

Luise Volkmann
Eudaimonia

Thank God, the days when small formations inevitably had to be combos and big ensembles in jazz necessarily were big bands are long gone. Just like the days when jazz musicians had to choose between playing free or traditional jazz. Nowadays, the range of combinations and creative levels in jazz is much broader. The CD "Eudaimonia" by Luise Volkmann, a young saxophonist and flutist, describes this blissful playground of unlimited expressive possibilities in a very entertaining way.

Luise Volkmann is a passionate storyteller or, if you will, a subtle portraitist - two traits that ideally coincide. The story she wants to tell is always at the heart of all her pieces. She reflects on the form and structure but also on the dynamics and the dramatic composition that the storytelling should have and then finds the musicians she needs for her narrative. For her cycle "Eudaimonia" she brought together a group of 12 partners in musical crime who not only represent different scenes but even partly diverging musical concepts that nevertheless come together almost perfectly in their formation *Été Large*.

The term eudaimonia dates back to ancient Greece and roughly describes a balanced state of mind derived from a virtuous conduct of life. Relevant reference works indicate that the Greek philosophers agreed that eudaimonia was a state all human beings should strive for but were divided about the way to achieve it. Self-sufficiency was deemed a prerequisite. And this is exactly the raw material Luise Volkmann's compositions are made of. She provides her pieces with just what they need, keeps them always close to the respective storyline and forgoes any kind of redundancy. Her compositions are of great complexity and even greater variety of forms but still, their narrative structure is easy to understand, varied and entertaining. The fact that this young musician manages this balancing act on her debut CD at a very high level is not only unusual but also exciting and promising.

Luise Volkmann has gained experiences in larger formations in ensembles around Satoko Fujii and Lisa Mezzacappa among others. She shares a certain fervour with the former and the sense of variability of a musical context with the latter. She skilfully and unobtrusively fluctuates between chamber music, free jazz improvisation and the directness of alternative rock. "I'm generally interested in matters of space and form in music" explains Luise Volkmann. "The element of form is often neglected in music. I believe that an interesting structure can make simple material sound quite differently and give it an edgy effect. I look out for topics that I can put into an interesting form. On the album it's portraits of people who have shown me how you can live your life well."

“Eudaimonia” is a collection of portraits of people who have found solutions for their own life and have thus inspired Luise Volkmann. “I have intuitively tried to derive a form from my relationship with this person which in most cases remains open-ended as this person is still alive. Sometimes, relationships have changed while I was writing. I had to take this into account in my composition. I tried here and there to stay away from purely emotional parameters and to search for purely musical moments.” At the end of this all but straightforward process stands music that is not commonplace but which captures the daily life in an unpretentious way. Or - to say it with the words of the saxophonist - “human music”.

The aforementioned portraits are intimate views on people that matter to Luise Volkmann - people from her surroundings or who have marked her in some other way. It doesn't really matter that this portrait character is not always clearly reflected in the titles of the seven pieces of “Eudaimonia”. On the contrary, it is irrelevant to her whether the listener recognizes the portrayed person or not. “For me, it was all about picturing a relationship to a person close to me” Luise Volkmann says, summarizing her concept “and telling a personal story while at the same time creating abstract images of relationships that listeners can synchronize with their own relationships. Everybody has a grandmother, a best friend. They are all unique but still, they have something in common. And that makes them so interesting.” The main focus of interest was what different people make of their lives. The artist asks fundamental questions about the sense of life which she transmits to her listeners in poetic interpretations without ever wagging a finger. Instead of retreating to the much-quoted ivory tower she mingles with us as an observer and a shaping force.

In order to guarantee a variety of observation levels, Luise Volkmann surrounds herself with an illustrious bunch of companions who in their temporary outfit are called *Été Large*.

Just like the topics of her CD are taken from life experiences, she has also picked up musicians throughout the different stages of her life. She studied in Leipzig, worked with musicians from Berlin, has established a rather coincidental connection to Sweden and has been living in Paris for two years now. All these moments come together in the band's composition to form a biographical axis along which Luise Volkmann can precisely bundle and transport her observations and interpretations. Two voices, four woodwinds, trumpet, trombone, piano, cello, bass and drums allow her to think and to be generous.

Striking gestures give way to a tiny wink of an eye, the full blast of life alternates with contemplative retreats. The big form is made up of numerous smaller picture elements, that merge like watercolours just to be sharply delineated the next moment as if outlined by the contours of a comic. Or is it just the other way around? Even after several listenings everything remains unpredictable because in Luise Volkmann's work, like

in an early novel by Paul Auster, life and its protagonists are too complex to be fully grasped after a one-time reading. These portraits demand to be listened to again and again in order to reveal new facets every single time. With “Eudaimonia”, Luise Volkmann makes a spectacular debut as a master of musical storytelling.