

Jenny Hval

The Practice of Love

Start time: 8pm

Approx. running time: 75 minutes, no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Arwa Haider talks to Jenny Hval about writing her sixth album as a collaboration.

The Practice Of Love, the seventh album from Norwegian vocalist/writer/musician/producer Jenny Hval, is an intoxicatingly multi-layered work that seems to envelope you from its opening notes. It is intimately earthy, ecstatic, and sometimes unsettling; it arguably evokes a vivid sense of performance – so it's perhaps surprising to hear that Hval wasn't thinking about live sets at all when she was originally creating the album.

'When I wrote and recorded my previous album, *Blood Bitch* (2016), I had thoughts about scenes and movements and colours all the time, but for this one I was only thinking of words and some kind of fog,' says Hval. She adds that when she did begin to shape tonight's live set based on *The Practice Of Love*, its abstract, collaborative themes ('communication, community, writing, hands and earth') flowed quite swiftly: 'Developing the piece has been a bit like dreaming, but with others.'

The voices on *The Practice Of Love*, in addition to Hval's own beautifully lucid expressions, include vocalist/keyboardist Vivian Wang (formerly of Singaporean experimental rockers The Observatory), French musician Félicia Atkinson, and Australian folk/classical artist Laura Jean; they emerge, interlaced through the track-listing, and collectively on the exhilarating 'Six Red Cannas'.

'I am drawn to people I like, so collaborations usually happen in a very organic way,' she explains. 'I work with friends and people I admire in their own right because of their ideas. Which is why I sometimes have very eclectic bands or instrumentation. Like, I have two people doing performance and one person handling all instruments, or I have someone recreating synth effects with vocals. For me, it's about the person and their ideas.'

Hval's musical language (as a solo artist, a group player, or under pseudonyms such as Rockettothesky) has always been expansive. On *The Practice Of Love*, electronic dance and trance music elements give tracks such as 'Ashes To Ashes' an unusually clubby, catchy hook; at the same time, she draws out the elegiac quality of these contemporary styles.

'I have always had a complex relationship with the '90s electronic scene,' she admits. 'I was a bit too young for the rave scene, and also at the time I was drawn to other things... Looking back, though, there are a lot of cross-overs from rave to dance pop hits of the mid-'90s, which I loved. At the time, I wanted to be a dancer, and then I suddenly got into music and books.'

'It's interesting to see, looking back, how I went from listening to N-Trance to Deathprod within the timespan of two years when I was a teenager. I went from being a euphoric listener to an investigator of sound (and language). I think both of these aspects are important to me now. It's the mix of these elements that I find interesting. And hopefully this mix creates a very personal language.'

Hval has previously described *The Practice Of Love*'s deeply atmospheric environment as 'a fantastical forest': an imaginative leap away from the album's real-life backdrop ('I record in a small space above a bike shed in a backyard in Oslo'). Still, that fantastical realm flourished as Hval began to experiment with new writing, at the same time that her co-producer Lasse Marhaug was planning his first film:

'I wrote something, suggested by Lasse, that was going to be about a sleep ritual in the forests of northern Norway, forests that were never claimed by a Christian king back when the country was 'christened',' says Hval. 'Vivian Wang recorded this narrative text for the film, but the film was never made. I fell in love with the recording and created 'Lions' [the opening number on *The Practice Of Love*]

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in response. I wrote a lot about forests elsewhere, too. I guess I take an interest in nature mainly through writing. That sounds a bit sad, doesn't it?

Not at all; on *The Practice Of Love*, it sounds like a thrilling rush to the head and the heart – and at tonight's performance, its narratives, soundscapes and fables spring to life through a blend of music from the album with guest performers including Wang, Orfee Schuijt's dance choreography and film visuals.

Hval deliberates: 'I think the main focus of the show is "craft" and "hands". "Making stuff". Or,' she decides: "'making stuff together"'.

Performers

Jenny Hval
Håvard Volden
Jenny Berger Myhre
Natali Abrahamsen Garner
Vivian Wang
Orfee Schuijt
Espen Reinertsen

Presented by the Barbican in association with Bird on the Wire

The Practice of Love is co-produced by Black Box teater and Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival



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