

Luise Volkmann & Été Large
"When the Birds Upraise The Choir"

Unbridled power and passion, playful fervour, a boundless joy of fantasizing, indomitable cohesive forces and absolute fearlessness - the second album by Luise Volkmann's band Été Large is here.

What could be nicer than watching small children jump into a puddle, self-oblivious, no matter who gets how dirty. We adults have largely lost this feeling of ruthless productivity of the creative moment, but when you listen to Luise Volkmann's new album, this effect is there from the very start. There is a huge pool of dirty water, and the bandleader jumps right into it with her entire pack, so that it splashes in all directions.

The Cologne saxophonist and composer Luise Volkmann is a young musician who thinks in terms of concepts but without making the finished result sound like a concept in the end. "When The Birds Upraise The Choir" is the second album of her large formation Été Large. She had the idea in mind for a long time as a continuation of the portrait concept of the previous record. *"I felt the need to write something for my parents, whom I had not mentioned musically on the first CD. The bond I have with my father, in particular, has marked me. He is a very inspiring character for me. His lifestyle is quite untypical for our time. He lives his life looking at the world and has decided to just be there. In an environment where success is always the only thing that counts, I find it to be an act of strength of him to just sit in his house in the woods, open the door and say, everyone is welcome to me at any time"*. Luise Volkmann carries the energy that arose and still arises from this situation not only through her career as a musician, but through her life in general. And now she forms the basis of "When The Birds Upraise The Choir".

The attitude of the so-called '68 generation and the rock music of the 1970s are an important starting point for Luise Volkmann, but precisely not the modelling clay from which her own songs are created. Her fascination ranges from the protest music of the Woodstock era to the destructive elementary power of punk. Whoever wants to place her songs between Frank Zappa, punk and Carla Bley is certainly not wrong, although this does not necessarily correspond to the intentions of the Cologne-based artist. She still finds this special mixture of youthful recklessness, spontaneous activism and the existential pressure behind each statement touching today, but at the same time she is aware that she is not a child of that era. She finds her own formulas to reach that seemingly buried intensity in the here and now, with which music could change the world back then.

Although it is the same band as on "Eudemonia" (2017), with a few individual exceptions, the difference between the two projects of Été Large could hardly be greater. The finely chiselled, almost symphonic sound paintings of the first album give way in the new song cycle to the irrepressible, almost explosive power described above, which is unleashed at just the right moment. Although not planned as such, the second album by Été Large is the soundtrack to the watershed moment we are experiencing. That global "Let's not go on like this! ", which has completely turned the course of events around the world upside down in recent months, was anticipated long before by alert artistic spirits like Luise Volkmann and translated into massive sounds.

The constellation of people alone with which the band takes to the barricades, musically speaking, is a piece of world change. As in her songs, Luise Volkmann's first concern in choosing her companions is human values. Although all members of her band are proven cracks on their instruments, each and every one of them knows how to put their vanities aside to serve the group as a whole. It's all about the bundled fervor of the entire formation. There is little room for ego trips. There are not too many musical personalities who can and want to follow Luise Volkmann on this path all the way. Fronting the band, we find the vocal duo of Casey Moir and Laurin Oppermann, who have thrown off all the etiquette of big band singing. With their dirty and at times unexpectedly tender idiom, the couple sets the direction in which the rest of the band is heading. Oppermann takes on the role of a recitative singer, while Casey Moir - to put it in Volkmann's words - takes on the role of the "stage animal". Bassist Athina Kontou and drummer Max Santner work together with the band leader not only in Été Large, but also in their trio Autochrom, whose instrumental album "RGB" (2019) already hinted at the orientation towards compact songs. With razor-sharp guitar salvos and unleashed wind instruments, the music of Été Large becomes a rousing spectacle.

On "When The Birds Upraise The Choir", Luise Volkmann breaks with all expectations. Certainly, historical or current references to other large formations can be made, but strictly speaking, this album is without precedent. Not only does it define its own genre beyond the triangle of free jazz, progressive rock and avant-garde chamber music, but it also puts the artist's responsibility towards society back at the centre. Luise Volkmann defends herself against the neutral irrelevance of a large part of contemporary music from jazz to pop. She is prepared to interfere, to share something of herself, and has found like-minded people who are determined to do so together with her in the most resolute way. *"Art," according to her credo, "is fundamental to society. Music may not have the same direct impact as a non-fiction book, but it is a language that changes the way we think. I would very much like to participate more. I use my language but by doing so I also want to make myself heard.*

Like every good story, this one has its happy ending. The French author André Gide postulated that it is not only important to free oneself, but it is much more important to know what to do with this freedom. At the end of the tremendous act of liberation of "When The Birds Upraise The Choir" Luise Volkmann grants herself, her band and the listener the peace she deserves with the quiet and conciliatory "Lullaby for my parents". In many ways an important statement in troubled times.