

## KRIS DELMHORST - *LONG DAY IN THE MILKY WAY* LONGFORM BIO (2020)

It was a beautiful afternoon in June of 2019, and Kris Delmhorst was sitting in her backyard in western Massachusetts, idly playing guitar and listening to the bluebirds sing. Out of nowhere, the kernel of a new song arrived: an existential pep talk. These had been showing up a lot lately. This one counseled persistence: *Keep on pushing and you'll find a way through*, the tagline repeated.

"The fact that I kept unintentionally coming up with songs that said, in one way or another, "Hang in there" - it revealed to me how much anxiety was lurking beneath the surface of daily life," says Delmhorst. "Climate change, political turmoil, the endless treadmill of outrage and heartbreak in the news..." The flowers around her may have been in bloom, but there was a darkness bubbling up from somewhere urgent. The songs were no accident - they held up a mirror that allowed her to get at the truth.

"As these songs arrived, they brought words of encouragement I realized I myself needed to hear," says Delmhorst. "Not in a shallow way, like 'Everything's fine.' They felt like a friend's voice saying, 'Look, I get it, life gets incredibly dark. And you need to find a way to stay connected to the beautiful parts.'"

Then she realized: that might just be what other people need to hear right now, too.

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*Long Day in the Milky Way*, out August 14, is the result. Delmhorst's eighth full-length, it finds a gifted lyricist at the height of her craft and working with a strong sense of purpose. World-weary but hopeful, the songwriter responds to a time of global anxiety with a missive straight from the chest.

Recorded in a nearly 300-year-old farmhouse in Maine with a slew of trusted collaborators, it's an immersive record packed with lush instrumentation - piano, guitar, trumpet, upright and electric bass, harp and violin. At the center are voices: Delmhorst's nuanced, emotive vocals at the helm, with supporting harmonies from a trio of singers providing a steadying and amplifying presence throughout.

Delmhorst's lyrics, meanwhile, find solace in close attention to small moments: a river flooded with snowmelt, lightning reflected on the ocean, bees asleep in a flower. What's on offer is not an escape from turmoil but a companion for it, a hand reaching through the chaos. Delmhorst invites the listener to look both out and in, to experience the full kaleidoscope of life's contradictions - persistence, frustration, heartbreak, love - and to locate the grace within the struggle, the beauty in the dark.

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You don't have to believe in anything mystical to feel the molecules around you shift just a little when you listen to Kris Delmhorst. Her songs transmute like breath turning to mist on a cold, clear night; the inner made visible. Her voice holds memories, like smoke lingering in a sweater from last summer's campfire. Twining through every layer of consciousness, her music weaves together the magical and the mundane with the strange logic of dreams.

Called "bold and brilliant" by the *Boston Globe* and "transcendent" by the *LA Times*, Delmhorst is a veteran of the independent Americana world, with vivid songwriting, soulful delivery, and intricate arrangements that stretch the limits of genre. She's been compared to artists as various as Anaïs Mitchell, Lucinda Williams, and Juana Molina - though she cites Rickie Lee Jones, in all her fearless joy and complexity, as an artistic north star.

Born in Brooklyn, Kris Delmhorst grew up a student of classical cello and an avid musical omnivore, absorbing everything from pop radio and rock to heady jazz and obscure blues. A post-college stint living on a farm in Maine led her to pick up upright bass, then fiddle. She taught herself guitar while nursing a bad ankle sprain in a cabin with no electricity, kept practicing while working as a cook on a schooner, and began writing songs while teaching outdoor education to fifth graders on Cape Cod. The Boston open mic scene in the '90s provided the rest of the young singer-songwriter's education, and the ensuing two decades yielded seven full-length records and two EPs, as well as near-constant touring and collaborations.

*Long Day in the Milky Way* marks a surefooted stride forward for Delmhorst: a cohesive distillation of her artistic sensibilities. Writing most of the songs at a retreat in New Hampshire surrounded by a trusted community of fellow songwriters, she designed them with her friends' participation in mind, building in load-bearing vocal parts that define the album's sound. For some tracks, she arranged vocals on the same day the song was written, sitting in a circle with backing vocalists Rose Polenzani, Rose Cousins, and Annie Lynch on the floor of an old boathouse, giving the record a deeply collaborative feel that's evident from the first note.

"I've always been a solitary writer, but over the years, developing songs with these women has become a treasured creative space," says Delmhorst. Having them there in the studio let me sing from a place of feeling supported, lifted up. It was so liberating to hear their voices alongside mine in real time, to not have to carry the song alone."

"*No shame in the long game, look around and see that time is all we got,*" she sings in "Wind's Gonna Find a Way," an album-opener full of subtle swagger, as background vocals and strings coalesce into a weather system all their own - sinuous cloud formations and bright glints of sunlight. "*Slow hands in the shadowlands, patient fingers working at the patient knots.*"

On "Horses in the Sky," Delmhorst describes the way pain can build upon itself: "*Now it is a fever, now it is a raging sea / never leaves your body, never gives a moment's*

peace.” In response, the backing singers form a unified entity like a Greek chorus: “*We all know / We all know the way.*” At the chorus, the song opens up - warm, expansive, a bright breath of open air: “*Horses in the sky, roll on by,*” all the voices sing together, urging the listener to see the possibility of hope amid hopelessness. “*Don’t you close your eyes, watch ‘em fly...*”

“I thought a lot about landscape, and about fabric,” says Delmhorst of her arrangements. There are few solos on *Long Day in the Milky Way*; instead, Delmhorst and her band craft a world out of subtle variations that coalesce into larger patterns. “I was thinking about the variations in a handwoven cloth, or in a forest. It called for collective-minded, flexible, non-ego-driven players.”

To that end, Delmhorst reached out to a versatile team of multi-instrumentalists, including Ray Rizzo (drums, percussion), Jeremy Moses Curtis (upright and electric bass), Dietrich Strause (piano, Rhodes, acoustic, vibes, trumpet, valve trombone), Sam Moss (electric guitar, violin), Màiri Chaimbeul (harp), whose subtle interweaving is almost telepathic, instruments trading lines fluidly and finishing each other’s sentences.

Nowhere is the collaborative dynamic more evident than on a warm, Wurlitzer-driven cover of Rickie Lee Jones’ “The Horses,” the familiar pop song making itself right at home alongside Delmhorst’s songs of solace. “*If you fall I’ll pick you up,*” goes the refrain, as she sings lines from 1989 that ring more poignantly than ever in 2020: “*And if the situation keeps us separated, you know the world won’t fall apart / and you will free the beautiful bird that’s caught inside your heart.*”

Sitting in her backyard that blue-sky day last summer, Kris Delmhorst couldn’t see the future. She couldn’t know about the coming pandemic and the havoc it would wreak, or the headlines that bring fresh troubles daily. But she knew about sorrow. She knew about doubt. And she knew how deep unease could lurk under a seemingly placid surface. The particulars change and change again, but the uneasy coexistence of darkness and light is eternal, and inevitably sometimes becomes too much for any one person to hold.

And that, of course, is what other voices are there for: to take you by the shoulders and remind you to go outside and look at the sky. To lend strength. To form a circle around you, to sit down on the floor, to acknowledge our common struggles. To say: *Keep on pushing and you’ll find a way through.*