

KATTHEM

sveriges bästa kvinnliga punkband™



I'm sitting behind the bar at Plan B in Malmö with all-female Swedish punk band, KATTHEM. There's Ella (22), Josefin (24), Jasmine (26) and Kallo (29). They're here to support fellow punk group, SMiSK, who are in the middle of a soundcheck. Their raucous screams fill the club, forcing us all to huddle close together.

I raise my voice over the background sounds and cut to the point, telling the band why I contacted them;

There's a rawness to KATTHEM's music that intrigues me; a certain poetic quality in their lyrics which is veiled by screams of aggression and anger. All-in-all, there's no bullshit, which makes listening to their music really refreshing. They don't hide behind anything- no auto-tune, no phoney electronics, no false facades- it's just their lyrics, the chords, and a tonne of emotions, good vibes and energy.

All of this, paired with their self-fulfilling 'I don't give a fuck attitude,' prompt KATTHEM to imbue a strong sense of female empowerment. They're a group of girls that are continuously pushing themselves and breaking their own boundaries. Ultimately, KATTHEM adopt the persona of some envious female cult that you *just really* want to be a part of.

Indeed, there is much to be envious about. All still so young, the girls seem to know what's up, and appear to be doing something

right, given their already strong fan-base in Göteborg and Malmö. 2017 saw them grow even larger, with the release of their second EP 'Ritalina,' the production of their first music video, and a tour of 17 gigs, including festivals such as Peace and Love.

So, why and how did KATTHEM come together?

Ella- "It was purely an emotional outlet. . . it felt like everyone of us needed a platform to express more primitive feelings."

The girls had all originally met at a songwriting course, which instigated the creation of the band. Not necessarily knowing how to play the drums, or how to play the guitar, KATTHEM was born as a means of dealing with their emotions.

Josefin- "We all wanted a platform to express our music and feelings where there weren't so many *rules*. . . because often if you play in a band, it can be like 'you do this and I do that,' but we're all switching instruments."

A wave of DIY, Riot Grrrl punk bands have washed over the areas of Göteborg and Malmö, but KATTHEM stand out amongst the crowd of up-and-coming young talents. Refreshing and innovative, the four girls perform on a rotational basis. The overarching idea is that whoever writes the song will perform it. This creates variation in uniformity, and, after-time, one can find distinct characteristics between each member's song;

first, there's Josefin. She's small yet dynamic and her songs are a nucleus of brain and wit, fuelled by anger (and unexpectedly strong vocals) and the need to communicate a greater message. Poetic, deep, and melodramatic, Ella's songs would make you cry had they been sung in any other genre (har varit död i två och ett halvt år, inga händer värmer upp mig // has been dead for two and a half years, no hands warm me up), but the childish rage that accompanies her delivery changes this. Jasmine's deep vocals raise the hairs on your skin, and her songs become a powerful release of frustration growing deep within your stomach. And Kallo is the epitome of the cool punk rocker; she's a bit more quiet, and often sings of love, but the songs are aggressive and forceful, a bit like a memory you just want to spit on.

Kallo- "You know, you don't need to be a genius on the guitar, as long as you can play a bit, and then you learn, so that's the most important thing."

Josefin- "I think for us it's very much about going live on stage. When we're on stage I don't think it's so important that the instruments sound good, it's more important that we have a good feeling, energy and attitude."

Ella- "Yeah, and it feels like that's something that we do because we wanna show it to ourselves. Like, when we go up on stage and do this big fucking 'fuck you' show, it feels like we do it to show ourselves that 'I can do this.'

Like 'ok, I have never played a guitar before, but I can fucking do it. Now I'm gonna play the guitar and I'm gonna do it in *my way*. . . and we're gonna do it in *our way*."

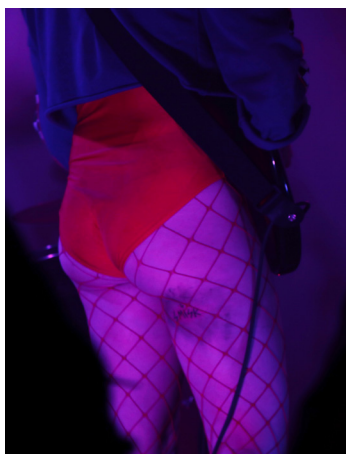
"[a] big fucking 'fuck you' show"

Josefin- "Also, I think for me- I'm not sure about everyone else- I had always made music, but I was really shy to show it. I was like 'oh no, I will show it only when it's good enough.' And I think many girls are self-conscious like this, and they have this thought that 'we must be so good' -"

Kallo- "'We must be *perfect* before we show it to anyone'."

