks into minimal layers he prepares for her. "I think it's the only person that can do anything on my music," he says. Ruth never 'sang' before, she writes texts, grew up in a milieu of theatre, she reads a lot. He is crabby, never listens to music. His friends recommend him Steve Reich or Charlemagne Palestine. He refuses. Besides Berio and Ligeti that he likes along with NTM "the only French group worth going out for" he adores Bach.

Cosmic. The music was not so spoken of in this encounter; the two prefer to speak about history and politics. Difficult to escape when we're coming from Israel. "My texts are more politic than religious, naturedly, I'm against the occupation and the human manipulation but I don't want to be a representative, on the other hand I can't avoid this issue." Ruth didn't do her military service cause she was too thin. We try to guess where does her contagious melancholy comes from, but she doesn't say a word, too modest. "I was born in the spring, that's why it took me so long to find my real family, my true family, my winter family," she writes. This sensibility deepens through all the texts, it's intentional "not to reject the sadness, thus it is part of life," says Xavier. In Auschwitz, a fable told in a misleadingly joyful tone, she speaks about a snow bubble: the synthetic snow falls on dying people "I'm not very disco" she mumbles. Their double album, a black cd and a white one, bring together the work of the last two years. It was recorded, often in one take, in a club in Tel Aviv, the apartment in Jaffa, a Parisian parking lot and in churches. Tonight they will play in the crypt of Saint-Sulpice church, no doubtfully one of the most suitable places for their sacred, cosmic music. But, they worn, this concert will be very different then the one in Saint Elisabeth.

Marie Lechner, translated from Libération, September 2007

The slow, deliberate storytime speaking voice of Israeli artist Ruth Rosenthal is neither gimmickry nor coyness nor innocence-as-politics. Her child-friendly animated whimsy isn't a cuddle-party (see *CocoRosie*); it's not looking for a hug, group or otherwise (see *Lavender Diamond*). It's a weapon, using a sense of mystery and curiosity as a way to approach big issues and a near-goth feeling of unfolding despair. The debut *Winter Family* release combines her whispered words with the reverb-heavy piano of Xavier Klaine—one hour of music packaged as deluxe fold-out double-disc digipak thanks to *Sub Rosa*. It's packed with songs that make heartache and loneliness sound like dispatches from muddy-toed garden romps (*Winter Family's* imagery dwells heavily on gardens and the things you find in them), profound desolation for when you're staring at an earthworm and pondering the mysteries of existence. This song, like many of their songs, is an extended metaphor told like a story. A snowglobe is held by a child with childish amazement ("I've got a toy. I've got a magic bubble") and remembered by an adult with adult puzzlement ("It was a see-through bubble—I don't know the name of these"). Every morning when she goes to play with the snowglobe, there's dead people inside. It's ultimately about power, injustice and confusion—the song is called "Auschwitz" after all. It's a much-needed, more-questions-than answers song, a mystified reaction to any act of evil committed by governments or individuals, past or present. Sad and haunting, but digestible like a three-minute radio number. It fits gorgeously with other new-noise spoken coo like indie-goopers Kirsten Ketsjer or politipunk no-agers Gowns, but (maybe it's their *Sub Rosa* ties or their church shows) *Winter Family* somehow feel more grown up, more genius grant, more self-reflective Laurie, more Ritalin-slowed Diamanda.

Christopher R. Weingarten, paperthinwalls.com

Winter Family are a Paris-based duo, instrumentalist Xavier Klaine and vocalist/lyricist Ruth Rosenthal. Initial listens convey a stripped down, piano/drone-based, minimalist devotional post-rock. Imagine Rachel's covering *The Silver Mount Zion*, perhaps. Delving deeper reveals extra dynamics and a particularly chilling, almost doom-like touch. Rosenthal's lyrics are as poetically bleak as a deserted, windswept post-apocalyptic harbour at dead of night. Her delivery a theatrical, frail, life-weary, often half-whispered recitation. A track offering cheerful-sounding dialogue is revealed as childhood's end bitterness when one discovers it's entitled 'Auschwitz'. The sparse, skeletal yet mesmerising arrangements break with the monumental, church organ-led 'Nous Les Vivants', where Rosenthal's delivery turns animated, proclamative. She sounds like Diamanda Galas' little (Rosenthal's really tiny) helper on it. Wholly acoustic, and as horridly and exquisitely pale and tragic as a virgin suicide, *Winter Family* makes most funeral doom sound like *Black Lace's* 'Agadoo'.

Avi Pitchon, *Terrorizer Magazine*, November 2007

A soft hum echoes against the vaulted ceilings and chipping frescos in the crypt of St Suplice, a church in the centre of Paris. A piano, organ, harmonium, and arm chair patiently await, like the rest of us, the arrival of Winter Family. This duet comprised of Israeli Ruth Rosenthal and French Xavier Klaine was formed in Jaffa in 2004 and since then has been performing in similar such venues in New York, Europe, and the Middle East. Winter Family is not simply a group, but an experience, at once reassuring and terrifying.

The sound is a combination of melodic spoken-word texts in English and Hebrew against sparse hypnotic music. A deep feminine voice recites words and creates images reminiscent of childhood bedtime stories. With a haunting melody continually playing like a broken gramophone, it quickly becomes evident that what we are entering is not a dream but a nightmare.

