

La Bâtie

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Festival de Genève batie.ch

Joan Shelley ^{US}

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La Parenthèse/Nyon



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Une orfèvre folk : Joan Shelley a ce talent rare de créer des morceaux dépouillés hors du temps. Son minimalisme musical cache toutefois un pouvoir : celui d'interroger un genre musical que l'on croit figé dans ses codes. Habituellement calfeutrée dans son studio au Kentucky, ce petit joyau s'est récemment exilé sur une île grecque pour travailler son cinquième album éponyme paru ce printemps. De retour dans son Bluegrass State natal, Shelley s'est associée pour la première fois à un producteur en la personne de Jeff Tweedy, du groupe culte Wilco. Une véritable révolution pour cette artiste discrète, quasi absente sur le web, seulement entourée de son compagnon Nathan Salsburg à la guitare et de James Elkington au clavier.

Un secret bien gardé à découvrir de la meilleure des façons : sur la scène intimiste de la Parenthèse.

En partenariat avec La Parenthèse

www.joanshelley.net

Joan Shelley

Joan Shelley quickly followed her acclaimed 2014 album *Electric Ursa* with *Over and Even*, a quieter, more contemplative set recorded in her home state of Kentucky. It was an album of the year at *NPR Music* and in the *Los Angeles Times*, and was given 4 stars in *Rolling Stone*, who called it “a masterfully turned set of folk reflections.” Shelley made the record with guitarist Nathan Salsburg, recording the bulk of the tracks over just two days. She has since toured the US and Europe, and will release a new album in 2017. Her latest release is the 2 song 7” single “*Cost of the Cold*” b/w “*Here and Whole*”.

Shelley’s music has never been experimental, at least in some bleeding- edge sense of the word. And she’s comfortable with that, proud of the fact that her simple songs are attempts to express complex emotion and address difficult question about life, love, lust, and existence itself. During *The Push and Pull*, for instance, she precisely captures the emotional tug of war as two people struggle to codify a relationship, her voice perking up and slinking down to illustrate the idea. *For Go Wild*, she wrestles with principles of independence and dependence, forgiveness and freedom, her tone luxuriating inside the waltz as though this were a permanent state of being. These are classic ideas, rendered brilliantly anew.

But in their own personal way, these songs are experimental and risky, built with methods that pushed Shelley out of the comfort zone she’s established on a string of records defined by a mesmerizing sort of grace and clarity. The shifts are not so much major as they are marked, suggestive of the same steady curiosity and rumination that you find in the pastoral pining of *If the Storms Never Came* or the subtle romance of *Even Though*. From genesis through gestation and on to execution, then, these songs document transitions to destinations unknown.

“I don’t have a concept, and I don’t know the meaning until much later. Whatever I am soaking up or absorbing from the world, there will be songs that reflect all those thoughts,” Shelley says. “I keep my songwriting alive and sustainable by trying to be honest about how it came out—these are all its jagged edges, and that’s what it is to be human.”



Over and Even

Joan Shelley's album, *Over And Even*, was written in the back of an abandoned beauty parlor on the island of Thessaloniki. The whole thing had something to do with Vashti Bunyan. That's what Joan told me, but Joan Shelley is a poet, so she makes things up.

In a small, dark room that smells of expired hair-do chemicals, there is talk of hypnosis. All the windows are blacked out. "Look into my eyes." White walls are blinding in the ancient sunlight. A bowl of oranges shines like solid gold, waiting for you. There is a small classical guitar, a sunburn, and a key that turns a lock, and songs come pouring out.

Maybe the Greek deal was really about Leonard Cohen. That's Joanie's jam: songs wide open enough to let the wind blow the curtains around, and solid enough to hang a ton of heartache on. She writes smart, beautiful songs full of poetry, history, mystery and nature. Like all the best sad songs, they will make you cry. Then they will drag you outside and leave you flat on your back, staring up at the stars.

Joan lands on a note like a laser beam on a diamond. Colors fly around the room, and her voice bends between them. People say her voice reminds them of Sandy Denny. It's more than the vocal range. It's a quiet power that draws you in. Maybe *Over And Even* wasn't written last winter on a Greek island. Maybe these songs were written a hundred years ago in a farm house somewhere in Kentucky. That's where Joan is from, and that's where she and guitar player Nathan Salsburg recorded all the basic tracks live.

All the people who played on Joan's new record - and Daniel Martin Moore who recorded and engineered it - are friends. That comes through somehow in the sound of the album. Will Oldham [might prefer to be called Bonnie «Prince» Billy?] and Glen Dettinger are genius harmony singers. They leave the perfect amount of space for microscopic shifts in Joan's voice, without sacrificing their own awesome idiosyncrasies. Nathan Salsburg's guitar follows every twist of the melody. When the song breaks your heart in two, Nathan is there with a high E-string to sew it back together.

