

Basia Bulat - Heart Of My Own (2010)

Written by bluelover

Thursday, 24 July 2014 13:22 - Last Updated Wednesday, 01 June 2016 16:28

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[01] - *Go On* [3:28] [02] - *Run* [3:02] [03] - *Sugar And Spice* [3:23] [04] - *Gold Rush* [3:33] [05] - *Heart Of My Own* [3:49] [06] - *Sparrow* [2:24] [07] - *If Only You* [2:47] [08] - *I'm Forgetting Everyone* [3:25] [09] - *The Shore* [4:44] [10] - *Once More, For The Dollhouse* [3:40] [11] - *Walk You Down* [3:10] [12] - *If It Rains* [2:31] Basia Bulat - Autoharp, Banjo, Fender Rhodes, Guitars, Organ, Piano, Ukulele, Vocals Thierry Amar - Bass (Upright) Bobby Bulat - Percussion Holly Coish - Vocals (Background) Eric Démoré - Accordion, Harmonium, Organ, Piano, Vocals (Background) Erik Arnesen - Banjo Michael Javorski - Vocals (Background) Tim Kingsbury - Guitar (Bass) Brian Lipson - Trumpet Jessica Moss - Violin Ellie Nimeroski - Violin Percussion Choir Extraordinaire Miles Perkin - Bass (Upright) Jen Reimer - French Horn Katie Saunoris - Vocals (Background) Sebastian Ostertag - Cello Allison Stewart - Viola, Vocals (Background) Jenna Marie Wakani - Vocals (Background) Madisyn Whajne - Vocals (Background)

Toronto native Basia Bulat won some deserved attention, including a Polaris prize nomination and a spot on the idiosyncratic Rough Trade roster, with her 2007 debut LP, *Oh My Darling*. Stylistically diverse-- almost to a fault-- the record proved Bulat to be as comfortable with lilting waltz-time folk as jazz-cadenced pop as licensable indie catnip. Howard Bilerman (Arcade Fire, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, British Sea Power) worked with Bulat, and though they at times nudged the taste needle with torrid pianos and flowery strings, *Darling* successfully balanced slick studio intervention with a charming handmade rustle and clatter (not to mention a lot of enthusiastic handclapping).

But while Bulat's versatility's a selling point, it's her rare, extraordinary voice that makes her a fresh find in the notoriously musty folk-pop bin. Graceful and incandescent, confident but approachable, her alto's the aural equivalent of the perfect party host who makes every guest not only welcome, but certain they're the most important person in the room. "Oh oh oh, I've done myself in," she laments on "Sugar and Spice", a song from new album, *Heart of My Own*, that traces the self-obliterating nature of love. And it seems like she's sharing her secret with

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you and you alone. It probably goes without saying that Bulat's flush-with-feeling lyrics aren't going to appeal to the more cynical consumers of singer-songwriter fare. (Then again, you could count those oxymoronic individuals on two hands.) Did I mention that while she plays most of the instruments on her record, Bulat favors the humble autoharp, clutching it to her chest like a Victorian nursemaid with an infant?

It's a mistake to read Bulat's songs as pre-Raphaelite pictorials or confessional Lilith Fair bait, though. For one thing, Bulat's brother Bobby's urgent, jittery, even martial drum work is thoroughly contemporary and continually prods Heart's songs into scrambling motion. Spectacular album opener "Go On" pairs hit-the-road-Jack sentiments with a rapid ramp-up to runaway train rhythms. "Gold Rush", wisely released as the LP's first single, interprets "rush" literally, with stomped beats, gushing strings, and Bulat's fevered vocal performance. This last track references the album's primary inspiration, Canada's isolated Yukon Territory. Bulat stopped and wrote a batch of songs on her last tour in tiny Dawson City, and you can practically hear the north wind's raw melancholy burn on tunes like the otherwise frisky title track.

Unfortunately, Heart's production isn't always successful. Bulat seems out of breath competing with the brute-forced keyboards of "Walk You Down". And despite all the ace moments in "Gold Rush", what sounds like a choir's "ah ah ah ahs" that sneak in on the song's bridge sound stolen from Arcade Fire's Funeral sessions. Not only does such embellishment gild the lily in an already crowded hothouse, but it dates the song five years. Possibly more distracting are the precious sleigh bells roped around "Run"'s neck and mixed too high. I think I speak for everyone when I say so soon after the holidays: I don't want to hear another goddamned jingle bell for at least 10 months.

But the album shakes such shackles often enough to maintain an atmosphere of warm intimacy. Bulat's shown an affinity for gospel in the past, covering Sam Cooke's "Touch the Hem of His Garment" live, and I had to doublecheck that the soul-baring, organ-burred album closer, "If It Rains", isn't a traditional praise song (nope, Bulat wrote it). Because her voice, all on its own, sells the material with such bolded, exclamation-pointed certainty that she might as well be singing amens. ---Amy Granzin, pitchfork.com

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