Josefin- "Yeah, and I think many boys in comparison are like 'oh brilliant, we're so good' . . . and they have this mindset from an early age. But they can stand there and really like . . . *suck*. . . and they're not ashamed. So I think it was great for me to be in this band, because we're not about playing perfectly at all. No one can tell me 'oh you didn't play the guitar well.' You know, I can do what I want, I don't care."

I question whether KATTHEM's unique writing process has forged a stronger connection and sisterhood in the band? A sisterhood based on trust and understanding with their individually written songs and lyrics.



Josefin- "We have this environment or relationship in the band where it's forbidden to say that something's bad. So like, I have never been afraid that you [the other members] will say it [a song] is bad or anything like that. . . but we have all been thinking that maybe we should stop labelling and referring to the songs as 'Ella's song' or 'Jasmine's song' just because they wrote it. . . that is one thing that we want to stop, because it's *OUR* band and *our* songs and we don't want any competition. Everyone is doing their part and everyone is important."

Jasmine- "Yeah, and it's more like we build it up together. So someone will have this idea, or a skeleton of a song, and then we will start to play around with it. So in the end it feels like everyone is a part of the song."

Ella- "But also it feels like when we rehearse we can talk so much with each other and be super honest. Like, I don't know if there's anyone who knows me like this. . . I'm not afraid to talk about anything with you guys."

Josefin- "Sometimes it's a habit, and we have this routine-"

Ella- "Like 'therapy' -"

Josefin- "Yeah, we have this routine where we're together and we will go round and say 'ok, so I feel this way. . . this sucks and this sucks, I have diarrhoea, I am depressed, I am really angry today, I have PMS' . . . so that's a

great thing. And also, in relation to the song writing, you and I [signals to Ella] have started writing songs together- two songs-"

Ella- "It feels like all the time we are *evolv-ing* and thinking about what our next step will be. You know like, 'now we have tried everybody playing the same instrument. . . what will our next step be?'"

"It feels like all the time we are evolving and thinking about what our next step will be."

Josefin- "But also, I get so inspired by all you guys too. I remember one show where Ella did this *stage dive* and there weren't really many people in the audience-

Ella- "Ahahaha NOOOOOO"

Josefin- "...and maybe two or three people were like *psyched* to do this stage dive. So, it didn't really work. . . you just kinda jumped in and fell. . . but then you were like, 'I'm gonna do this, carry me!' and they carried you all the way back to the stage."

Ella- "...and my vagina was like *all over* the place!"

Josefin- "But then I remember I felt so impressed and inspired by that, because I was like 'oh my god, I would never dare to do that myself.' But now at other shows I've been feeling like 'yeah, at this show I've dared to be a little bit more like... like I did 'the Ella'... I dared.' You know, I think 'if she can do it, so can I. Like you get so inspired-"

Kallo- "We push each other in a good way."

I ask whether KATTHEM's listeners are inspired by the girls in the same way the girls inspire each other. Whether the band have received any positive responses in light of their assertive "I will do what I want" image and mindset.

Josefin- "Now I'm thinking about 'the Mother' -"

The others- "Oh yeah, the mother!"

Josefin- "This was really long ago though. It was a mother in her forties and she came to us and said-"

Kallo- "She said, 'I want my kids to be like you... I want my girls to be like you.'"

Ella- "Ahhh that was the best compliment ever! But also, we've participated in a few music camps for girls and transgender people, called Popkollo."

Josefin- "We had workshops with girls around 12-18 years old. I felt like some of them were

really shy at first, but by the end they were really happy, they dared to come up with ideas. And it didn't matter if it wasn't good. It was just about coming up with the idea."

Ella- "I remember at our first camp we had a workshop where the kids had like 5 minutes to prepare a number. They each got a piece of paper with a list of emotions on them, and then they had to prepare a performance where their only focus was to show the emotions... just like crawl on the floor, do whatever you want... be ugly, be like a gorilla, and just dance super crazy. And it felt like after that, everyone just loosened up."

Josefin- "I feel so happy when I see that they are having fun. And I think about how I would have loved this when I was their age, but I didn't do it. And now we can give that to others, so that's really nice."

I'm still intrigued by KATTHEM's creative process and so return to my previous question about their relationship and the environment in which they work. Jasmine points out that they're all very sensitive and emotional people, and the band once again joke that their rehearsals and writing process often become forms of therapy. Yet, this 'therapeutic' procedure seems entirely natural and appealing in the sense that the girls all come across as extremely tolerant, open-minded and understanding people. And it seeps into their music too; a mix of uncontaminated emotions and a sense of complete freedom. Such 'purity'

(per se) of emotions is a unique (if not rare) find in most millennial music today.

Ella- "All four of us have like... vad heter det?"

Josefin- [laughs] "'Sick in the head.'"

Ella- "YEAH! SICK IN THE HEAD!"

The girls all talk of their experiences with mental health suggesting that this mutuality forges a stronger understanding between all the band members, in the way that they are all in tune and equal with each other.

