

DEATH VALLEY GIRLS

Album: *Islands in the Sky*

Endorsed by the one and only Iggy Pop, who starred in a previous video for their single 'Disaster (Is What We're After)', Death Valley Girls' trajectory of making brilliant music continues. This is their fifth studio album, the follow-up to *Under The Spell of Joy*. It makes sense that Iggy is a fan, as they're absolutely badass.

More expansive than before but still as uncompromising as ever, the themes of space, magic, love, and heartbreak chime with their mystical aesthetic. 'Journey to Dog Star' and 'What Are the Odds' evoke the churning, dark side of sixties psychedelia, with the latter their unique existential spin on Madonna's 'Material Girl'. There are influences like the films of Kenneth Anger and Antonioni, *The Shangri-Las*, *The Stooges* (of course) and *The Seeds'* musical palette, whereas towards the end, tracks 'Watch the Sky' and 'It's All Really Kind of Amazing' are brighter, but no less trippy. 'Magic Powers' even resembles more recent bands like *Ladytron*, with its zesty synth sound.



Organ, saxophone, and blistering guitars weave around Bonnie Bloomgarden's passionate vocals and chanted backing vocals, making the band seem like some kind of kooky, supernatural biker girl gang. But their retro stylings are only one half of where they sit, as they sound timeless. Indeed, they are more likely to pull out some impressive dance moves than a flick knife. They may look mean, but they mean well.

Islands in the Sky is out 25th February from Suicide Squeeze

Lorna Irvine

CATRIONA PRICE

Album: *Hert*

'Wur hert is a ba.' The debut album from composer Catriona Price opens with a collage of voices talking about the famous Ba' game that takes over the streets of Kirkwall on New Year's Day, setting up a piece exploring themes of home and the ties that bind us to it through a distinct Orcadian lens. Using lyrics from the poetry of a range of Orkney artists, including George Mackay Brown, Harry Josephine Giles, and Margaret Tait, Price weaves their words through flutes and strings, pulling folk and jazz influences into a yearning elegy to the archipelago.

The album gives us flashes of the character of island life, people and dogs mentioned in the broad knowing way of the small town; the eccentricities and personalities that make up the daily conversation of the community where a couple of words tell a long story. There's a wry humour that's in particular evidence on 'No Such Thing as Belonging', where an affectionate, weary mockery only available to those who love a place without condition zips over Grappelli-esque violin with a knowing wink.

Photo credit: Jannica Honey



An impressive cast of musicians – Seonaid Aitken on violin and Tom Gibbs’ flicking piano quarter tones among them – bring a range and versatility to Price’s compositions.

While there is a pop sensibility to some of the album, it seems designed to be listened to as a whole that builds towards the emotional punch of the last quarter of the piece. ‘Storms’ raises a defiant fist to the world and demands to be challenged, with ‘Energy at the End of the World’ pulling a catastrophic float into the final track ‘If’; a distraught but peaceful conclusion that home and heart reside in people and memory as much as a physical place. *Hert* has that duality at its core: the push and pull of a relationship with the places and people who form us.

***Hert* is out now**

Chris Queen

BIG THIEF

Album: Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe In You

I’ve been walking around this past fortnight feeling like I have a good friend in my pocket at all times, close to me, to get me through every wintry and hopeless feeling. I won’t lie – I have become a bit dependent on this album. It is my buddy on the bus in the dark mornings.

Songs like the opener ‘Change’ are slow and swaying and took me by the hand gently into the new year. This album is also my writing partner: the subsequent track, ‘Time Escaping’, is the antithesis of ‘Change’ in terms of energy. Imagine walking into a Saturday morning market and half the crowd have grabbed a nearby pot or trinket to shake and add a pep to your step. The silly lyrics and bouncy country sound of ‘Spud Infinity’ likewise remind me to write in whatever mad dynamic way I choose. This album is my cooking companion too – ‘Love Love Love’ is crashing and waving, ‘Blue Lightning’ is dirty and bold, ‘Simulation Swarm’ provokes nodding and tapping throughout. I read to this album, I stretch to this album, I sleep to this album: tracks like ‘Promise Is A Pendulum’, ‘The Only Place’ and the ‘Sparrow’ are beautiful and swooping and tender.

***Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe In You* is available on Spotify**

Natalie Jayne Clark

