

# African Paper

## MUNSHA: The Fall of the Astronauts



With “The Fall of the Astronauts”, Berlin-based composer, cellist, and singer Munsha presents a work that defies conventional musical categories. The album is based on her musical theater piece “Alice's Geschwister” (Alice’s Siblings), which deals with the mental states of emergency mirrored in social norms. Lewis Carroll’s novel “Alice in Wonderland” doesn’t serve as a mere literary template, but rather as a foil for a profound examination of psychiatric systems, coercive treatments, and the grey area of personal identity.

Musically, Munsha flows between avantgarde, experimental electronic, artpop, jazz, and classically inspired approaches. Her academic background connects to an unmistakably discernable free spirit: she does not write for a scene but rather unfolds her craft according to narrative and emotional necessity. This is evident in the highly organic entanglement of cello, voice, electronics, and all types of possible and impossible found sounds.

The opening track “A New Home” resembles a long awakening with washed out sonic layers, rising, noisy textures, and a seemingly disembodied sound that is hard to localise. With its ambivalence between coolness and subtle sensibility, the track provides a strong atmospheric prelude.

These ambiguities are also present in deeper cuts: in “Voyage”, playful elements like glockenspiel and piano tinkering contrast with jazzy rhythms and vocals which, while akin to a classical soprano, are surprisingly also pop-adjacent when Munsha lets her voice prance, surely a bit tongue-in-cheek, with the lines “She’s a wolf that sings to the moon”. Time after time the album breaks free from conventional structures. At first, “Lacie’s Theme” appears to be a somewhat quiet piano-étude, but the beat and arrangement change constantly, until the piece imperceptibly drifts into a different direction. These transitions - abrupt or subtle - are part of the conceptual core of the album. Nothing remains fixed, everything is in elusive motion. This is noticeable in “Bourdon des Charmeurs”, a piece which begins with a harsh, almost aggressive drone, and is later overlapped by metallic, tonally delicate elements. Harmony is not played off against disruption; rather, a fragile interplay between the two is made tangible.

Occasionally, the electronic elements are reminiscent of new wave influences, as well as the experimental side of the NDW (Neue Deutsche Welle), like in “The Daze”, where synthetic patterns, driving rhythms and vocal presence come together in a way evocative of underground icons like Mona Mur. “EKT (The Fight)” is likewise rhythmically complex, albeit clearly structured and constantly intermingled with small, surprising bursts that elude pure functionality. These dense and constant changes permeate the entire album, and prevent any form of unambiguousness. In the centerpiece “The Labyrinth of the Astronauts”, the cello holds a dominating role without pushing itself to the front. Everything remains permeable, fluid; the track almost becomes orchestral, without actually being orchestrated. Munsha’s voice is constantly flashing, fragmented, fragile, present. It is in these moments that it is clear how substance, intention and expression are deeply woven into the album.

The theme of mental states of emergency is especially impactful in the textually dense piece “Der Garten”. Here, narrative passages interlace with a strongly reverberated, almost liturgical vocal delivery. The text—a parable portraying socially constructed differences as pathological—tells of two sisters, their dreams, sounds and colors, and how they are perceived as abnormal when they don’t fit the template of normality. Birdsongs in the background work as a commentary, like a Greek chorus, or perhaps an echo of the protagonists’ inner world. “Suzes Flamme”, a track running only a few seconds, provides a poignant caesura with its laconic text: “Kennst du die kleine Grenze, den Unterschied zwischen dir und mir?” (Do you know the small boundary, the distinction between you and me?).

The fact that Munsha does not allow herself to be typecast is evident in her musical approach, as well as in her stance toward psychiatry. In an interview she states: “I didn’t want to tell a story of a mental illness, nor of a specific ‘psychopathological subject’, but rather how the cure is the actual problem.” She doesn’t call the need of medical assistance into question, but rather its use as a standardized, normalized measure. The narrative voice on the final track, “Rosa Kaninchen” seems especially bitter in this context. In this almost lulling jazz ballad she overtakes the voice of a normalized world that pretends to know the way, and in doing so, gives the audience something to stomach.

Munsha found inspiration in both fictional and actual biographies. Alongside popular names such as Foucault, Goethe or Carmelo Bene, the narrative includes personal encounters as well as victims of psychiatric violence. This interweaving of documentary materials with artistic form provides the album with a depth that is not illustrative, but rather constantly striking and imbued with stance. “The Fall of the Astronauts” is a musically and thematically polymorphic album, that with great earnestness, though without pointing fingers, tackles a complicated subject matter. The fact that it is formally eclectic, permeable, and often gorgeous, makes it one of the most exciting and original works at the current threshold of music, theater, and political art.

Review by U.S. on [African Paper](#) (original version in German released on May 17th, 2025)

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