

Johanna Burnheart

Bär

Self-released (DL) ★★★

Johanna Burnheart (vn, v), Al MacSween (ky, syn), Davd Swan (syn), Johnny Mansfield (vib), Jonny Wickham (b), Twm Dylan (el b), Ben Brown (d, perc) and Noel Langley (flhn, conch). Rec. August 31-2 September 2022



A gasping intake of breath, and Johanna Burnheart's second album of

refashioned jazz violin begins. She has migrated across national and musical boundaries to reach this point, from her native North Germany to Wells Cathedral School then London's Guildhall, and classical music to jazz.

Now London-based and gigging with the likes of Yazz Ahmed and Rosie Turton, her debut *Burnheart* (2020) conjured a sound world immersed in clubland. The follow-up is specifically steeped in Berlin nightlife, and named for the city's symbolic bear – a beast she saw six times in the wild having invoked it, suggesting her questing, untamed spirit.

Synths again contextualise music mostly softer and smoother than Berlin raves or

ursine bites. Al MacSween's mellow, 1970s-style keyboard solo on 'Falke' suits its initially chilled out sound, before Burnheart's violin adds a more acerbic tang and sharpens her affectless vocal. Her reimagining of an instrument with a significant but undeveloped jazz history, from gypsy jazz to Zbigniew Seifert's post-Coltrane explorations, is this album's lodestar.

On 'Ems', drums hammer at the door, vibes anticly skip and the violin dissolves into electronica. Burnheart plays slide guitar-style on 'Fossa Offekonis' and offers denatured skirls, a pizzicato dance and slashes like city traffic speeding by on 'Cylla Burna' (the title refers to Kilburn's former status as a duelling ground, and current knife-crime). 'Something Cool' lets Burnheart slip into a persona recalling her synthpop compatriot Claudia Brücken or a deceptively glazed Dietrich: "I don't know your name... I don't usually drink with strangers," she purrs. "Do you like my dress? ...I keep my furs for the cold."

Playing the role of a once-rich, beautiful woman, Burnheart extends a performance as aware of pop and dance as her instrument's traditional terrain.

Nick Hasted