Ella- "It's really important for all of us to listen to each other. You know, we're not pushing each other over the edge."

Josefin- "And I think we wouldn't have played together for as long as we have if we weren't taking this in... if we weren't respecting each other's feelings and taking them seriously. But also, because we have all experienced mental illness... it sounds so harsh to say mental illness... but like anxiety and depression... everyone has some experience of this, and we're very open about it. And I think it's so nice, because sometimes if you don't feel good mentally, it's hard to speak to someone about it who hasn't experienced it. We all know how it feels, so that's why we take it seriously, you know, if you don't have the energy to do a gig or something-"

Ella- "Like, if someone says 'I can't actually do it', then we're not gonna do it-"

Josefin- "Yeah we discuss it, but if it's no, then it's no. So the health comes first."

Does this make it harder to perform? The sensitivity that arises from cooped up emotions then paired with any sort of mental illness could make the repetitious practise of performing their songs akin to ripping open an old wound, which ultimately never heals.

Kallo- "I think it's just nice to get it out, sometimes you just need to release something. If the song is sad, I might turn it into anger."

"a big 'fuck you' to when you didn't believe in yourself or when you had been self-conscious."

Ella- "Yeah, it feels like it's not so much about like, 'oh this song symbolises this period of my life'... you know all of us are so emotional, and we go around with a bunch of emotions, and it feels like sometimes you're gonna explode, so you need the music to pour it out of your body. And

sometimes when you're on stage, it doesn't matter what the song may be about, it just becomes an outlet—"

Jasmine- "And also it feels like the genre, it's another kind of energy. You know the lyrics could be emotional, but the energy we have isn't sad. It's not *'my heart will go on.'*"

Josefin- "Yeah I feel it's more like a 'fuck you,' [looks to Ella], like you said, a 'fucking, fuck you show'—"

Ella- "Both to others, but *also* to yourself. You know, a big 'fuck you' to when you didn't believe in yourself or when you had been self-conscious."

Josefin- "But I feel like if it is a sad song, when you perform it, it's more like 'I feel this way, and it shouldn't be this way. Noooo!'. So you know, it is sad but you're like 'look how sad this is! It shouldn't be like this. Fuck this! And now I'm telling everyone how I'm feeling.'"

Ella- "Like a really angry kid—"

Josefin- "Yeah! We have our inner angry kid—"

Ella- "Like a really angry kid who just started screaming because this kid just wants some meatballs. You know, we just want to eat spaghetti... we don't like fish pudding. We want spaghetti, and ketchup... and *SALT!*"

So, what is KATTHEM's biggest 'fuck you' song?

Ella- "Baby Showers is our most humorous. But it feels like 'Nyckeln i Handen' is our most 'fuck you song'. It has a really strong message."

'Nyckeln i Handen (Key in the Hand)' talks of sexual harassment and the danger of a girl walking home alone at night. The song is powerful and smartly written, emphasising all the things we already know; the fact that the girl is always the victim, yet so often blamed for something she never even instigated. Following the #metoo incident, I ask whether this song in particular has received more attention.

Josefin- "The thing is, we released the song this spring. And then we released the video this fall. Of course, releasing a video gives more attention to a song. So we had prior plans to release it on that date, but we didn't know about the #metoo."

Kallo- "It's hard to say—"

Josefin- "I feel like maybe people, like for example my dad, he was maybe getting it more. Like we released the song a while ago but *now* he's like 'this is so relevant. You should send it to Afton Bladet'—"

Ella- "Oh my god, it's the same thing with my mum!—"

Josefin- "You know, *clueless people*—"



The veracity and pertinency of problems such as sexual harassment for the generation of women today is yet to be fully acknowledged by older generations, and perhaps then serves as an underlying factor as to why the issue has remained so stagnant. Ella points out the way in which she has always been fighting with her parents about these topics because they never really understood.

Ella- "They don't understand. And often they get defensive about this stuff, because they don't have . . . maybe they haven't thought about it themselves."

Yet, after the release of KATTHEM's song and videoclip, Ella points out the way in which her and her mother "took a new step in getting to know each other," in that her mother finally understood "what [she'd] been talking about all these years."

Ella- "What she said was really beautiful, she said 'I've been doing this all my life', you know, holding a key in her hand when walking on the streets alone, but she always thought she was crazy, and the only paranoid person. But then we made the video and she was like 'oh, there are others that feel this way.'"

