

Zola Mennenöh

Longing for Belonging

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Copenhagen / Cologne songwriter **Zola Mennenöh** joins Shahzad Ismaily's **figureight records** for the release of her eloquent debut album *Longing for Belonging*.

Known - and highly in demand - as a session musician in her native Germany and her adoptive second homes in Denmark and Norway, **Zola Mennenöh** is a singer, guitarist, flautist and sound artist of huge talent. She has toured the world over, specialising in jazz, improvisation and experimental & avant garde choral music, both as a performer and as composer. It is through this experience and years of honing that *Longing for Belonging* comes into existence. Her debut solo album is a collection of delicate treasures: graceful, expressive and elegantly poised, exploring the great depth of her abilities as a musician and the cultured poetry of her lyrics.

Zola's music touches on pastoral alternative folk, while splashes of classical decoration (such as the yearningly beautiful sea of undulating woodwind at the end of "I Will Always Be Yours, Forever") and melodic licks borrowed from jazz help illuminate unexpected corners. There is, in abundance, a songwriting sophistication in the mold of PJ Harvey or Beth Orton, a Southern Gothic shadow comparable to Neko Case and Nina Nastasia, and an omnivorous musical awareness that could stand alongside Cat Power's varied arrangements. Thematically, the album meditates on the search and discovery of personal and emotional unity. *"It is an attempt to encounter and ultimately become one's true self,"* Zola writes. The record is largely performed by a core quartet of Zola, Nicole Hogstrand (viola da gamba), Johanna Borchert (prepared piano) and Szymon Pimpon Gąsiorek (drumkit / percussion).

In keeping with the album's wider creative process - which Zola describes as *"allowing intuition, feeling and subconscious into the process and letting go of expectations"* - the lyrical threads chase various narratives, memories and hopes. "I Disappeared Under The Sea" speaks of an existential disconnection from the world, its arrangement and form also representing the same theme. "Make Things Simple" acts as Zola's response to early experimental music pioneer Pauline Oliveros - a meditative exploration of sound, rhythm and time.

Longing for Belonging - while on the surface an album of *songs* - also offers unexpected turns. Its tenderness is balanced with subtle moments of darkness; its verses and choruses are subverted with free, improvised experimentalism. The 12-minute "Make Things Simple", at the centre of the album, unhurriedly slows the tempo to match its waves of rhythmic drones; the gentle free jazz drums of "A Piece of Peace" bring to mind Jim White's more restrained records. *"I wanted the album to be me and personal, to be me as a whole,"* Zola tells us. *"I accepted the fact that it might be imperfect in some ways but I thought it should be real and honest. It should come from the heart and an honest place."*

Mentors such as Greg Cohen, Sidsel Endresen, and Jenny Hval shaped Zola's career and her own style, an interdisciplinary and holistic understanding of art. She splits her time between Copenhagen, Cologne and Berlin amidst a busy touring schedule.

figureight records is a creative project led by Shahzad Ismaily. The label has to date released records by múm founding member **Gyda Valtysdottir**, NYC super-producer **Randall Dunn**, Jon Hopkins and Brian Eno collaborator **Leo Abrahams**, Spotify chart-topping indie artist **Toth** and several more.

Worldwide press and radio: ken@phantom-limb.co.uk

Label: james@figureightrecords.com