

Leslie Clio

PURPLE

RD: 19/05/2017

If you ask Leslie Clio why she's chosen the name **PURPLE** for her third album, you'll learn there are a multitude of reasons, some spiritual, some aesthetic, some symbolic. As a mixture of red and blue, for instance, it's an embodiment of both energy and stability, while it's recognised in different cultures as, variously, a sign of spiritual awareness, of power, ambition and courage, and as a symbol of both mourning and the future. But though each of these is relevant, perhaps the most significant of all the colour's connotations is its association with independence. **PURPLE** you see, is the sound of Leslie Clio discovering and revelling in freedom and self-sufficiency.

Peppered with bold melodies, pop nous and lyrical acumen, all shot through with her lively personality, **PURPLE**'s songs leap from the speakers. They're the result of an awakening provoked by time spent away from Europe, and though they display the scars of past experiences, they're also - much like their creator - frequently playful, full of authority and dignity, and as vital as they are calm. Immerse yourself in its luxurious depths and you'll find widescreen drama in "Darkness Is A Filler" and "Sad Games", dark tension in "Game Changer" and "Fragile", understated soul in "Walls Down" and "Bad Habit", and spirited joy in "And I'm Leaving" and "In And Out". **PURPLE** is, in other words, an ambitious and far-reaching collection of songs that fulfil the promise Clio's exhibited ever since her debut, 2013's *Gladys*.

That album, of course, represented the culmination of a dream for Clio, who, thrilled by the music of Sam Cooke and John Lee Hooker and films like *Sister Act*, sang from an early age "to cheer my Mum up". Sent to a boarding school at the age of 12, she says, "I wandered around the grounds, just me and music. I always knew that I wanted to be a singer. I'd even won a drawing competition in first grade where you're supposed to paint what you want to become, and I painted a stage and spotlights and a singer with a microphone." Nonetheless, after leaving school she travelled widely through South East Asia, Australia and New Zealand, before a chance meeting upon her return to Hamburg led to a place at a music academy. A year later, aged 23, she moved to the German capital. "I was like, I'm going to make a record and that's the only thing I want out of life. I might drop dead afterwards, but I'll do it."

Gladys was a huge success in Clio's German homeland, earning her impressive chart placings, an ECHO nomination, and synchs in TV shows and films, including one of 2013's biggest movies, *Der Schlussmacher*. With the benefit of hindsight, however, Clio admits that its follow-up, 2015's *Eureka*, suffered from the notorious 'second album syndrome'. "I put so much work into it and pressured myself but the 'why' was wrong. I'd had a great time touring the first record, but I didn't *live*. I didn't do enough worth writing about."

By the end of 2015, Clio found herself forced to re-evaluate her approach to her work, and, in typically gutsy fashion, she decided to turn her back on Berlin and relocate to Hawaii. "I said goodbye to a lot of people," she recalls, "and then I just sold everything: every plate, every fork, every spoon that's ever had any history in my life. I just started afresh. Radically afresh. I joined people harvesting or planting trees, and lived in a house with five other people who were all involved in planting veggies and all that eco-living, solar energy stuff. I wanted to explore other things. I wanted to know what I am if the music disappears."

This exercise in *tabula rasa* paid off. By the time she returned to Berlin, five months later, Clio was raring to work again, her head full of tunes, her notebooks overflowing with ideas. “I was in a totally different state,” she grins. “In the past, I’d always been afraid of wasting time, and I ended up pushing myself so hard it made me ill. I had to force myself to go to Hawaii as well, but it was totally necessary. And when I was there, I had this thing popping up on my phone every day: ‘I am enough’. I am not my music, and I’m not my career. I’m a great person and I have the one thing that nobody has, which is being me. And that’s the greatest gift...”

She brought this enthusiasm to the studio, where she worked with producer Olaf Opal on a record that turned out to be the one that most closely reflects her character. “The defining mood was relaxation, trust and security,” she smiles. “It was by far the smoothest production I have ever worked on. I was doing something completely for myself, without any traditional pressure to ‘succeed’.” She talks of the joy of experimenting with new styles - “I wanted to cover a wider field of sound worlds, and not just dip into them but really explore them, formulate them and make them opulent” - and with new instruments, such as a Mellotron. Each song, she decided, was to be “a playground: “I wanted to ‘collage’ a lot, have long outros, playful intros or weird interludes, and use different little, strange elements, then glue them together to see what happens.”

That said, Clio makes few wild claims about the record’s lyrical content. “It’s about love, idiots and heartache,” she laughs, “the same as always, but also loneliness and isolation. These things are always connected.” But, she emphasises, these are now addressed from a different perspective. “I’m in the best spot of my life so far. I just turned 30, and I’m really at peace with myself. I know exactly what I want, who I am, and what I’m not. I write what I want to write, and the reason why I write is I need to. Writing and recording really is my safe haven. I need it to reflect and digest, and I get very antsy when I don’t. And that’s why I’m doing this record: because I’ve changed a lot. I started out as a young girl, but I’m a woman now. I’ve experienced a lot of things. And finally realising you’ve reached that point? Oh, it’s everything.”

Bruised but aware, conscious of her past but invigorated by the future, full of strength but overflowing with serenity, Lesley Clio is back with the record of her career. Though music comes naturally, she’s always worked hard, but **PURPLE** is the sound of what happens now that she’s finally understood that it wasn’t her songs that needed attention, but herself. Having taken those courageous steps, she’s on the cusp of what some will inevitably refer to as her artistic “purple patch”, and she’s ready to celebrate that hard-won independence. “Putting things into songs,” she concludes, “is the ultimate pleasure. Even if I was working in an office, I’d never stop doing this. I have to do it. And having a record that’s the most personal I’ve ever done: that’s my definition of success...”