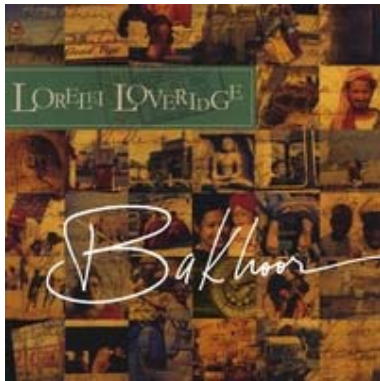


Lorelei Loveridge - BAKHOOR (Orderly Bazaar Records OBAZ. 0101-2)



Here's a young lady with a really interesting history... Born in Edmonton, Canada, brought up on country music then exposed to Hindustani and Cuban musics, eventually releasing an album (Endless Contradictions) back in the mid-90s.

1996 saw Lorelei setting off on her own personal spiritual journey, travelling to many countries and landing in Saudi Arabia, where she lived for 11 years (and survived all manner of adversities); since returning to this country she's based herself in Manchester.

Album number two, *Bakhoor*, is an aromatic creation that's aptly named (after the scented woodchips or incense bricks used to perfume Arab houses and special occasions such as weddings), containing as it does exotic flavours of the musics of the various countries Lorelei has visited in addition to her own well-developed folk-pop sensibility.

The record, which has been four years in the making, showcases Lorelei's special brand of music, what she herself calls "roots rock ethnic jazz fusion", in which she weaves her personal traveller's tales and gives voice to her own thoughts and feelings by evoking "landscapes of imagination and experience" with the assistance of co-producer/multi-instrumentalist Rob Hewes and a brilliantly-managed support crew that includes (among a cast of seemingly thousands!) guitarists Brian Hughes, Louis Sedmak, Harry Manx and Lester Quitzau, vocalists Usha Gupta and Anna Beaumont and tabla player Sanket.

Although various album sessions took place in India, Canada and Saudi Arabia, Lorelei and Rob have together achieved a splendidly unified overall sound - clear and detailed, with plenty of depth and presence, enabling a myriad of world music influences to percolate through the general texture that's best described as sophisticated and classy pop-roots.

Of course, due prominence (though not over-prominence) is given to Lorelei's amazing voice: assured and confident in all modes of expression, and often very haunting indeed. Her vocal delivery (like the musical backdrop) embodies multicultural elements (even some Tibetan overtone chanting on one song, though it's barely clockable!) alongside more conventional phrasing that's sometimes reminiscent of Tracy Chapman or the jazzier side of Joni Mitchell even. And her songwriting is informed as much by her

personal experiences as by her keen political consciousness.

All of the album's 15 tracks are self-penned (only the closing mantric "club mix" We Party On is a co-write), and they range from the Bollywood-inspired Oh, India (a yearning for spiritual escape) to the sardonic, biting condemnation of warmongery Not Like Us, the love-song to Nepal, the troubadour-folk of I Need To Go, and the poignant Some Of Us (which cries out to be covered by an act like While & Matthews).

She also questions the principle of martyrdom against the quest for justice (Home Is Where The Heart Is), and considers the deeper implications of events she experienced in Mecca (Is It Deep Enough?), while What You've Seen is dedicated to the survivors of the 2004 tsunami.

The disc is extremely well-presented too, with a lavish 24-page booklet containing copious liner notes and full song lyrics: its unquestioned classiness matches the recording itself.

Lorelei has much to say, and she says it with integrity.

So, after all this praise, why then do I emerge from my listening feeling not completely won over by this disc? (And this feeling persists even after a number of playthroughs.)

It could be that in going for the smooth, glossy and fully accessible production values, Lorelei is underselling, or at least diluting, the true power of the thoughts and feelings she's conveying through her songwriting. I'd be interested to hear how Lorelei comes across as a solo performer in a live setting...

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