

NO PETTICOATS HERE – THE COURAGE TO KICK OUT CONVENTION

A CRITIQUE BY LIAM SLOAN

The enormity of the destruction and upheaval caused by the Great War is hard for anyone in 2016 to comprehend, and that can leave a sense that there is nothing original left to say during these centenary commemorations.

But in her fine new album, Louise Jordan has reminded us that there are many war stories we never hear, left untold in the John Singer Sargent paintings, Wilfred Owen poems, Commonwealth War Graves, village memorials, or grim casualty statistics.

As societal norms fractured, for women across Europe, the geopolitical suddenly became highly personal, and the personal became unavoidably political.

In *No Petticoats Here* – the title taken from a Lieutenant General's rebuke directed at suffragist Dr Elsie Inglis' suggestion of a female medical corps on the Western Front – Louise Jordan has retold the stories of named and unnamed women of the war, each of their lives changed utterly by the continent's disintegration.

In eleven exquisitely pitched original songs, Jordan has diligently researched the true stories of individual women alternately liberated, destroyed, reshaped and repurposed by the First World War.

For the most part, her subjects are not well-known war heroines. Some – the "surplus women" left husband-less by the slaughter of a generation two hundred and fifty miles away, the football-playing factory girls – are anonymous. Others bear the most extraordinary personal tales of audaciousness and bravery. One-by-one, the songs introduce us to motorcycling ambulance drivers, an undercover war correspondent, a spy chief, and a pioneering physicist. In different ways, each, in Jordan's words, displays the "courage to kick out convention," often risking their reputation or freedom.

It is in the strangeness of war, a limbo where norms evaporate, that strange opportunities arise for Jordan's protagonists. But the songs also remind us that as the establishment re-established and the rules returned once the Armistice was signed, so transgression – even transgression once deemed in the national interest – brought exceptional women dangerously close to public shame.

Jordan's starting point for many of her songs is what happened after the war, not during it: divorce, insanity, sexual abuse, economic hardship, stigma, abandonment. Even the liberation offered by women's football in the war years ended in a Football Association ban on female players which lasted from 1921 until the 1970s. "Shoot the ball, take back power and control / Shoulder to shoulder, we stand for all," the players can sing in the absence of their fighting men, but within a few years they will disappear for half a century.

It is because women's rights are continually threatened across the world that these stories remain resonant and relevant. "Ripple and flow, change is slow," Jordan warns, reminding us that over the intervening century, each advance for women's liberation has too often been met by a near equal and opposite reaction.

The seriousness of the subject is matched by Jordan's flawless singing, combining grace and authenticity with a bittersweet tone which reflects the nuances and complexity of her chosen subject matter. Supported by sensitive strings and accordion accompaniment which supports the simple storytelling in Jordan's lyrics, this is an album which changes listeners' preconceived knowledge about the past and spurs reflection on the fragility of the progress in our own time.

L.B. Sloan
London, July 2016

PREVIOUS PRAISE FOR LOUISE JORDAN

"Absolutely, totally and completely, brilliant" **Mike Harding, BBC Radio 2**

"A stirring, lilting grace... She also has an engaging stage presence... featured in Vogue this year as a rising star" **Martin Chilton, The Telegraph**

"Haunting and unforgettable" **Martin Townsend, The Sunday Express**

"a sound that captures the essence of the song as much as the words do... it's absolutely glorious" **FATEA**

"a master class in song writing. A gifted instrumentalist... captivating debut from a distinctive young artist" **R2 ******

"Louise's vocals are out of this world" **Maverick**

"*Veritas* energises and inspires with gently captivating yet unassuming natural elegance; simple honesty and creative imagination hand in hand." **fRoots**

"[*Veritas*] consists of an interesting mix of traditional and original material given a classical edgy feel, often reminiscent of a Kate Bush performance." **Brian Cope, Folk London**

"a record to be listened to closely and savoured with a glass of wine in front of an open fire." **Oz Hardwick, R2 Magazine**

"*Florilegium* from Louise Jordan lures far beyond its title. It attracts and engages because it's an album of thoroughly captivating compositions that draws its energy from the deep wells of folk and classical." **Tim Carroll, FolkWords**

"Direct and unfussy, the essence of the music and message is never lost in ornamentation. A record that is timeless, artless and yet ambitious." **Colin Bailey, Artree**

"Traversing an emotional arc from the opening track's melancholy to the serenity of Peaceful (a song that sounds to have hymnal influences)... it's an intoxicating listen." **Mike Davies, MyBrum**

"*Tempvs* is an admirable, entirely honest, courageous, enterprising – and proudly, completely self-produced – record." **David Kidman, The Living Tradition**