

## JEAN KAPSA SYNCLINE

French pianist and composer **Jean Kapsa** has confirmed that he's the latest artist to sign to Nils Frahm's label LEITER, for whom he will release a first single, 'Bloom', on October 27, with a mini-album, **Syncline**, to follow on all digital platforms from November 24. A collection of six solo pieces, it was recorded at night between September and November 2022 in Kapsa's home in Paris on the piano his parents gave him when he was just 15 and which he still keeps in his living room, surrounded permanently by microphones. "Most of it consists of first or second takes," he says, "usually recorded not too long after a piece's composition – and often on the same day – so that the mood was the same. If I wasn't happy after three takes, I usually gave up. I wanted the listener to be able to witness this intimate, fragile way of building an album made up of very new, personal, precious pieces."

**Syncline** manages to be all those things: intimate, fragile, personal and precious. It's also performed with rare skill. On the opening 'Bloom' his instrument's hammers could be velvet cushions and 'Planeur' is so tranquil the piano's pedals can be detected, while 'Above The Chapel''s exquisite melody is developed with enviable patience and 'Fringe''s subtle shapeshifting is uncommonly ingenious. Each title is significant, too, referring to stops along a hike Kapsa's often taken in the Saou forest near his hometown in the scenic Drôme region of southeast France. This provided the source of the album's title, too, with 'syncline' a geological term for a bend in a rock layer, caused by forces within the earth's crust, in which younger strata are closer to the centre of the structure. "This formed a huge, closed belt of cliffs," he elaborates of the spectacle, "ten kilometres by three, and in the middle are exceptionally preserved flora and fauna. I also find the word 'syncline' beautiful, and I like the fact that, said with a French accent, it sounds like it means 'to bow'."

Kapsa's connection to LEITER dates back almost a decade to the loft he was sharing with seven other roommates in 2014. "The place was really special," he recalls, "and one evening La Blogothèque came to film the band Real Estate with a little group of guests as the audience. I knew that a pianist friend of the producer had been invited to join us after the concert, but it was a surprise to see Nils arrive. Afterwards, while people were tidying up, I sat at my piano, the same one on which I'd later record **Syncline**, and started to improvise. Nils came over and joined me for twenty minutes or so. You could say we introduced ourselves without words."

So impressed was Frahm that he not only insisted Kapsa stay in contact, but also invited him to perform a duet, 'Hammers', at the Philharmonie de Paris the following night for a show broadcast by ARTE. Afterwards, Frahm explained to the crowd how they'd met the previous evening: "I was like, 'Who's that? He's way better than me!'" Still, it would be another eight years before they encountered one another again, though in the meantime Kapsa added to what was already a flourishing catalogue, with two solo albums, 2019's *Haïku* and 2020's *Vespera*, joining 2012's *Improvisations*, not to mention multiple releases, before and since, with some of the many bands in

which he performs. Over the years, you see, Kapsa has built up an impressive reputation in the French capital's jazz scene, where he's particularly appreciated for his improvisational skills.

"From 2008," he explains, "I started playing in several groups as a sideman as well as co-founding others. The bands developed differently, a trio in a more modern jazz, acoustic way, a quartet with a rock energy, another quartet in a post-bop style, and a quintet focusing on the hard-bop period." He'd grown up listening to old-school jazz, whether attending concerts with his parents or exploring their record collection, and this inspired him to begin learning the trumpet aged 5, then the piano from the age of 9. "I felt the piano was a lot easier than the trumpet, and more pleasant to play, especially when you're always playing solo," he remembers. "I quickly started to play by ear, improvising around what I was listening to: blues, boogie-woogie, ragtime, Pinetop Perkins, Memphis Slim, Scott Joplin and Oscar Peterson. Sometimes, when my parents had a party, I played pieces for people dancing. That's a powerful memory, to be able to move people with the piano."

As Kapsa's passion became more evident, "I began taking lessons with an old local jazz pianist," he says. "Every week he welcomed me with the same slippers on his feet, and we enjoyed jamming together on his Hammond B3 organ and piano." Zooming in slowly on contemporary jazz, Kapsa started attending a specialist school, and aged 18 he formed his first trio. It was two years later, however, after a trip to New York during which he jammed with other musicians at Broadway clubs, that he decided to pursue music full time instead of, as he'd previously intended, engineering. He began studying at another jazz school outside Paris, honing his talent wherever and however he could, including with a new trio which picked up several prizes, and soon found himself performing with some of the very musicians whose music had inspired him as a teenager. In the years since, Kapsa has performed across the world, from South America to Eastern Europe, as well as writing for films, commercials and choreography, including a theatre, dance and circus company. He's excited, too, to share his new compositions on stage. "I'll shift them in new, interesting directions, stretching and twisting the music."

**Syncline's** atmosphere is perhaps best encapsulated by the album's cover, as Kapsa himself points out. "Sometimes I feel making music can be like this image of a colourful window surrounded by a grey wall. I'm building a composition of notes, harmonies and colours to make it shine and to try to embellish the environment. There's also something very human about this picture. It implies many stories we'll never know. These flowers could serve many purposes: love, grief, decoration, gratitude. Again, to me this looks like music. People can do whatever they want with what they listen to, and they can be moved in many different ways, ways that don't even belong to the artist."

Certainly, there's no doubt **Syncline's** intimate, fragile, personal and precious music will provoke a powerful response. What that is, however, depends on you.

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SYNCLINE**

**Track List**

1. BLOOM
2. PASTORAL
3. ABOVE THE CHAPEL
4. FRINGE
5. PLANEUR
6. BASSWOOD

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