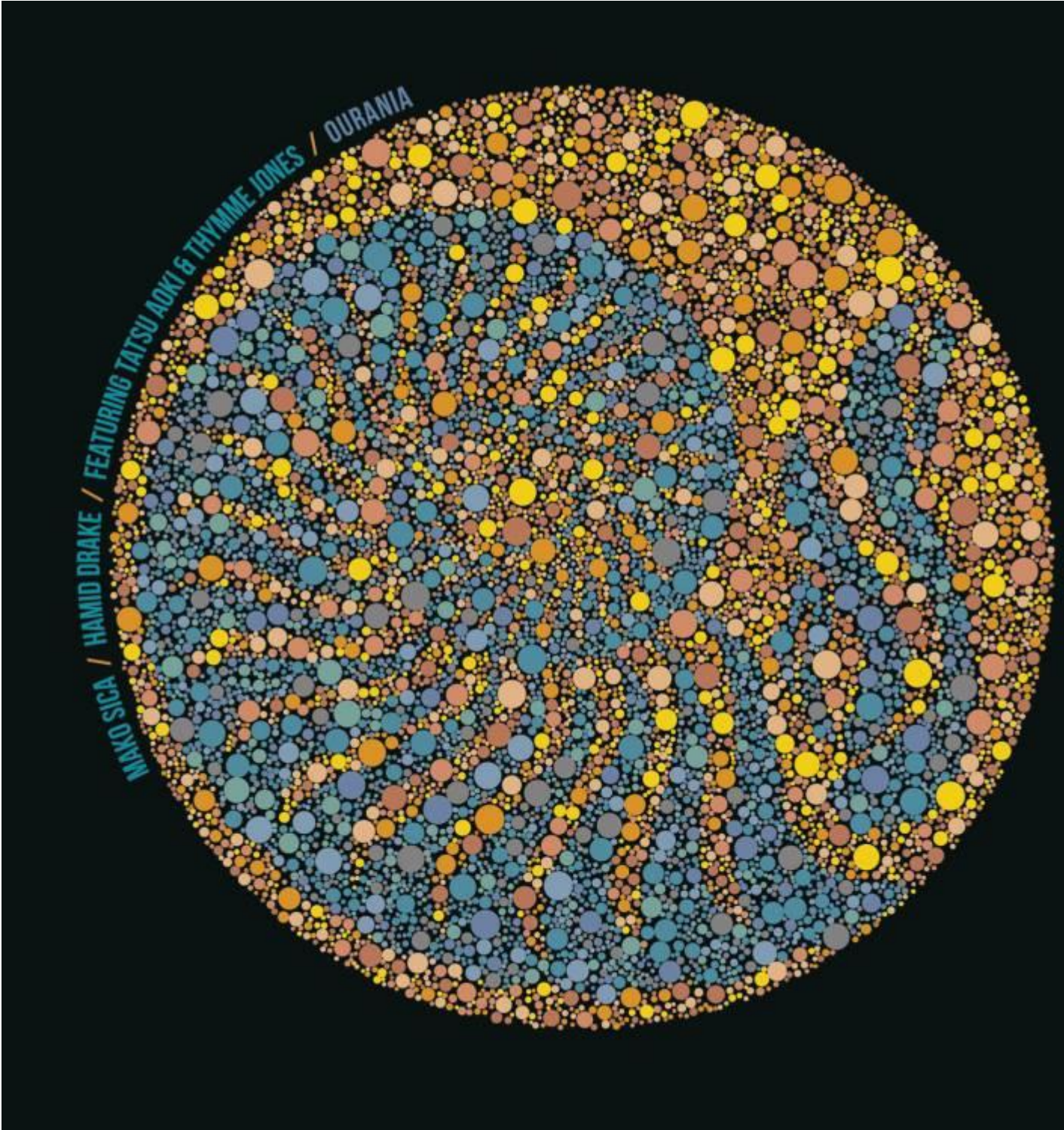


Mako Sica, Hamid Drake, Tatsu Aoki, Thymme Jones - Ourania



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Mako Sica - in the language of the Lakota tribe, it means the Dead Field in Arizona. And in Poland? I have the impression that it is still an unknown land for most music lovers, despite the fact that *Ourania*, released in autumn 2021, is already the third album of the Mako Sica project released in Poland.

