

Mira Calix

Eyes Set Against The Sun

WARP CD

Mira Calix's third solo album opens with such a perfectly pitched pair of tracks that, at first, it seems as though she may have set even herself too tough an act to follow. "Because To Why" combines a low, keening violin, Woodbridge School Junior Choir and samples of snow melting into rivulets into a raw, tidal folksong of delicious contrasts. "The Stockholm Syndrome" then adds more conventional Warp ingredients, such as muscle set against a faltering, plucked motif and Calix's brittle, world-weary vocals.

Far from being an anticlimax, the rest of the album soon reveals itself to be the white to the opening's yolk, more understated, yet part of a unified work constantly cycling between textures, sound sources and moods: the choir and Calix's own voice, The Britten-Pears Orchestra and a bamboo xylophone, tracks both brief and lengthy, troubled times and calmer reflection. Even the title has its own, deliberate breathing space. If anything, it's this unforced arrangement, rather than the nature samples or wooden instruments, which are the true 'organic' qualities of *Eyes Set*. It also proves once and for all that 'organic' doesn't have to mean soft and cuddly, as off-kilter piano rhythms and a sense of unease abound. This peaks with the 11 minute "The Way You Are When", where strings plucked in the mischievous spirit of mid-90s Aphex Twin soon succumb to background murmurs, interference and a noisy catharsis that turns out to be the xylophone literally falling apart.

Yet as much satisfaction comes from focusing on the briefer interludes: the layered metal-tapping of "A Cereus Night"; "Protean", where a field trip recording of birdsong duets with a studio-based pastoral theme, or the return of the children's choir for a parting shot that's both an echo of and enticement to return to the beginning.

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