



## Björk's Biophilia

Björk's whole career has been a quest for the ultimate fusion of the organic and the electronic. With her new project Biophilia – part live show, part album, part iPad app – she might just have got there

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**Michael Cragg**

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Iceland's singer Björk performs during the Rock en Seine music festival, 26 August 2007 in Saint-Cloud  
Photograph: Afp/AFP/Getty Images

For Björk, technology, nature and art have always been inextricably linked. "In Iceland, everything revolves around nature, 24 hours a day," she told *Oor* magazine in 1997. "Earthquakes, snowstorms, rain, ice, volcanic eruptions, geysers ... very elementary and uncontrollable. But on the other hand, Iceland is incredibly modern; everything is hi-tech." The Modern Things, a track from 1995's *Post*, playfully posits the theory that technology has always existed, waiting in mountains for humans to catch up. In fact, Björk has always seemed like an artist who's been waiting for technology to catch up with *her*. Finally, it seems to have done so.

When Apple announced details of its iPad early last year, it acted as a catalyst for what would become *Biophilia*, Björk's seventh and most elaborate album, the title of which means "love of life or living systems". Along with a conventional album release, complete with music videos – at least one of which has been directed by Eternal Sunshine's Michel Gondry – *Biophilia* will also be released as an "app album" and premiered as a multimedia live extravaganza at MIF.

Biophilia for iPad will include around 10 separate apps, all housed within one "mother" app. Each of the smaller apps will relate to a different track from the album, allowing people to explore and interact with the song's themes or even make a completely new version. It will also be an evolving entity that will grow as and when the album's release schedule dictates, with new elements added. Scott Snibbe, an interactive artist who was commissioned by Björk last summer to produce the app, as well as the images for the live shows (which will combine his visuals with National Geographic imagery, mixed live from iPads on the stage), describes how Björk saw the possibilities of using apps, not as separate to the music, but as a vital component of the whole project. "Björk's put herself way at the forefront here by saying, 'We'll release this album and these apps at the same time and they're all part of the same story.' The app is an expression of the music, the story and the idea."

For one song, *Virus*, the app will feature a close-up study of cells being attacked by a virus to represent what Snibbe calls: "A kind of a love story between a virus and a cell. And of course the virus loves the cell so much that it destroys it." The interactive game challenges the user to halt the attack of the virus, although the result is that the song will stop if you succeed. In order to hear the rest of the song, you have to let the virus take its course. Using some artistic license, the cells will also mouth along to the chorus. It's this determination to fuse different elements together – be it juxtaposing a female choir from Greenland with the bleeps and glitches of electronic music pioneers Matmos during the *Vespertine* tour, or meshing soaring strings and jagged beats on the *Homogenic* album – that helps explain the power and success of Björk's collaborations.

Talking to Pitchfork back in 2007, Björk outlined the importance of being "really loyal and precious about collaboration", taking her time to find the right people and remaining faithful to previous collaborators – the whole Biophilia project, for example, is being art-directed by M/M (Paris), with whom she's worked since 2001's *Vespertine* album. "I don't think you should even go into [a collaboration] unless you think it's the absolute right thing to do, and that you have equal things to give each other," she added.

"Björk is the master collaborator," confirms Snibbe. "She has a really strong vision, but she's really open and welcoming to ideas from her collaborators."

Another of Björk's Biophilia cohorts was an Icelandic organ maker called Björgvin Tómasson, who received a call from her last summer. Following a meeting in Iceland, Tómasson was given the job of creating two brand new instruments: one, a small organ controlled via MIDI equipment, allowing Björk to play it using a computer; the other, an old celeste that was rebuilt to incorporate the sounds of a traditional gamelan (Björk refers to this new hybrid instrument as a "gameleste"). "Prior to this experience, I would never have thought of the possibility of doing anything like this to a 100-year-old instrument," Tómasson says. "A new instrument was created in that moment."

In a career noted for its constant evolution, Biophilia represents Björk's biggest leap forward. While her previous work has focused mainly on the inner self and the minute details, this album and app project explodes the scope on to the macro level, taking in the entire universe and drawing far-reaching parallels between the ever-evolving technological landscape and the natural landscape around us. It proves once again that Björk is an artist who's unafraid to step into the unknown •

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# **BJÖRK: BIOPHILIA**

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