

'NOW!', about AL-'AN ! by OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE
Text by Alexandre François - La Blogothèque
(translated by Gareth Davis)

" She deposits her beauty on a wave of anxiety and hides her makeup in a drawer, does her hair hurriedly and waits, without knowing what for, like a rose on the public highway. But the atmosphere is seething with the secrets of the clouds approaching from both directions, the desert and the sea, and imagination has no control over the anarchy of the unexpected. She puts her imagination to one side, and surrenders herself to a song that praises meaninglessness without aspiring to the glory of the absurd. Beirut is deprived of the chance to forget her wounds or remember her tomorrow, which has been abandoned to the throw of a dice in a game of backgammon played without rules, like the experimentation of postmodernist poets in her empty cafes."

(Mahmoud Darwish, 'Fi Beirut' in *Athar al-farasha: yawmiyyat*, Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2008, trad. Catherine Cobham)

In **OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE** ([wazo-tã.pɛ:t] - Storm Petrel), **Frédéric D. Oberland** and **Stéphane Pigneul** have chosen a name, a call from the sea, of almost totemic quality. First, perhaps, it offers the suggestion of journeys over great distance, the distant hymns of fortune-tellers and gravitydefying acts of the oracles. Yet at the same time, comes the idea of earthly chaos, a willing reference to the telluric frenzy that darkens the sky yet also, paradoxically, brings promise of a radiant tomorrow.

AL-'AN ! ("Now!" in Arabic) is the third part of a journey that commenced in 2012. A two part - aesthetic and political - proposition. How to build something that speaks of the present, that transcribes it, mirrors it, opens discourse and questions, and provokes the sharing of experience that conjures away this contemporary malaise of powerlessness and, in turn, opens doors to a common future? The endless and haunting question that we are reminded of by philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in his final text '*Que Faire?*' (2016). This 'What Is To Be Done?' that seizes us each time an event shakes our belief in history, destroying a community, consigning the world stage to non-sense and farce.

Building something together, bearing witness, creating sense, being a part of the world, refusing the catastrophe. Rather, grabbing hold of the present, cradling it and letting it breath, or even more, breaking through to the obscured now and creating geographic and temporal bridges. This was the attempt of Frédéric D. Oberland, Stéphane Pigneul & Ben Mc Connell with **OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE (Sub Rosa/ST)**, their first album, an opening chapter published in 2013 after a series of journeys with the photographer and video-artist **Stéphane Charpentier** across the Greek peninsula. Lands struggling with social, political and economical turmoil. These events in Greece, the birthplace of logos and democracy, now struggling with global capitalism, were the first indication, the first sign that the crisis which shakes the old Mediterranean world is the key to better reading and better understanding the contemporary predicament.

Following the energetic post-rock of this first, self-titled, album, came **ÛTOPIYA?** A far more poignant piece of work, lyrical, yet with the roughness of the free music it was inspired by. It emerged from lengthly improvised sessions, recorded over three days, with bass clarinet player **Gareth Davis** and the incantatory voice of **G.W.Sok** from the Dutch punkrock band, The Ex. Interweaving their music with the photographic images of **Yusuf Sevincli** and the words of poets **Nazim Hikmet** and **Tarkovsky**, **OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE** continued their Mediterranean voyage, this time further East. To the Levante. To "measure the pulse" of a Turkish society walking on the ashes of the Gezi Park protests. Only a year before these protests had revealed the real nature of the radical islamic-conservative government, at the same time being moments of both hope and disillusionment for the disenchanting youth of Istanbul struggling to find a voice and let it be heard.

It seems almost obvious then to see, at the end of February 2016, Frédéric D. Oberland & Stéphane Pigneul, making their way to Lebanon, searching for epiphanies and the serendipity of joyful collisions. The destination, **Beirut** - the very heart of, what perhaps it's most famous historians named, the "storm zone". With 17 different communities and all the cultural and religious fusion that that implies, its common frontiers with Syria and Israel, streams of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, the stigmata from a 15 year civil war still very much in the air, this enclave that opens onto the sea appears to be a concentrated amalgamation of all the political challenges that are faced by the Middle-East.

Above all though, was the music. That of **Jerusalem In My Heart**, the interdisciplinary collective led by Montreal musician Radwan Ghazi Mounmeh, or the intensely vivid Beirut underground scene, a worthy contestant to the Cairo scene, with musicians absorbing a plethora of influences, dancing between modern, traditional, free, electronic, and rock. Through the albums of **The Dwarfs Of East Agouza**, the noise duo **Two Or The Dragon**, the pan-arabic group **Alif** with singer **Tamer Abu Ghazaleh**. From **Johnny Kafta Anti Vegetarian Orchestra**, **Karhana**, to **Maurice Louca** and **Mayaleen** these discoveries were made again and again. Looking back at their arrival, Oberland and Pigneul

confide, "Reaching for the incandescent, the unity, the contrast, the undaunted taking of risks, the search for bridges yet devoid of exoticism or pastiche orientalism, the spaces between noise and free, between rock and jazz, traditional music and dreamlike poetry. The resonating of these artists, their albums and bodies of work seeming more and more to resonate with ours. It was that which brought the passion, the ever increasing sense of communal understanding when we arrived".

