



GLOBAL NEWS READING: Was Kate Bush the last of Britain's **avant-garde** hitmakers?

A **remastered** set of her early albums is a **reminder** that the experimental can, *in the right hands*, be **commercial** too

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Here is a piece of **trivia** *that is not really trivial*: the first female **solo** artist *to have a record shoot straight to number one on the British albums chart* was Kate Bush in 1980. It was “Never for Ever”, her third LP. Today, women **claim** the **spot** more frequently and some of the **boldest** musicians, *artistically speaking*—Janelle Monáe, Lorde, Beyoncé—are among the most popular. *Four decades ago*, Kate Bush stood alone in that **regard**.

*At a time when many of the nation's biggest acts **err** on the side of **blandness***, it is worth recalling *how an artist of Ms Bush's **sheer** strangeness became one of the*

*outstanding stars of the day.*¹ Like David Bowie before her, she took a *fascination with literature, theatre, dance and the **avant-garde** into the mainstream.*² She was unusual from the beginning, and only became more **radical** as she went on.

She fought her record company's choice of a **debut** single, *opting instead for the billowing "Wuthering Heights", which carried her vocal range, exaggerated mannerisms and love of dramatic narrative to number one in the singles chart.*³ She **disregarded** many of the usual **strategies** of music promotion, *most notably live performance (Ms Bush undertook one **series** of concerts in 1979, and had her second in 2014).*

A remastered **edition** of her first seven albums, *issued in two box sets*, offers the opportunity to follow *once more* the uncommon **course** she took. *Over the 11 years in which they were released*, Ms Bush developed *from* a teenage **ingénue** *exploring the edges of the singer-songwriter style into* an artist who seemed to have devised her own musical language, *exploiting new sampling and editing technology while delving back into traditional music for her sources.*⁴

She was also capable of **extraordinary insight**: it is almost **frightening** to think *that* Ms Bush **wrote** the lovely, **low-key** "The Man with the Child in His Eyes" *when she was 13* and **recorded** it three years later. So **tender** and powerful is its understanding of love and relationships.⁵

After the success of her first album, "The Kick Inside" (1978), Ms Bush's follow-up,

¹ [At a time [when many ...]], it is worth recalling how....

² she took **A** into **B**.

³ ..., which carried **A** to **B**.

⁴ Ms Bush developed from **A** into **B**, [*exploiting new ... [while delving...]*].

⁵ (its understanding of love and relationships) (is) (so tender and powerful).

“Lionheart”, *released the same year*, felt like something of a hurried repeat job.⁶ The two years she spent on “Never For Ever” resulted in a richer, more mystical, more **sonically** and **thematically diverse** record. It was an immediate **smash**, aided by two hit songs—“Babooshka” and “Army Dreamers”—which *even in an era of inventive singles* stood out for their atypical subject matter and arrangements; one a **cautionary** folk tale, the other an understated **lament** *for a dead boy-soldier*.

“The **Hounds** of Love,” a **masterpiece** *released* in 1985 and *divided* into a pair of song **suites**, is a rich, beautiful and near-perfect record, and **utterly sui generis**. *Wildly adventurous in its songwriting, its musical structure and its use of the studio*, it became Ms Bush’s biggest **original album**. The first side was **stuffed** with such **stunning** songs as “Running Up That Hill” and “Cloudbusting”, but it is the even more wonderful second side that represents Ms Bush’s artistic **peak**. “**The Ninth Wave**”, *the tale of a person overboard in the sea trying to survive the night*, is pure magic, and a triumphant **vindication** of the **narrative** mode she loves.⁷

Ms Bush had already set the **bar** so high *that even she, let alone her contemporaries*, would *thereafter* struggle to **surmount** it. Yet at no point *has* she ever become predictable, nor *has* she lost her creative ambition. *As the British music mainstream plays things ever more safe*, Ms Bush stands as a reminder of what might be achieved by taking risks.

⁶ [After the success of...], Ms Bush’s follow-up, “Lionheart”,...

⁷ (“The Ninth Wave”, [the obliquely ...]), (is) (A, and B).