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A Cosmic Soul Queen Finds Her Sound

Prince collaborator Lianne La Havas' bass-heavy grooves recall vintage Aretha Franklin

Lianne La Havas *Blood* Nonesuch ★★★½



When we first met Lianne La Havas, on her 2012 debut, she was a South London 22-year-old coming of age, electric guitar in hand. Plucking out rhythm lines that sounded like bossa nova gone rockabilly, she sang about love's ups and downs in a voice that moved from gold to gravel in a blink, intertwining strength and vulnerability.

On her second album, she still strums and fingerpicks like an alt-folkie, but that new sound you hear is bass, and plenty of it. Standouts like "Unstoppable" and "What You Don't Do" make the case for La Havas as a cosmic soul queen, recalling the daydream music Aretha Franklin made in the mid-Seventies. Many will attribute the change to Prince - La Havas performed with him on his last album and on *SNL* - but for all the low end, these grooves are almost untouched by funk. Her music remains her own; when she sings, "All I've ever known is how to be alone," on "Tokyo," she's contemplating her independence as much as lamenting her solitude. It doesn't all work (see the mushy "Midnight"). But when it comes together - as on the bumping ode to Jamaica "Green & Gold," and the spare "Wonderful" - this album demands, and rewards, all the attention you can give it.

KEY TRACKS:
"Wonderful,"
"Unstoppable"

JOE LEVY