The co-founder of the Mako Sica group is Przemysław Drązek, a Polish guitarist and trumpeter who has lived in Chicago for over twenty years. The regular line-up of the trio is completed by guitarist and vocalist Brent Fuscaldo (in *Ourania* also playing bass guitar, harmonica and percussion instruments) and drummer Chaetan Newell. While the unusual line-up (without a bass base) works perfectly during concerts, as I had the opportunity to see during the band's performance in Warsaw a few years ago, during recording sessions, the musicians invite guests and make recordings in a wider line-up. This time Newell on the drum kit was replaced by the giant of the Chicago improvised scene and one of the most recognizable drummers, Hamid Drake. The line-up is complemented by other musicians from the Chicago scene - Tatsu Aoki (double bass and shamisen) and Thymme Jones (piano, trumpet, voice).

Przemek Drązek said in 2017 about establishing cooperation with Hamid Drake: "One cold evening, and there are many such in a windy city, we all met together in a Pakistani restaurant and so after over five hours of long and passionate discussions we decided that it was necessary to translate it into sounds" (interview for morenoise.pl, 2017). As you can see, there is a good "chemistry" between the musicians, because *Ourania* is already the third album recorded jointly by Mako Sic and Hamid Drake.

In terms of sound, it is an album that imposes some associations with the early fusion period - probably the main reason is the glassy sounding telecaster of the Stick playing with a lot of reverberation, its electrically processed, very spacious trumpet, the sound of sporadically appearing keyboards and Brent Fuscaldo's bass guitar with a very expressive, strong pulse. But the associations are not clear cut and even if they appear, I would rather leave them to the audience. The decisive piano chords sometimes stand in opposition to the splashing sound patches of the guitar and trumpet - this allows building the drama of the songs and relieving tension.

There is also time for it - individual pieces in *Ourania* are unhurriedly developing. Except for the last one, they last from twelve to twenty minutes. Each of them creates a story, and such a reception is favored by Brent Fuscaldo's vocals present in all songs. Often they flow a little "beside" the music, composed of words in an unknown or invented language, giving the impression of an introduction to a shamanic ritual. Whether Brent goes back to any Indian traditions - I don't know, but sometimes it's worth getting carried away without going into details. It can be felt that the joint recording session with a wide line-up was very inspiring for the musicians and resulted not only in enriching the sound, but also interesting ideas.

Tatsu Aoki seems to play shamisen more often on this album than double bass. I must admit that the instrumental parts on this acoustic three-string Japanese instrument add color to the individual pieces. There is a fragment in *Gasping For Breath* where, on a strong bass basis (*Fuscaldo*), he first improvises a shamisen (*Aoki*), which then becomes a rhythmic instrument for an improvising mandolin (*Drązek*). A lot is happening, but always in a non-intrusive way. There are no crazy solo shows, no dialogues between instrumentalists - this is an album built on sounds, moods and space. This does not mean, however, that there is no virtuosity here. The pieces develop slowly, but there is always some element that builds a trance - singing, Hamid Drake's timpani (*Rain*), a repetitive bass theme (*Shell*) or a sampled loop (*For TS*).

The album features illustrative fragments, during which both the double bass bow, percussion instruments, guitar, mandolin and electrically distorted trumpet find their new sonic definitions. But not only instruments, but also processed sounds of nature, mysterious murmurs mixed with musicians' improvisations, can be found in *Ourlania*. *Ourlania* is an album where you can delve more and more, discovering new layers with each return - first the general atmosphere, then the remarkable structure of the songs, nuanced instrumental licks, non-obvious trance and finally perfection based on the balance between silence and a few sounds that appear there ... where we do not expect them, and they will pleasantly surprise us.

The first band of Przemek Drązek, before his emigration, was Krzyż - the progenitor of noise rock. Today, after a quarter of a century of musical research, Drązek's music combines the influences of the entire musical world, melted into one monolith. Playing with musicians with equally broad interests and great sidemen (Hamid Drake), he can present his visions, in which the references to the musical prototypes are implemented in such a sophisticated way that discovering them is a real pleasure.

Grzegorz Pawlak