

BETH JEANS HOUGHTON & THE HOOVES OF DESTINY

YOURS TRULY, CELLOPHANE NOSE MUTE

This long-awaited debut from the eccentric folk chanteuse is a flawed gem, but it sparkles nonetheless



It's four years since Beth Jeans Houghton appeared on our radar with EP 'Hot Toast Volume One'. A single, 'Golden/Nightswimmer', followed. And then...

we waited. A good portion of 'Yours Truly...' will be familiar to fans: 'Nightswimmer' pops up, while 'Dodecahedron', 'Liliputt' and 'Sweet Tooth Bird' have been around online for a while now. So is it finally time for Houghton to outshine the Mumfords and Marlings? Or, in trying to polish her long-awaited debut to perfection, has she got lost in the small details?

One thing's for sure: this isn't the same Beth Jeans that we heard on 'Golden'. Produced by Ben Hillier, of Blur's 'Think Tank', 'Yours Truly...' owes more to the North American alt.folk of Owen Pallett and Joanna Newsom than the proto-Communion lot Houghton got lumped in with following her EP. 'Humble Digs' nods a head to Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* as Houghton sings of a frugal love to a marching beat, the chorus changes and well-placed strings imagining Owen Pallett's *Final Fantasy* transplanted to Newcastle. It's reflective of the album as a whole, in which every other second demands a double take, revealing a snag that went unnoticed on first listen.

On 'Dodecahedron', Houghton's voice cascades sweetly, but the song's beauty is shattered when you realise she's singing about night terrors. As the middle eight approaches, a male member of the Hooves Of Destiny begins to harmonise, and Houghton goes up an octave, like the choirgirl meeting the priest. It's spellbinding.

'Atlas' has touches of Los Campesinos! to it, as Houghton sits with her boy, "dissecting the Atlas for places we've been/Your list is longer, but you've got more years on me" (her current beau is Anthony Kiedis of Red Hot Chili Peppers, so that last bit's certainly true). But without a doubt, 'The Barely Skinny Bone Tree' is the stand-out here. Opening a cappella, Houghton's voice treated slightly, it sounds familiar yet mysterious, telling of "a baby boy, with eyes of mercury" with echoes of Vashti Bunyan or, more recently, Smoke Fairies.

Things begin to crumble towards the end. 'Liliputt' skitters without destination and 'Franklin Benedict' blends into the cluttered 'Carousel', in which clown laughs are sampled above harpsichord lines. 'Nightswimmer' is incongruous next to the more recent tracks. It's not perfect. It's not even close, but, like its title, 'Yours Truly, Cellophane Nose' has an intimate, unusual charm that's all its own. *Ailbhe Malone*

DOWNLOAD: 'Atlas', 'Veins', 'The Barely Skinny Bone Tree'