The chance to collaborate with two members of Johnny Kafta, guitarist **Charbel Haber** (*Scrambled Eggs, The Bunny Tylers*) and percussionist **Sharif Sehnaoui** (*Alan Bishop, Okay Temiz*) presented itself. As always, working with urgency, spontaneity and without pre-written material, they found themselves performing in the local improv scenes or in the studio with Charbel, Sharif, **Ali El Hout** and **Abed Kobeissy** (*Asil ensemble for contemporary classical Arabic music, Two or the Dragon*), **Pascal Semerdjian** (*Postcards*) and the oud player **Younna Saba**. Each arrived at their own unique language, creating the terms of a dialogue rooted in the present and without set rules. These recordings from the Tunefork studio and made inside the flat they're renting in Mar Mikhael (only a short walk from the port where the refuse of the city piles up), would give birth to the early sketches of what can now be heard on AL-'AN! . Back in France, in Brittany and in Paris, the sessions were completed at Kerwax studio with drummer **Sylvain Joasson** (*Mendelson*), electronic musician **Mondkopf**, the soprano saxophone of **Stéphane Rives** and the vocalists Tamer Abu Ghazaleh and G.W. Sok. The denouement, a final return visit to Beirut and Lebanon in Autumn 2016.

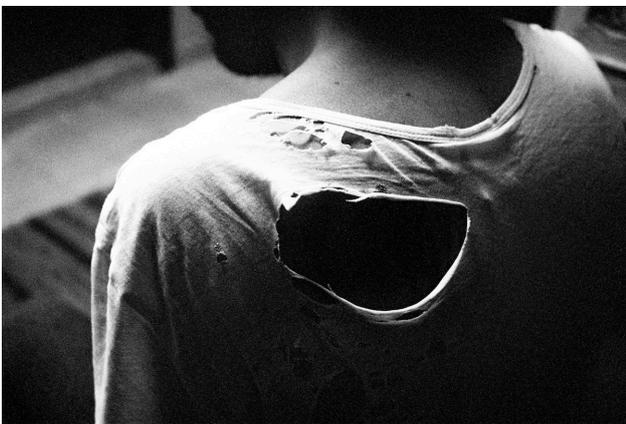
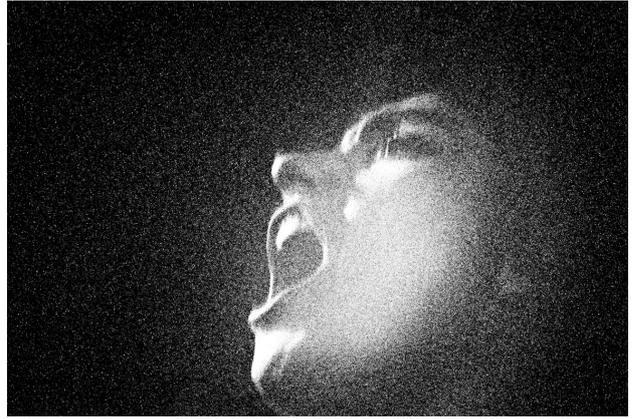
It was serendipity that completed the project. The images and film of Grégoire Orio & Grégoire Couvert (**As Human Pattern**) witnessing and capturing the process in Beirut from the center to the periphery, from the lowlands to the mountains; the protests from the heavily politicised youth against SOLIDERE (the privatized district created by Rafic Hariri in the center of Beirut), the carnival-style elections of General Aoun for the presidency, the overwhelming smell of rot that permeates the financial scandal, pictures of the martyrs on the flags, bullet riddled buildings, armed militias, but more so, and far more important, the friendliness and the generosity of the people, friendships freely given, these open spaces between pleasure and labour which define the overwhelming joy at the heart of "working together", every chance event creating countless new possibilities.

With **AL-'AN ! (and your night is your shadow – a fairy tale of piece of land to make our dreams)**, OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE have achieved a far more complex work, richer in texture, the intertwining of acoustic elements with electronica, roaming and shaking the foundations of this almost labyrinthian personal opus of an album. As ever, the group realising both the immersive and also the total physicality on the record.

As a seismograph it measures. Aware to the heart beat, of the hypnotic pulse from the analogue machines to the explosion of matter and matters. And in the same way, AL-'AN ! remembers. Memories in the far more intimate form of the travel diary, each track the capturing of a moment, brief sketches, the first notes the faint outlines of a specific atmosphere, the chords building little by little the heavier lines of a coherent edifice, an innate sense of structure beneath the apparent fragmentation. The keystone reveals itself only as the journey ends, the final side of the record, in the form of the epic 17 minutes of "Through The Speech of Stars" resolving in the misty haze of "À l'Aube".

AL-'AN ! proceeds from a logic of abundance, from the diversity of character to the binds that give it its structure. Not only because this opus is blending the Arabic, French and English languages, and in doing so constructs a dialogue between Europe and the Middle-East. But also because it safeguards moments of wondering (« I Don't Know What Or Why (Mish Aaref Eish w Leish) », of self doubt, of nocturnal reveries, of times of fervour and of compact and condensed energy. The feeling of tension and confinement is mirrored in the open spaces of the night beneath a blanket of stars. Silence responds to the heat of noise, urban chaos greeting endless space, creating moments of calm which on previous albums had been only hinted at. Sacred songs (In "Carnaval" the echo of the track "Wa Habibi" from **Fairuz**, captured from a street corner on a Holy Friday can be heard) give way to secular poems. The words of **Mahmoud Darwish** his own voice on "The Offering" and his words, taken from "The Red Indian's Penultimate Speech To The White Man", resonate on "Through The Speech Of Stars". The speech of the political, an articulated language, finds its counterpart in the anonymous scream or the sound of singing birds. Like a chorale, AL-'AN ! blurs the origins. It embraces this "Now!" the living and the dead, the world and us, the misery and the bliss of being. Here and now. One thing is certain: the story of the night that OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE paints is one that moves towards the day, and is one in which Eros still has words left to say.

Alexandre FRANCOIS



Photos by Frédéric D. Oberland