

Say Goodbye, by Liz Janes

reviewed by [Steve Thorngate](#) in the [March 22, 2011](#) issue



In Review



Say Goodbye

By Liz Janes
Asthmatic Kitty

Liz Janes calls her new album a soul album, but don't take this at face value. Her résumé—as a solo artist and in support of Sufjan Stevens and others—leans toward avant-folk. So it's no surprise that this isn't a straightforward salute to Memphis. Still, *soul* is as good a word as any for this quiet, strange but above all groovy little record.

A lot of the pleasure comes from Janes's rhythmically intense singing. She begins the blues-tinged ballad "Anchor" accompanied only by an acoustic guitar bass line, her voice carrying the piece for a whole minute before the band comes in. Similarly, on "Trees"—the album's high-energy point—she starts with just the vocal over long electric piano chords.

The album is full of vintage electric piano, played with an outside-the-box edge. Classic soul horn lines intrude delightfully into the low-key palette. The drums and upright bass recall Calexico or early Van Morrison as they move freely from subdued to jazzy to scattershot. A couple of experimental tracks function as welcome breaths between the song-driven material, not distractions from it.

What is distracting is the lyrics, some of which feature religious themes that are neither subtle nor evangelistic but just awkward. A melancholy love song that might be about God ("I Don't Believe") is a tired idea. Other songs offer theological truisms as their main hooks: "We are just creatures / We have been created" ("Trees"); "Time and space are constructs of grace" ("Time & Space").

Elsewhere, however, Janes's writing is more artful. And words aside, *Say Goodbye* is one of the most pleasantly unusual records to come out in some time.