

STIAN WESTERHUS AMPUTATION

HOM 004

“To know what you have, and to give all of it up – even if you know that it’s going to keep haunting you for the rest of your life. Phantom pain. Diagnosing what is the best of two evils – is what this album is about.”

Amputation, the new album by Stian Westerhus, may be centred on dislocation, loss and melancholia, yet from such turbulent origins a work of life-affirming catharsis has arrived. His first release for House of Mythology – following a plethora of acclaimed collaborative and solo work – is a triumph of experimentation and abstraction, marrying a fearless innovative drive with stark emotional resonance. Otherworldly and exhilarating, it’s the sound of a virtuoso musician throwing away both caution and co-ordinates and taking a dive into the unknown, with spellbinding results.

“It’s music I’ve dropped to the floor repeatedly, maybe even on purpose. It’s music in a cracked mirror portraying the time it was created.”

Stian Westerhus started his musical life studying jazz, his work taking him firstly to Middlesex, where he graduated as a Bachelor of Music before his Masters at Trondheim Musikkonservatorium NTNU. Since then, he’s worked constantly, touring and recording with a dizzying array of artists including Jaga Jazzist, Supersilent, Nils Petter Molvær and Motorpsycho, not to mention a series of solo records for Rune Grammofon. He has also made several commissions, like *Ripples, Ripples & Disbelief* with Trondheim Jazz Orchestra (2012), *Longitude* with Britten Sinfonia (2013) and *Redundance 40* with South Netherlands Philharmonic (2014). His list of achievements is as lengthy as it is impressive, ranging from a BBC Jazz Innovation Award in 2008 to several Norwegian Grammy nominations (Spellemannprisen, where he has two awards to his name – with Jaga Jazzist for *One-Armed Bandit*, category Open Class 2010, and also in the Jazz category for *Didymoi Dreams*, his 2013 collaboration with Sidsel Endresen).

Throughout, he’s consistently found ways to create new paradigms largely via a distinct and innovative approach to the mediums of six strings, pickups, effects and amplification.

“From when all ends came loose. Pieces, like mounted in my musicianship with rusty bolts, continuously oxidizing their way through my skin.”

Amputation, however marks new frontiers for this always bold and intrepid pathfinder, encompassing a mission in which Westerhus’ ever-evolving exploration of his instrument combines with a series of soundworlds that seamlessly veer from tender melody to bracing electronic edifices of sound to convey a startlingly articulate speech of the heart. Though existing strictly in its own distinct headspace, the emotive cry of “How Long” – burnished by celestial guitar filigree and plaintive falsetto harmonies yet with a refrain that snags in the memory – is likely to strike a chord with admirers of latter-day Scott Walker, James Blake and Ben Frost alike. Meanwhile, the two part “Amputation” suite of Side Two is unflinching sturm-und-drang, using both forceful assaults of binary-derived noise and eerie disquiet to convey trauma and unease with bleak yet exhilarating potency.

Soon to be presented as a 16.1 surround sound installation at Notam in Oslo, *Amputation* is a fearless and uncompromising trawl into the murky depths of the psyche, one that has struck treasure in the form of an album unlike any you’ll hear this year – the sound of a mercurial artist reaching between thought and expression to arrive at a vision by turns harrowing and heavenly in its intensity.

“Thematically it’s about leaving what is most precious and sacred behind. About accepting loss, damage and defeat. About those moments when you realize you are on the very edge of life and society as you know it.”

– Jimmy Martin



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