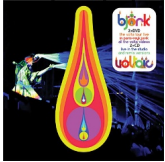


Björk - Voltaic (2 CDS) [2009]

Written by bluelover

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 23:12 - Last Updated Saturday, 23 July 2016 16:36

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Disc 1: Voltaic Live At Olympic Studios, London

1. *Wanderlust* 05:47
2. *Hunter* 04:19
3. *Pleasure Is All Mine* 03:21
4. *Innocence* 04:00
5. *Army Of Me* 04:20
6. *I Miss You* 03:31
7. *Earth Intruders* 03:52
8. *All Is Full Of Love* 04:05
9. *Pagan Poetry* 05:15
10. *Vertebrae By Vertebrae* 05:09
11. *Declare Independence* 04:18

Disc 2: Voltaic - The Volta Mixes

1. *Earth Intruders (Xxxchange Remix)* 04:38
2. *Innocence (Simian Mobile Disco Remix)* 07:47
3. *Declare Independence (Matthew Herbert Remix)* 05:23
4. *Wanderlust (Ratatat Remix)* 05:26
5. *The Dull Flame Of Desire for girls* 06:19
6. *Earth Intruders (Lexx Remix)* 06:41
7. *Innocence (Graeme Sinden Remix)* 04:32
8. *Declare Independence (Ghostigital Remix)* 02:51
9. *The Dull Flame Of Desire for boys* 05:25
10. *Innocence (Alva Noto Unitxt Remodel)* 06:16
11. *Declare Independence (Black Pus Remix)* 08:47
12. *Innocence (Simian Mobile Disco Dub Remix)* 07:46

Following the less than stellar 'Volta', I approached Björk's live adaptation of her 7th album with caution and with lower hopes than of her other works. Surprisingly, 'Voltaic' has surpassed expectations. The live recording from Olympic Studios consists of material from half of 'Volta' and songs from her previous albums as far back as 'Post', and brings a fusion of her iconic, electronic sound with her recent brash experimentation with brass instruments to create a very unexpectedly enjoyable performance.

A refreshing aspect of 'Voltaic' is the differences with its material's studio counterparts, warts and all. In comparison to Björk's near flawless voice on her studio albums, this live performance misses the mark ever so slightly, and slightly must be stressed. There's a little twinge of disappointment listening to 'Wanderlust' and 'Earth Intruders' in that Björk tiptoes around some of the high notes; although this is probably for the better, as the result may have been a safer choice than the catastrophe in missing an unreachable high note. Yet there are precious moments in this album where her voice really shines; evident in the highs hit in the lines 'how Scandinavian of me' and 'he makes me want to hand myself over' from 'Hunter' and 'Pagan Poetry' respectively, and her powerful, gravelly attitude in her voice in 'I Miss You' and 'Declare Independence'. Despite these differences in Björk's vocal range, there are more notable differences in the timing in certain songs. The takes of 'Vertebrae by Vertebrae' and 'I Miss You' are the main culprits in that the vocals are phased from their studio counterparts, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. It could be that Björk forgets her cue and tries to regain her place in the song, or that she's intentionally freestyling due to her creative nature in an attempt to be refreshingly unpredictable - I like to think that it is the latter. On the whole, the vocal performance in the album still remains very impressive, and I find that her unpolished voice in 'Voltaic' shows a more human side to Björk than her studio performances have done. And thankfully, 'Voltaic' is untouched by the tragic voice of Antony Hegarty that plagued and ruined potentially great songs on 'Volta'.

The selection of songs in 'Voltaic' effectively represents the broad spectrum of Björk's work in both aspects of discography and emotion. From the bouncy 'I Miss You' from 'Post' to the haunting 'Vertebrae by Vertebrae' from 'Volta', there are very few bases left uncovered in this live album. Due to 'Voltaic's proximity to the release of 'Volta', the performances of songs from that LP are naturally very similar in their sound, with only subtle differences between the studio and live versions; the most notable instrumental change being the alternate bridge shoehorned into the end of 'Earth Intruders', which is rather quaint. Perhaps the greatest aspect of the album is the adaptations of Björk's earlier work; where 'Pagan Poetry' remains relatively unaltered, songs like 'All Is Full Of Love', 'Army Of Me' and 'Hunter' adopt the brass sections to replace certain synthesizer and string lines brilliantly. Unfortunately not all songs benefit from this change, as an unpleasantly sounding organ, that may as well have come from a child's Fisher Price keyboard, replaces the vocal backing in 'Pleasure is All Mine' and lurks in the middle of 'Hunter'. The biggest surprise in this album is 'I Miss You', where you're lulled slowly in by a soft reed-sound and smacked in the face with an intensely heavy bassline - I dare say that I prefer this adaptation to the original. Despite the hiccups of some of the instrumentation, it is more

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than made up for in the bass and percussion throughout the album. From the hectic percussion of the chorus in 'Wanderlust' to the crushing bass and heavy drum beat of 'Declare Independence', these parts of instrumentation in 'Voltaic' are solid from the beginning to the very end.

In essence, this album showcases the very best of Bjork's history and fuses her older, iconic sounds with her recent experimentations in music. Setting aside a few minor vocal and instrumentation mishaps, the performance as a whole is an excellent and enjoyable experience - 'Voltaic' is what 'Volta' should have been. --- JJKeys, sputnikmusic.com

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