



Another dimension: The Icelandic singer's new disc includes sounds from an organ connected to an iPad and PlayStation-controlled 'gravity harps'

Björk is crazy, like a fox

Her new app-heavy CD proves she's still the craftiest kid at the school of pop

MANY HAVE TRIED—and failed—to figure out the thinking behind singer-songwriter Björk Guðmundsdóttir's sometimes magical, sometimes questionable career moves. In 1994, for instance, Madonna asked the Icelandic talent to collaborate on the pop queen's sixth studio album. Björk repeatedly declined Her Madgesty's requests but, as a consolation, sent Madonna one song—which ended up becoming the most obscure hit of her career: *Bedtime Story*.

Six years later, after a critically praised performance in the movie *Dancer in the Dark*, for which she won the best actress prize at Cannes, Björk announced that she would never act again. Most confounding of all is her walk on the red carpet at the 2001 Oscars: she managed to stupefy Hollywood by wearing a dress that resembled a stuffed swan. Joan Rivers demanded Björk be “put into an asylum.” (Ellen DeGeneres further mocked the singer by wearing a version of the frock when hosting the Emmys later that year.)

Her latest disc, *Biophilia*, to be released Oct. 11, maintains Björk's status as the weirdest—and craftiest—kid at the school of pop. “I feel technology has finally caught up with humans,” explains the 45-year-old via phone from New York. “That’s why I got this guy in Iceland who makes instruments to make me a small pipe organ that I could connect directly into an iPad touch screen. He reworked my old celesta [a keyboard that resembles a glockenspiel in sound] this way—

which made composing much more tactile and impulsive.”

As well as the celesta, she asked Andy Cavatorta—who created musical robots at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—to make four “gravity harps” (three-metre-long pendulums, each with a harp at the end) to be played alongside a wooden organ, modified to be operated by Björk with a PlayStation controller. “The common complaint for using all these electronic gadgets to make music has been that they are quite cold and clinical and not spontaneous or flexible. I wanted to change that.”

To further up the ante, Björk brought in five different teams of app developers to take her songs to “a fourth dimension.” Part of the process involved meeting with Apple—whom she needed onside to help sell and promote her project via iTunes, as she is shrewdly releasing the apps independently.

The apps—there are 10, one for each song—are housed in a larger app, which is designed as a galaxy (each song being a constellation of its own). When users touch each designated song “sphere,” they can play games and instruments and alter Björk's *Biophilia* tracks at whim with a few finger points.

This new-found course of music making ties in to Björk's desire to teach her trade. “I’ve always had the thought of opening up

a music school in my head, so I thought of this as an educational project—to introduce children to musicology,” she says, noting that the sold-out \$675 ultimate art edition of *Biophilia* comes with 10 chrome-plated tuning forks that are adjusted to the tone of a *Biophilia* track, covering a complete octave in a non-conventional scale. “I kept thinking of a child holding a touch screen and playing with the songs, learning as they go.”

Björk says her long-time friendship with the late clothing designer Alexander McQueen helped inspire *Biophilia* (she sang *Gloomy Sunday* at his memorial service, wearing one of his wood-and-feathered gowns). “He was very brave,” she says. “We got on well because

he wouldn't compromise his vision.”

Nor will Björk, who says she won't back down if people aren't receptive to *Biophilia*'s unconventional concept. “I've never been one for hits anyway,” she says, pointing out that

the lyrics of a new track called *Moon*—including the line, “Best way to start anew is to fail miserably”—reveal a personal mantra.

“Big failure has happened to me but with it came great results. It was when I lost my voice, a nodule on it. I had to cancel concerts. I ended up working with one of the world's greatest vocal experts, doctors, teachers and voice osteopaths. In the end, I just got a stronger voice because of it.” **ELIO IANNACCI**

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