



AMIINA

Sólrún Sumarídadóttir, María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir, Edda Ólafsdóttir and Hildur Ársælsdóttir – four Icelandic women in their mid twenties collectively known as **amiina** – first decided they wanted to write music together in 2004. They gathered together every last instrument they could find and piled them into their car. They then filled every available bit of space with food. This, they maintain, was a very, very important part of the process. But it was also very nearly the act that prevented the birth of **amiina**. Their overloaded car was unable to struggle up the steep mountainous incline to the studio they had chosen, and had a local farmer not towed them to their destination with his tractor **amiina** might never have come to be.

KURR – the band's debut album, named after the sound that birds are said to make in Iceland – makes it clear that they have not learnt their lesson from this experience. **amiina** are the kind of band about whom it could be said, almost literally, that they employ pretty much everything but the kitchen sink. And though it's true that they started with individually defined roles as a string quartet this was never going to be how they would set about making a record of their own. In **amiina** there are no specific assignments: no official bass player, drummer, guitarist or singer.

So with no method, no restrictions and no remit **amiina** simply dreamt it up. It shows: **KURR** is undeniably dreamlike. It succeeds in being both highly evolved and yet childishly simple, much like Raymond Scott's famous *Music For Babies*. There is something deeply nurturing about **amiina**, but there is also something enigmatic and mysterious. Much of this is undoubtedly due to the fact that alongside more traditional instrument like guitars, keyboards and mandolins **KURR** features a saw, Celtic harp, metalophones, singing wine glasses, xylophones, glockenspiels, harmonium, bells, table harps, kalimbas, cuadro, celest, harpsichords, Rhodes piano, synthesisers, trumpets, trombones, bass clarinet, drums, cello, violas and violins. Oh, and a computer.

"It came as a total surprise to us that the record wasn't completely schizophrenic," says **Sólrún**. "We looked at each song as a separate character and we never thought any of them would sit at a bar together. But then it was pointed out to us that it actually did make sense. And we thought, 'Oh, OK, this is a cool record!'"

amiina are, you see, anything but a collective of self-indulgent musos in search of the lost chord. Classically trained they may be, masters of composition they definitely are, but purveyors of meandering cosmic slop they are not. Every **amiina** tune is a masterpiece of delicate, intricate collaboration, each note finely tuned and precise, each melody haunting and unforgettable. There's an almost telepathic quality to their relationship together that allows them to instinctively understand exactly where they wish to take their work, much as twins often finish each other's sentences. But perhaps this is the result of the amount of time which they have spent together: long before the birth of **amiina** the four of them collaborated as a string quartet, having met in the '90s whilst studying at Reykjavik College Of Music. They then went on to collaborate with a number of artists, most notably playing around the world as Sigur Rós' touring foils, with whom they have also recorded for a number of years. It was as a result of this partnership that their music was first given the space to breathe in front of 3,000+ audiences across the world as they opened for Iceland's biggest band. Such baptisms of fire require true courage and conviction, even more so for music this intimate, but these are things that **amiina** possess in bulk.

Listening to **amiina** feels like entering a whole new world, one of wide-eyed mystical innocence and naïve untainted beauty. It's like stepping through the back of the wardrobe into Narnia, or



through the looking glass into Wonderland. Listen to opener *Sogg*, its glockenspiels crisscrossing like ripples on a pond in a formal Japanese garden, or the Eno-esque chamber pop of *Rugla* – one of the few tunes to display **amiina**'s string quartet roots – which evolves into a cute singsong-y rhyme that masks noises that sound like quizzical rodents. Elsewhere, on *Seoul*, a musical saw is used to generate almost Clanger-like communication over a backing redolent of drunken insects, though this too changes into the fast pattering of the kind of colourful bells you might buy at the Early Learning Centre. On *Glamur* you can almost hear the slow ratcheting of clockwork cogs inside slowed down music boxes, while the accordion of *Lori* sets a rainy vision of Piaf's Paris against a John Barry-esque harpsichord and a soft quasi-military tattoo drumbeat (courtesy of Sigur Rós's Orri Pall Dyrason). *Hilli*, meanwhile, combines a rustic mandolin and heavenly choirs to create a lullaby of such calm that it could stop wars. And that's the secret of **amiina**. Their music genuinely is so special – so ineffably charming and infused with a sense of cosmic magic on a tiny local scale – that it can improve the quality of your life.

The unfamiliarity of their sound may be puzzling for a moment, but it's utterly distinctive, gently revealing vibrant colours, a playful imagination, and an unusual warmth and sensitivity. Precise it is – so much so that some have mistaken it for electronic music – but clinical it is not. One only needs to see the faces of the four musicians as they perform to realise that the joy it projects is completely human. Leaping from 'instrument' to 'instrument', from one side of the stage to the other, they smile frequently despite their immersion in songs whose otherworldly magic they themselves can't quite seem to believe they have unearthed. It's this music and these exquisite performances, both full of personality and charm – something **Sólrún, María, Edda** and **Hildur** also have in abundance – that have already won them a sizeable audience across the world. And it's this audience that looks set to swell with the release of *KURR*, a record so sublime and mesmeric that one cannot help but fall under its spell.

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