

Renee Cologne – Bio

It all started with \$32 and a dream.

Walking to school with her newly purchased acoustic guitar, Renee Cologne began her life trajectory in a small classroom learning how to play “House of the Rising Sun”. She began playing and singing for anyone who would listen, from her Girl Scout meetings to the local old folks home: one thing was clear, she had found her calling.

For twenty years, multi-instrumentalist Renee Cologne has been living that calling. Drawing comparisons to Bjork, Imogen Heap and Jane Siberry, her music has been described as “majestic and dramatic, painted in stunning, bold strokes on an over-sized canvas” (Womenrock.com). Utilizing a palette of lush vocals, soaring strings, horns and electronic elements, she creates what she calls “soundscapes” – aural rooms with layer upon layer of texture that intend to offer a listener surprise and reward upon repeated listens.

Cologne first burst onto the downtown New York scene in the mid-1990s, performing at top venues including Joe’s Pub (at the Public Theater), Fez, The Cutting Room, and CBGB’s (RIP), to name a few. In 1994 the New York Foundation for the Arts awarded her their prestigious Artists’ Fellowship grant for Music Composition. This enabled her to build her first home studio, start her own independent record label called *Backdoor Records*, and release her debut CD entitled *Aromatherapy*, because, as she says, “How can you not call your first album *Aromatherapy* when your last name is Cologne?” She toured in promotion for her own music, as the drummer in the all-girl all-star band Big Panty, and as a background singer and guitar player for the inimitable MeatLoaf. These travels took her all over the world and to exotic places like Slovenia, Mexico and the UK performing with MeatLoaf for their Hyde Park “Party in the Park”, before hundreds of thousands of people.

As a composer and singer, she has written or performed for stage, dance and film. Her voice has been heard on many commercials, including M&M’s, McDonald’s, TJ Maxx, and many others. And her collection of a cappella choral pieces entitled *Hymns to a Hungry Planet* was a nod to her passion for the Bulgarian Women’s Choirs.

But it was a chance collaboration with a mutual friend, that opened up a whole new world. “Derrick Smit showed up at my loft in the old Wonder Bread Factory in Hoboken, armed with an arsenal of electronics that made my head swoon. I had no idea what I was in for,” Cologne shared. She watched him work, watched him make sounds, cut them up and manipulate them. “I was blown away. I wanted to learn how to do that”. And so she did. She hunkered down listening to Aphex Twin, Bjork, Portishead, learning the studio as another instrument, and step by step, started to put together what became, *The Opposite Of* (2002). Playing many of the instruments herself, and honing her skills as a programmer and producer, *The Opposite Of* was a beautiful, complex and densely orchestrated record, featuring strings, horns, industrial beats and soaring melodies. *Collected Sounds* said of *The Opposite Of* “There are records that are immediately arresting. This is one of them.”

2007 saw the release of *Rock & Roll Housewife*, which dealt with the everyday life of a housewife, sort of – what to do with the FedEx man, how to buy appliances at Sear’s and when it is time to resort to yelling at the top of your lungs. Though on first glance the album title and some of the song lyrics have a humorous bent, there is depth and heartbreak just below the surface. The album garnered accolades and was included on KGRL’s List of Influential CD’s and found Cologne chosen as THE ARTISTS FORUM “2007 Artist of the Year”.

It was while on tour with MeatLoaf, that she found herself in a hotel room in Colorado with a mobile recording rig set up dabbling with Joni’s Mitchell’s song “Both Sides Now”. “I remember reading through the lyrics and being hit by how much their meaning had changed for me from when I first heard the song years ago. It was that space in between that I became fascinated with”.

It is from this “space in between” that Cologne’s newest record *Coverlings* was born. “My father was a big music lover and hi-fi junkie. In one afternoon, he would play everything from Portuguese Fado songs to Loretta Lynn to Stevie Wonder. As a kid, they all just flowed into one and another”. Pouring through the many songs, bands, artists and songwriters that had influenced and resonated with her over the years became a new kind of obsession. She was well underway recording one song after another before she even realized she was amassing a collection, in essence, a new record. “It was impossible for me to narrow down the songs I loved. So, the songs picked me.”

Donning yet another hat, Cologne took a turn at being a curator, and created a new kind of soundscape - a “coverling.” The title came to her early on: there was something alien about the word but also very human, as in earthling vs. alien; as in human acoustic sounds (voice, the sound of a bow on a string, a French horn) meeting alien machine sounds (beats, created odd sounds, synths). In paying tribute to these varied artists, Cologne interprets, deconstructs, and then reconstructs to create lush, ethereal covers that are both comfortingly familiar and strikingly alien.

Coverlings will be available from Backdoor Records on January 4, 2019.