

A Fine Frenzy

Alison Sudol inhabits a vivid imaginary world populated by siren songs and sailors, sightless creatures and fragile fallen eagles, a place where almost lovers and hopeless dreams are bid a melancholy musical farewell. And on *One Cell in the Sea*, Sudol allows the listener inside that often-fantastical world, revealing her inner life via songs Harp magazine praised as "fraught, haunted and beautiful."

One Cell in the Sea is the 14-song debut from A Fine Frenzy, the lineup fronted by 22-year-old singer/pianist Sudol. While A Fine Frenzy's songs are ethereal, the musical and lyrical vision is as thoughtful, brainy and delightful as Sudol herself. Born in Seattle and raised in Los Angeles, Sudol is an only child of divorced parents, finding solace in music that ranged from Ella Fitzgerald to Elton John, from Motown to the melodic melancholia of new global British bands like Aqualung, Radiohead and Keane. The diatonic minimalism of Philip Glass and transportive allure of Icelandic music like Bjork likewise thrilled and informed her sensibilities. Sudol's literary tastes are equally eclectic, including the graceful prose of Jane Austen and the quirky, surreal tales of Lewis Carroll and C.S. Lewis. Then there's the band name, nicked from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ("The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; and, as imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.") Sudol's songs embody the qualities of her influences: "In Carroll's 'Through the Looking Glass,' from one moment to the next you don't know where you are, but at the end it all makes sense," she observes. "You can be in the strangest situation, but it seems normal. I love incorporating that sort of twisted logic into my writing."

Some of her earliest and most beloved memories are woven into the songs on *One Cell in the Sea*. "I remember really responding to natural phenomenon," she recalls. "I'd get so excited about rain, snow, birds... and I vividly remember our yellow piano." That early inspiration is described in the lush and lilting "Come On, Come Out," as Sudol sings, "watching the sky, you're watching a painting / coming to life, shifting and shaping."

The story of A Fine Frenzy has been shifting and shaping for several years, beginning when Sudol was 18 and penned 'Almost Lover,' which would eventually become the first single from *One Cell in the Sea*. A strong student, Sudol graduated high school at 16 and formed a band shortly after. At 18, she left the band and turned to the piano for comfort and inspiration. Evenings became her favorite time, airing her deepest thoughts and liveliest imaginings as she played and wrote for hours on end. Though live performing is her passion, Sudol kept A Fine Frenzy under the radar in Los Angeles. "Sure, it's easier getting recognition playing the club scene than it is hanging around in your living room,"

she acknowledges with a laugh, "but I wanted to keep it quiet and let the music speak for itself." It didn't stay quiet for long, however, and it was in that very living room where Virgin Records CEO Jason Flom came to see Sudol—and partake of her mother's cookies and A Fine Frenzy's equally delicious songs.

Entering a Burbank studio near her home in late 2006 with British producer Lukas Burton (who has written and produced for Paul McCartney, James Blunt and Dido), A Fine Frenzy began work on their Virgin Records/Capitol Music Group debut. Sudol and frequent touring bandmates Stephen LeBlanc (keyboards) and Daxx Nielsen (drums) were joined by stellar players for the recording. Contributing to the CD were the album's co-producer, bassist Hal Cragin (Iggy Pop, Rufus Wainwright), along with award-winning string arranger David Campbell (Beck); guitarists Dave Levita (Alanis Morissette, Sinéad O'Connor) and Michael Chavez (John Mayer, Five For Fighting); and drummer Joey Waronker (Beck, R.E.M., Smashing Pumpkins). And by early 2007, *One Cell in the Sea* was born. Sterling songs include "Near to You," a spare, yearning yet hopeful tune about a new love in the shadow of an old ("I'm battle scarred / but I am working oh so hard to get back to who I used to be") and the rollicking dynamism of "Lifesize." Those are balanced beautifully by the delicate, lingering vulnerability of the first single, "Almost Lover," to the bop-along but soaring "Think of You," just a few gems that populate the captivating and hypnotizing *One Cell in the Sea*.