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Sweden

Sofia Härdig: *The Storm In My Head* (Filthy Records)

Although she tours and records as **Sofia Hardig** and the Needles, I'm including Hardig here because she's an amazing songwriter and because she released TWO CDs this year—*The Storm In My Head*, and a raw but potent collection of home-made demos called, naturally, *The Demotapes Album*. That one IS billed as just Sofia, so she's in! Ms. Hardig is one of the true "rocker chicks" of Sweden, and bears definite stylistic similarities to PJ Harvey, Chrissie Hynde and Patti Smith. Her electric guitar, which she seems to enjoy playing ragged, fuzzed-up chords on, is never far from her side. She has a propensity for starting songs with sparse electric guitar alone (or maybe with a bit of percussion) and then kicking things into full-tilt rock when you're not fully expecting it. Pretty cool. On "Backwards Into The Night," she repeats a synth bit that sounds like a xylophone and parallels the main melody, while Hardig shows her affection for early Patti Smith in her vocalizing. She's great at darkening her delivery and alternating between tough and tender, sometimes going from one to the other in a flash. On "Bring It Home," over bass and raw synth she tells a lover she's waiting at home for him—"I know you told me so/It's not a lie"—and you get the clear impression the guy will be in BIG trouble whether he comes home or not. The song is essentially two chords with some variable distortion, and Hardig works it for max emotion. "Water Surrounds Us" is an introspective Pretenders-like ballad. "Falling" requires only a minute and a half to kick some serious ass, with Hardig playing the same chord over and over and delivering a classic rock & roll chorus. Two of the album's most fascinating songs are "I Hurt," which gains power from raw, unadorned emotion. Hardig starts with an unsteady, anguished vocal as though she's in a drunken, self-destructive mood—then just when you get a little worried, she kicks the song into a carefully controlled, full-tilt rocker. It's awesome! So is "Krimes," which features Hardig counting "1,2,3,4" over and over on one track and singing an impressively unsettled low vocal on a different track. What's especially striking about Sofia Hardig is how she employs interesting little twists within the often predictable realm of gritty guitar rock, and commandeers the genre like she's got it all to herself. Nervy, sensual and self-assured, Hardig deserves to be widely heard, as she's far more interesting than many others mining this same stylistic territory. **OR: 7. OM: 2.**

www.sofiahardigandtheneedles.com

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