



CLAY

JOHANNES BIGGE TRIO

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## JOHANNES BIGGE TRIO - CLAY

Three friends make music together - it sounds so self-evident, light and dynamic, as if no one touches the keys, strings or sticks, but as if the music simply grows out of itself like moss or grass. This natural flow is a quality that has characterized the Johannes Bigge Trio from the very beginning, but manifests itself once again on the new album *Clay* with the full force of genuine creation. It sounds new and fresh, and yet from the very fact of hearing it, this music gives one the impression of having always been there from the very first note.

Despite a slightly different line-up, the Johannes Bigge Trio picks up with *Clay* exactly where they left off in 2018 with their last album *Imago*. Pianist Bigge, bassist Robert Lucaciu and drummer Moritz Baumgärtner conjure up a plate stacked with intoxicating melodies, but the three dream-walkers never let themselves be seduced by their addictive potential to the point of giving themselves over to them completely. Each melody is the fertile soil from which the next melody immediately grows. It is a continuous sequence of becoming and fading away, which at every moment makes one eagerly await what will happen next. The playfulness of *Imago* is joined on *Clay* by a moment of force that provides new contrasts and points of friction.

Bigge didn't name the album *Clay* for no reason at all: it's clay in the sense of modeling clay. The songs were written in 2022 during a period in which no gigs were on the schedule for the Leipzig trio. Instead, there were a series of rehearsals spread throughout the year. Bigge brought a few pieces at the beginning of the year, and they changed a bit at each rehearsal, like a sculpture taking shape over an extended period of time. *Clay*, Bigge says, "represents the transition from something unconcrete to something concrete. Other tracks on the album, such as 'Sweet Daydream,' also symbolize the transition from dream to reality. 'In My Mind's Eye' symbolizes, in a way, the different layers of the inner eye in relation to reality. It's about these transitions of different states and levels of perception."

Despite, or perhaps because the songs have been titled in a metaphysical hazy manner, the trio plays with a remarkable clarity that stems in no small part from the vocabulary of Bigge himself. Anyone who has ever followed the flow of his inspiration will instantly recognize his crystalline tone in its small-scale, almost molecular flow. Johannes Bigge does not have to invent a new vocabulary for every album. His language is

so multifaceted, his ability to tell stories so sprawling that he could record a thousand records with this pool of creativity without ever repeating himself. Johannes Bigge uses a different image: "The landscape is there, I just have to map it anew each time. I always know where I want to go, but only in the concrete composition process do the pieces manifest themselves."

Although Johannes Bigge takes care of the compositional basics, his songs, which seem to run themselves, often give you the feeling that it's not musicians playing the music, but the music playing the musicians. This impression is not least due to the fact that the three friends themselves have an incredible amount of fun together and give the whole music something very enthusiastic rarely found in contemporary jazz. Bigge's companions are decidedly involved in modeling common plasticine. Or to stay in the picture, the songs demand that each of the three contributes exactly what makes the sculpture complete. "I could see how the music grows, how it is created between us," Bigge raves retrospectively. If the trio could already be compared to an equilateral triangle on *Imago*, this is even more true on *Clay*. The intentions of the three participants merge so organically into each other that in places it hardly matters who plays what, because it's always about the common whole.

Thus, the songs mostly function like open conversations between three like-minded people, in which the precision of expression and the desire for mutual exchange are mutually dependent. Bigge does not rely on chord blocks, but on a fabric of voices that evolve and follow the dynamics of life and trust their own impulse. For our ears, we permanently need to sing-along in our minds, whereas Bigge, Lucaciu and Baumgärtner hardly give us time, as their playful motifs are so densely structured, to situationally internalize what they themselves have already long since internalized. If we let ourselves in on the subtle play of this further in-between state in the sense of the album title, the resulting transparency and transcendence trigger feelings of happiness in every respect.

Without playing pop music in any way at all, the Johannes Bigge Trio often follows the logic of pop music. The songs have an amazingly catchy character, whereby the band's sound precisely gives rise to this memorability, a sound that continues to resonate long after the music has faded away. Which brings us back to modeling clay. Unlike what is often common in composition and production processes, Bigge and Co. do not permanently enrich their songs, but thin them out until only exactly what needs to be said is left. This also makes it immensely easier for outsiders to access this music, regardless of whether one has been socialized with jazz, pop, classical music or the murmur of streams and forests. "When I write a piece, I try out everything that doesn't work until only what makes sense is left," Johannes Bigge summarizes.

Now *Clay* is here, and it seems as if this music has always been here as well. It was just waiting for Johannes Bigge, Robert Lucaciu and Moritz Baumgärtner to come along and bring it to life. And that's exactly how it should be.

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