## ATHINA KONTOU – MOTHER

## „BERATI“

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After four years, the band Mother, led by German-Greek double bassist Athina Kontou, is releasing its second album, Berati: an artistic statement, a process of self-empowerment, and a dialogue between cultures that lies at the heart of Mother's work. The album title — a traditional dance from the Epirus region — symbolically points to the elemental quality of music that cannot be confined within rigid boundaries. Berati evokes a landscape in which cultural spaces flow into one another: folk songs, original compositions, and improvisation merge into an organic whole. The music on the album unfolds like a living organism, oscillating between tenderness and force, between silence and eruption: lyrical and mature, free of rigid conventions, yet deeply rooted in tradition.

While the first album, *Tzivaeri* (nWog, 2022), was strongly shaped by arrangements of traditional songs, *Berati* marks a deliberate step into a cohesive sonic entity, expressing itself in shimmering and multifaceted ways through tempo, dynamics, and timbre. "We breathe together, and now completely new colours are emerging," says bandleader Athina Kontou. This is especially clear in the title track, *Berati*, in which the musicians worked extensively to find its complex repetitive structures that are neither classical jazz form nor mere repetition. Here, simple lines flow into one another, give way to meditative rhythms, and open up an almost endless arc, underpinned by Dominik Mahnig on drums with ever-changing textures. Like a mantra, Luise Volkmann's saxophone repeats a striking melody, which the band supports with its own rhythms and nuances. From this multiplicity, the piece develops its own meter before finally giving way to wild exuberance.

Musical traditions from Northern Greece, Armenia, and Crete all find a place on this album. They meet sensitive improvisation, three original compositions by Kontou, and the individual musical backgrounds of the band members. The musicians of Mother take up these different sonic worlds, explore them, and shape them into new musical forms through their shared knowledge, like a home of their own. An important element in this is the prepared piano of new band member Julius Windisch, which expands and densifies the band's sound. "It's not about

simply making noise — but about creating a sonic world that corresponds to the melodies," says Kontou. "It is noise, but it is lyrical. It is not free jazz, but it carries strong melodies." It is precisely this connection between different cultural and musical perspectives that defines Mother's approach: not either-or, but a creative in-between.

On the album *Berati* the four-piece ensemble is joined by two guest musicians - German-Kurdish bağlama and lavta player Koray Berat Sari (who also appeared on the first album) and singer Erini. She grew up in Crete, now lives in the United States, and recorded two songs with Mother in Cologne in January 2026: the traditional rizitiko "Inta 'hete Gyrou Gyrou," in Cretan dialect, was originally reserved for men only. It serves as a reminder of the transience of life. In "Ithaka," a composition by Athina Kontou, Erini interprets excerpts from Constantine Cavafy's famous poem of the same name. Odysseus's journey to his home island becomes a universal image of human life: what matters is not only reaching a destination, but also the experiences, encounters, and insights we gather along the way.

Like the petals of a flower slowly opening, the rhythmic melody of "Shoror" gradually unfolds from a lyrical saxophone theme, a traditional dance from the collection of folk songs by Komitas Vardapet, who is considered the founder of Armenian classical music. The histories of Armenians and Greeks in the Ottoman Empire are closely intertwined — and this is also reflected in Mother's repertoire.

*Berati* is therefore also an album about multiple belonging. Mother's music creates a space in which in-between spaces do not need to be resolved but can become productive. Traditions are not treated as unchangeable objects, but rather as living forms carried forward through new encounters. *Berati* tells of journeys between countries, of people and memories that change and are passed on. It is an album about origins and futures, about the beauty of the in-between, and about the possibility of weaving something of one's own from many different threads.

(Text: Sophie Emilie Beha)