Joan Shelley's voice flows out like a river. It never travels in a straight line. It follows bends and curves carved by history. We are all lucky just to be swept away, and go with her wherever she's going.

Infos pratiques

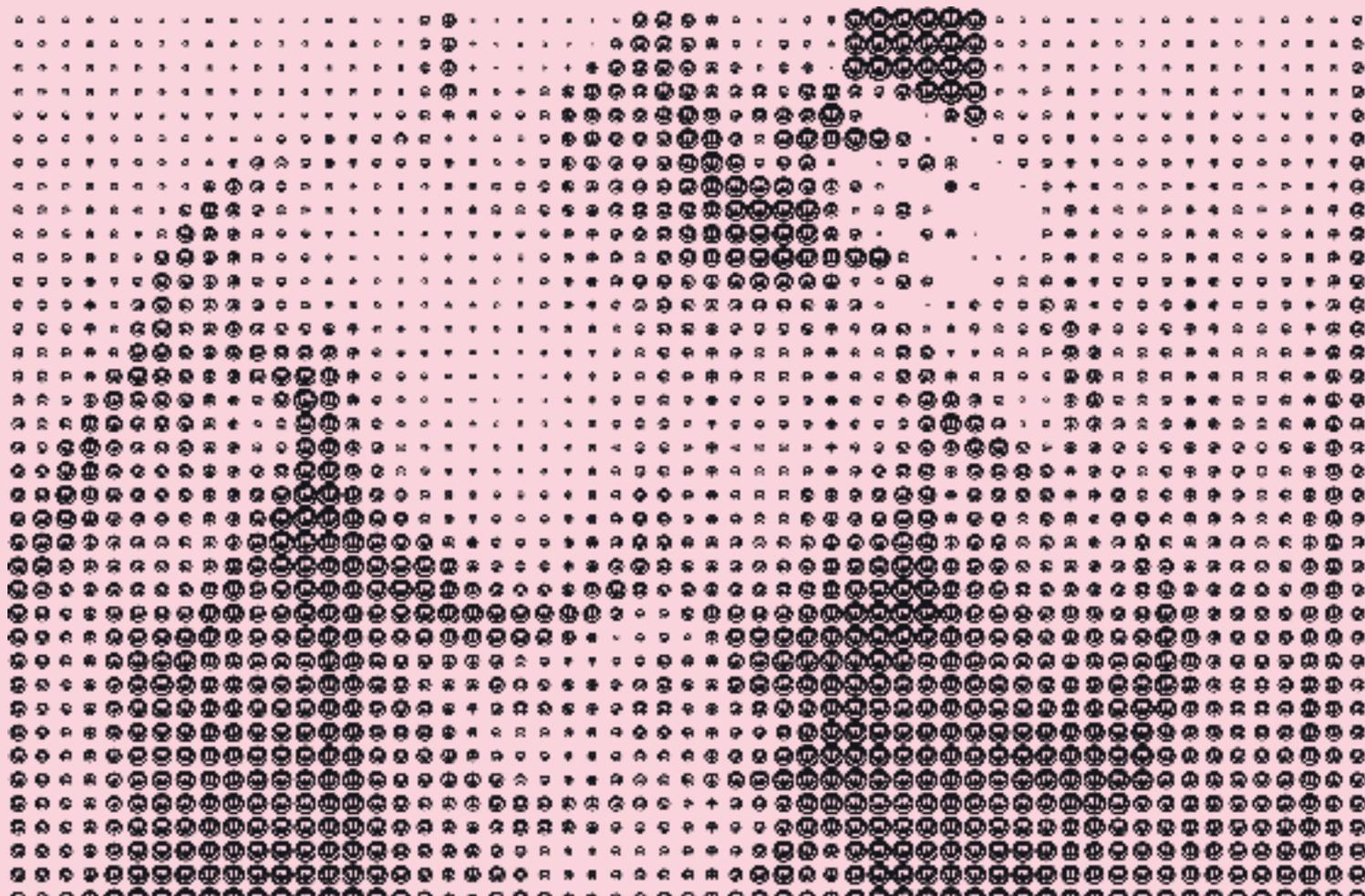
Lieu

La Parenthèse/Nyon
Grand-Rue 22B / 1260 Nyon

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Rue de Carouge 52 / 1205 Genève
billetterie@batie.ch
+41 22 738 19 19



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Contact presse

Camille Dubois
presse@batie.ch
+41 22 908 69 52
+41 77 423 36 30