



Theresa Andersson

Melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre; these are the traditional building blocks of pop music. Yet although you will find them in abundance on Hummingbird, Go!, the new album by Theresa Andersson hardly sounds like conventional pop. That's because the New Orleans singer-songwriter chose to approach her craft from different perspectives before she even began composing. "I stopped thinking in terms of traditional songwriting," Andersson explains. "I worked on shapes, forms, and textures, scents and colors. Elements which are more earthy and organic inspired me." She would walk along the Mississippi River, or relax in her garden. As ideas emerged, she caught them in her butterfly net or rather, on her laptop and let them converge, then blossom.

Produced by Swedish songwriter and recording artist Tobias Froberg (who also helmed The Last Tycoon for Peter Morn, of Peter Bjorn and John fame), and featuring lyrical contributions from poet Jessica Faust, Hummingbird, Go! evokes a distinctly unique universe via its inventive songs. From the funky backbeat, pizzicato plucking, and vocal leaps of "Birds Fly Away," to the smoldering "Locusts Are Gossiping," with its interwoven vocals as haunting as any Bulgarian choir

and percussive clicking reminiscent of chattering insects, each cut vibrates with polychromatic detail.

Three very different geographic locations played pivotal roles in the genesis of Hummingbird, Go! First and foremost is Theresa's kitchen, where she not only recorded the demos, but, ultimately, the finished album, too. Working alone on the former, she took a D.I.Y. approach to creating sounds to match what she heard in her head: The vibraphone on "The Waltz" is actually soda pop bottles filled with varying amounts of liquid, while the slide guitar textures on "Hi-Low" were coaxed from her primary instrument, violin. Mouth percussion doubled for drums. A classical guitar, tuned down, stood in for conventional bass.

"I did all this crazy stuff," she continues. "Instead of a keyboard, I filled up wine glasses with different amounts of water, and rubbed the rims, to get different notes; I'd seen a clown do that when I was a kid." Even the room itself is audible, particularly on the vintage R&B of "Introducing the Kitchenettes." "The kitchen sounds amazing, it has wonderful, natural reverb," Andersson admits.

Her adopted home, which she moved to at the age of 18, also infused the record with special attributes. "When I first came to New Orleans, I really felt something inside of me was awakened." Like most residents of the Big Easy, Andersson is a music lover, steeped in the vintage sounds that have made the city

famous. As a performer, her resume includes dates with Dr. John, the Neville Brothers, Betty Harris, and members of the Meters. "All of that has filtered into me," she observes. "You can't help it when you're here." Listen closely to the aforementioned "Birds Fly Away," and at its heart, you will hear a sample of renown New Orleans drummer Smokey Johnson, one of her favorites. Regional legend Allen Toussaint even dropped by, ferried in his champagne-colored Rolls Royce, to perform on the bonus track "Now I Know."

And yet, while living and making music in her kitchen, and throughout New Orleans, Hummingbird, Go! also brought Andersson full circle, back to her childhood home: The Swedish island of Gotland, in the Baltic Sea. It began when she noticed a small ad for a performance by Frberg at a New Orleans club; with a name like that, she reckoned, he had to be Swedish. "I went to see him play, and it was like I'd found my brother." Not only did they click musically, and personally, they discovered he came from Gotland, too. His father had even been her music instructor at one point. Via Tobias. Andersson found herself plugged into the current wave of Scandinavian indie pop. Consequently, not only is Andersson joined by Norwegian artist Ane Brun for the bittersweet duet "Innan du gr," but the final album was mixed by Linus Larsson (Peter Bjorn and John, Mercury Rev) at his studio in where else? Gotland.

While mixing the record in Sweden, Andersson also needle felted 1,500 individual CD jackets for the teaser EP "I the River." This daunting craft project offers another example of her highly integrated aesthetic. "My mother has always been creative, with sewing and making things," Theresa reveals. "She has a spinnery that makes yarn from the local sheep. And that is something else I really brought into this record; I'm fascinated with textures, and love the feel and look of things. When you color wool, the final results depend on how you sort your natural colors to start. It's the same in music."

Despite initial plans to use "real" instruments, outside musicians, possibly even a recording studio, in the end Andersson and Tobias made Hummingbird, Go! entirely in her home, with no outside performers (except Toussaint and Brun), and the same homemade sounds that graced the original demos. As a result, Theresa had to find a suitably unique way to perform these pieces live, too. The solution? A one-woman band set-up, using two looping pedals and a variety of effects.

With her toes turning knobs, as her hands strum guitar or bow a violin, and singing with a charismatic smile that belies her intense concentration, Andersson's performances are little masterpieces of functional choreography. Working out a single arrangement can take upwards of two months. Inspired in part by the

puppet theater of Chicago's Blair Thomas and Company, her shows provide daredevil thrills for Andersson and her audience alike. "The crowd are as excited as I am," she admits. "There is definitely that feeling of, 'Oh my God, is it all going to fall apart?'"

In the late 19th century, linguists minted a word, synesthesia, to describe the effect of two or more senses crossing wires; when textures register as colors, sounds as fragrances. The term could have been coined for Hummingbird, Go! Like Keren Ann, Feist, and Jane Siberry, Theresa Andersson maps out musical terrain all her own, while simultaneously beckoning listeners to come explore, too. Kaleidoscopic as it is, her music may not inspire critics and fans to come up with wholly new words, but Hummingbird, Go! will nevertheless demand that they flex their imaginations to describe it just as Andersson did to make it.