

Martin Weiss is best known to you as a guitar acoustic author. Now him and his partner Alicia Nilsson are presenting the ALMA Acoustic Duo project and the debut album *Gracias A La Vida*. We met the two kind musicians due to the pandemic on Skype for a detailed interview, which you can watch completely on the Guitar Magazin YouTube channel.

First of all, congratulations to your first album *Gracias A La Vida*. The variety of styles, the quality of the sound and the playing are very impressive. Could you tell us a little how your collaboration began?

Martin: It started about a year ago with the lockdown in Spain and we would continue being creative and so we started to cover some pop songs. It went so well that we first recorded an EP and then the songs of the *Gracias A La Vida* album.

I actually thought back into the past. How did you get to know each other musically?

Alicia: We had played with two different bands at the same event in September 2019 ...

Then let's do a little guitar talk. I find it remarkable that you only play nylon string guitar on *Gracias A La Vida*. Some of the songs are more associated with steel strings or electric guitar.

Martin: I've played nylon string pretty much all my life. The "bread and butter" jobs were more on the electric guitar, but the acoustic is the perfect instrument for this duo. This sound has a special magic that touches people deeply, you don't have to do a lot with the sound, add a little reverb, nothing more is necessary.

Alicia, how about your idols and inspirations, do you have special role models for the duo line-up?

Alicia: Well, I've admired a lot of great singers like Édith Piaf, Aretha Franklin, Shirley Bessey or Tina Turner, but it's hard to pick individual ones. It was through Martin that I got to know Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass or Tuck & Patti. My father came from Argentina and listened to a lot of tango and my mother from Sweden brought rock n 'roll and folk music of Simon and Garfunkel or Cat Stevens - just a mix of everything ...

Martin, with a duo project the question naturally arises: what makes a good companion?

Martin: First of all, a good rhythm is essential for me, which holds everything together and of course a feeling for what the respective style requires. With a good accompaniment the listener doesn't miss anything, I always try to provide "a complete musical picture".

Alicia: At first I was a little skeptical about a purely acoustic setup, but with Martin as an accompanist, it's heaven to sing.

What is very nice about your program is the multitude of styles: Samba, Tango, Bossa, French and Italian chansons. The latter are not so well known in Germany, can you tell us a little bit about them?

Martin: Alicia introduced me to this universe, it is fascinating what kind of scene there is: Lucio Dalla, Pino Daniele and many more, but the Latin American continent also offers a huge musical repertoire. Alicia took care of the song selection and I took care of how to put it on the guitar.

Alicia: Martin is very versatile and open to new styles. He sounds like a "Latino" when he plays this music.

And how did you choose the songs, Alicia?

Alicia: I really wanted to have "Gracias A La Vida" as a homage to my father. We both love Brazilian music, in this repertoire we have found many pieces for ourselves. Some of the songs

are in languages you don't necessarily expect: "Youkali" is a tango habanera with French lyrics and "La Voglia, La Pazzia" is an Italian samba.

On the album there is also a chic modern flamenco song called "Soledad" that you composed yourself. Is there more planned in the future?

Martin: Well, there should be definitely one original song on this album. I had an instrumental bossa first, but then we turned it into a Spanish song with beautiful lyrics by Alicia.

Alicia: Of course we can't wait to play in beautiful locations in front of real audiences again.

Alicia, when listening to the record, I wondered if you speak all the languages that you sing on it. Five or six? I did not count.

Alicia: There are five on the record and I speak them too, apart from Portuguese. I grew up in a family of artists who traveled around the world. That's how I learned the languages as a child, but probably this wouldn't be possible now.

Another "nerd question" to Martin. Can you tell us a little bit about your recording setup? As musicians today we are all practically hobby music producers.

Martin: I learned a lot about recording on my guitar magazine job and gained a lot of experience in the process. Basically I use a recording setup that we also play live with: Two Audio-Technica 4041 condenser microphones for the guitar that go into an interface. The mics are placed in a kind of "ORTF" arrangement at a 90 degree angle in front of the instrument. For the vocals we have a Neumann microphone that also goes into the interface via a "Focusrite ISA One" preamp. The guitar is right and left in the sound and leaves room in the middle for the voice. We will also use this setup for our live streaming concert on April 15th, which we will present on our website www.alma-acoustic.com.

And how did you approach your album recording?

Martin: The whole thing was a long process. Usually you would rehearse first and maybe play a few gigs to see how the songs work. But in our case all of the composing, arranging and recording took place in our studio. When it comes to playing live, we first have to learn our arrangements again.

Last question to Alicia. The album is dedicated to your father. Would you like to tell us something about it?

Alicia: My father died of cancer in 2011 and he meant a lot to me. He was a gifted, passionate hobby guitarist, when he had some free time, he played Spanish classics such as "Capricho Arabe" or "Concierto de Aranjuez". This sound accompanied my childhood, if he could hear me singing with Martin now, he would be very proud.

Jens Müller