

Björk - Medúlla (2004)

Written by bluelover

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*01 - Pleasure Is All Mine 02 - Show Me Forgiveness 03 - Where Is The Line 04 - Vo"kuro'
05 - O"ll Birtan 06 - Who Is It 07 - Submarine 08 - Desired Constellation 09 - Oceania 10
- Sonnets - Unrealities XI 11 - Ancestors 12 - Mouth's Cradle 13 - Mi?vikudags 14 -
Triumph Of A Heart 15 - Komid*

Björk's long-awaited Medúlla presented the Icelandic innovator with a challenge. Not only did she have to follow-up her breathtaking 2001 masterpiece Vespertine, but she also decided to do away with instruments. "I only wanted to work with vocalists," she proclaimed in a recent magazine interview.

No instruments? No problem. Welcome human beatbox artists Schlomo, Rahzel (of The Roots) and Dokaka. And many tracks still have a distinctly electronic edge, helped along by Björk's longtime collaborator Mark 'LFO' Bell. Björk also has the most powerful instrument of all at her disposal - her voice.

Fans will feel at home with the opener, "The Pleasure is All Mine", with those familiar trademark wailings and some pleasant Vespertine-like harmonies courtesy of an Icelandic choir. Many songs have a minimalist feel, such as "Show Me Forgiveness" and "Submarine" which features Robert Wyatt. The Icelandic "Vökuró" and "Sonnets / Unrealities XI" are full-on choral numbers with an almost religious tone to them. "Desired Constellation" is one of the more effective slow tunes, with Björk warbling over a background of delicate digi-noise.

It's not all simplicity though. "Where is the Line" is a mish-mash of ideas, sounding like a fight between a choir and a rack of effects boxes, with neither winning. "Oceania" too, which opened

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the Athens Olympics, is spoilt by some overenthusiastic vocal whoopings. An Inuit throat singer called Tagaq is also brought into the mix, whose contributions range from unnerving ("The Pleasure Is All Mine") to downright horrid ("Ancestors").

This is not a radio-friendly album. There are no "It's Oh So Quiet" moments here. The only really immediate tunes are the enjoyable "Who Is It" and the closing track "Triumph of a Heart" (listen out for the rather splendid human trombone on that one).

Medúlla has some high points, and it never gets boring, but it still left me feeling rather confused. It was recorded in 18 different locations, and you can tell - the end product feels disjointed and at times claustrophobic. Whereas previous albums like Vespertine were real growers, some people may lose patience with this one. The unquenchable desire to try out new ideas, which makes Björk such an exciting artist, may prove to be her downfall on Medúlla, as too much of the experimentation doesn't quite hit the mark. ---David Hooper, BBC Review

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