Josefin- "Some people don't understand, or won't understand . . . but I think the reason that we play, besides it being fun . . . you know, we do it for the people that *relate*. I have also had family that have said 'oh but I don't understand why they have to be naked,'

because in the videoclip Ella is walking through the streets naked . . . but it's about going home alone and being *exposed*... and then they question 'why?' Firstly, it's art, and secondly, you're naked because that's the way you feel—"

Ella- "And it's *non-sexual*. . . there is nothing sexual about it—"

Josefin- "Yeah, and I think that those people that think it's sexual, they should maybe go to the doctor because of their weird perceptions. You know, why should you shame this when we are trying to enlighten the fact that we shouldn't judge girls' and their bodies? . . . So I guess I get a bit annoyed when I hear relatives say this. But then again, of course, I think 'oh they're from a whole different generation. They're more conservative.'"

Ella- "But it's beautiful when you can see for a fact that you're reaching out. That people who before didn't understand, now do."

Jasmine- "But it sounds like we're a cult now . . . trying to convince people . . ."

But in a way KATTHEM have become a cult. A powerful group of young women doing what they want, how they want, and consequently, enforcing change and positivity both for themselves and for younger women. Do KATTHEM then aim to break taboos and societal conventions?

Is this what they ultimately hope to communicate to their listeners?

Ella- "It feels like we work on breaking taboos for ourselves. It's not so much about showing other people something . . . you know . . . we're selfish, motherfuckers! But no, in all seriousness, we always find the motivation in ourselves . . . you know, there's the idea that 'I have to break this taboo for myself,' and then we inspire others by doing this. Because they see that this person did this for herself, and then think 'I want to do that too.'"

But even so, while breaking taboos for themselves and consequently inspiring young girls and women, the band bring up the fact that there needs to be a change in the music industry for female artists. In an industry largely dominated by male artists and producers, as an all-girl punk band, KATTHEM are often reduced to just that— an all-girl punk band. The content of their songs and what they stand for is so often overlooked.

Ella- "You know so many people have come up to us and said 'you sound like this band— insert other female band name— and they don't actually sound like us at all.'"

Josefin- "The only thing that we have in common with the bands we're often compared to is that they are girls too, and they might also have some sort of attitude like us. But it's always like that for girls. Swedish girls who do pop music are always *compared-*"

Ella- "And it's always like that because they don't really have anything or anyone to compare us with . . . because usually there's only one girl-band that people really know about."

It becomes paradoxical; KATTHEM along with various other all-girl bands stand together as an image of female empowerment and strength. Yet so often this image is understood— or *chosen* to be understood— as a feministic statement of power and anarchy; riot girls who are 'fighting' against the patriarchy.

Ella- "It feels like for them [male artists, producers, the media] it's a statement to be only girls, but for us it's just that we wanted to make a band together . . . you know, I feel comfortable with you guys. But for them . . . I dunno, I guess it's a bit like not shaving your own armpits . . . why do people get angry with this? It's a *non-action*. . . the only thing you do is not shave. But it feels like the same thing here . . . you know, when you do something it's like 'oh this is not common, it must be a statement,' but for us it's not a statement."

"We're always being reduced to our gender"



Josefin- "I actually had a friend, this guy, a while back. When he saw that it was going good for us, you know, we were booking more gigs and releasing more music... He said to me 'yeah, it's so great that everything is going so well for you, but now it's fashionable and popular to do this type of music'... basically he said that we were becoming more successful only *because* we're an all girl punk band—"

Ella- "OH MY GOD!"

Josefin- "Yeah, and I got *so* sad, because it was like 'ok, so you're saying we have an advantage because *we're girls?*' when it's actually the opposite... totally the opposite! It's harder, it has always been harder."

Ella- "They reduce it—"

Josefin- "Yeah, and it feels like as soon as we get more popular or more advantage, they're like 'oh no.' Like, I heard this theory about men and women regarding equality; if a woman does 70% and the man does 30% then both the man and the woman *feel* like it's equal. So, this guy thinks that we are becoming more equal, but *still* we are below them."

Jasmine- "Yeah and often they're not even talking about our music. We're seen as being popular just because it's at this specific time, and we're all girls, and we're in *this* band doing *this* type of music... you know, it's not because our music is good."

"It's so hyped being a girl!"

Ella- "We're always being reduced to our gender. They're not looking at what we do, or who we are, or what's our personality. It's just like 'ok you're a girl so you like pink, and you're only progressing because you're a girl'—"

Josefin- "It's so hyped being a girl!"

It *is* hyped being a girl, but the existence of KATTHEM— a unique group of girls who sway from societal norms and expectations of women, who push themselves and their own boundaries, and who, in doing so, ultimately enforce change and positivity for young girls and women alike— make the future for women and women in music look *female*.

You see, on the surface KATTHEM may not take themselves so seriously. They enjoy revelling in their own humour and laughing at their own jokes. They enjoy being childish and talking about themselves. But their naturalness is infectious, and beneath their loud screams is an individual group of girls who *really* care about what they do. Simply put, KATTHEM is KATTHEM, and no one else—and it's the reason we love them.

Wir Kinder älskar KATTHEM <3

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KATTHEM