<<I was born in the spring, that's why it took me so long to find my real family, my true family, my winter family>> is both the first line from the title track and an example of Ruth's beautifully intricate and elegantly perplexing poetry. Her texts explore the worst of what human beings are capable of doing to one another: violence, pride, suffering, uncertainty, death. The message is at times clear and direct while others ambiguous and abstract. One song fills the room with gunfire as a mother waits for a son who will never return, while another paints the world from the point of view of a slug. The political and the philosophical are interwoven, often accentuated by the ironic and the absurd. This melancholy music constructs a universe steeped in darkness. Light exists only blindingly and in bursts.

The journey is not however to the outreaches of the galaxy but to the very depths of the self. It is an introspective look and according to Ruth ~a gift to be interpreted differently and independently by each individual.

Winter Family's debut album was released in September with their second album well under way. The follow up to I Was Born In Spring is apparently fuller-sounding, more accessible, and darker. The group will be performing at the Horse Hospital in London on November 10th and are constantly adding dates and locations. With few influences and fewer contemporaries, this unique duet promises nothing but facilitates a musical sojourn that goes beneath and beyond the majority of indie bands.

Left with goosebumps and shivers, they should not be missed.

Jen Carswell, musicin.eu

The first time I saw Winter Family, was on June 2006 in a gallery in Paris. I remember the collection of instruments brought especially for the occasion: a piano, an Indian harmonium, and an ancient more than a hundred years old, priceless instrument, a pump organ, threaten to crack. I remember to have wondered whether Ruth and Xavier had the least idea of the size of the space in which they were going to perform or the number of spectators who could get into it (forty people, at the most). Since then I've already understood that these kinds of questions does not come to their mind nor break their spirit. The minute that we look at Ruth and her voice detach the silence it is quite clear that these 'earthly' considerations have none of the importance. Unmercifully the low voice of Ruth is one that contains all the pain of the world, and, thanks to some imaginary pedal, let the tonality of despair sustain in you. Ruth radiates and absorbs all that surrounds her: a black sun. To listen to her delivers her texts, in turns in Hebrew and English, it is to listen to the message of a frail Pythia, attracting as a magnet by the power of her own absence. To see Winter Family (which is still a rare occasion) is like a strange shortcut to an improbable concert of Laurie Anderson accompanied by Charlemagne Palestine. Acquainted to the classics, Xavier, hidden behind his keyboards, knows his minimalism in the tip of his nails. Difficult to escape from the evident and aristocratic references as from the beauty of his visceral mess, and the notes he librates from his

instruments. Winter Family plays music as few people dare or even think of playing: humbly but absolute, it jitters the belly but resulted calmly like people with faith.

Maxime Guitton, ali_fib gigs

Tonight, winter family is coming to Israel. To this European family (who has some local Israeli roots as well) there's a foreign, design, cold and charming presence in the dark sense of the word. Ruth Rosenthal writes and performs her texts in English and Hebrew and Xavier Klaine composes and plays his music for piano harmoniums and pipe organ. Their resume includes a live show in the French TV, shows in several ancient churches, a mini-tour in New York and some shows in Milan, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv.

Itay Mautner, nrg.co.il

Xavier Klaine's piano is slow, heavy and the ambiance is dark. Ruth Rosenthal tells us her stories marked by certain gravity, often speaks of loss and forgetfulness.

We understand that winter family is not here to amuse us, they truly live their universe and make one with their music, and that's a pleasure to see.

The songs are chain to each other in a slow rise until the tension reaches its climax.

The Piano is minimalist, repetitive and touching; during the words fight their way and flows in a stream without ending, shivers our spines. Afterwards a drummer joins to give a hand on one of the songs, and Xavier passes to the harmonium.

Winter family stays an excellent discovery that we were happy to see over and over again.

Fabrice Allard, Etherreal.com

Winter Family is a duet between Israeli artist Ruth Rosenthal and French musician Xavier Klaine. Using an assortment of keyed instruments Klaine provides musical backdrops to Rosenthal's spoken texts. Unlike a great many spoken word albums, this body of work has an undeniable emotive resonance, thanks in no small way to Klaine's beautiful way with melody, but on top of that Rosenthal's voice carries a considerable resonance, alternating between a forthright expressiveness and a delivery bordering on cold detachment. In either case, it's captivating stuff. From the simple yet massively effective piano opener 'Salted Slug' to the vast pipe organ and echo of 'Nous Les Vivants' the duo succeed in stretching a potentially very limited arrangement far beyond the expected constraints and make a hugely compelling album in the process. Highly Recommended.

bookmkat.com

Winter Family is a very interesting spoken word (Hebrew/English) and music duo, kind of like Abaton's own Emerald Tablets, but with contemporary poetry instead of ancient mystical texts. Ruth Rosenthal interprets her own words beautifully with supple gestures and a richly

intonated voice. Her partner, Xavier Klaine, has an excellent touch on the piano. It's quite clear that he's an accomplished pianist, but he understands that Ruth is the duo's star, so he fills in for her minimally. Catch Winter Family while you can: Thursday night at 9:00 at Goodbye Blue Monday in Bushwick. They're in from Paris (via Israel), so you might not have another chance for some time.

Lauri Bortz and Mark Dagley, Abaton Book Company

The evening started with the duet 'winter family'. This duet proposes an original form, the music on piano and harmoniums by the French Xavier Klaine who develops dark melodies, often repetitive and hypnotic, exploiting the climates and the intensities, highlights the texts of Ruth Rosenthal. Between poetry and tale the young Israeli with the low voice invite us to her, often, black but not without an irony, world. The musicality of the words seizes you by the emotions even without understanding all. However the relevance of this writing allures. The use of Hebrew in their repertoire put timelessness, and a total magic. Without any doubt, Winter Family is one of the revelations of this festival.

Wqw, indiepoprock.net