

EMOTIONAL MOTION SICKNESS

Phoebe Bridgers
sings the songs
that make you cry



Los Angeles songwriter **Phoebe Bridgers** is emailing me from Europe, riding in a van somewhere between Germany and the Netherlands. “I can see miles and miles of forest,” Bridgers writes, “and every once in a while a big open field.” It’s a lonely scene that sits nicely alongside Bridgers’ lonely music.

She is in Europe and will soon be in Eugene, supporting her solo debut, *Stranger in the Alps*, an album of sad and acoustic lo-fi indie music landing somewhere folksier than Elliott Smith but just this side of roots music.

Eugene audiences might recognize Bridgers. She

performed with Portland folk-rockers Blitzen Trapper at an early tour stop the band made in town.

Bridgers admits she’s a lonely person, but she’s not sure she’s any more or less lonely than anybody else. “It’s hard to gauge how lonely I am,” she explains, “compared to the average person. But I’m getting better at finding comfort in it: reading, taking walks, listening to records.”

And that particular sense of isolation, along with Smith’s hyper-confessional style, permeates *Alps*.

In fact, Bridgers calls the late Portland songwriter’s catalog untouchable. “No one really comes close,” she

says. “From the instrumentation to the lyrics to the way he recorded himself, it’s perfect.” Smith’s influence shows up elsewhere on *Alps* in the sweetly sad chord progression, harmonies and melodic structure of “Demi Moore,” a song whose sound owes just a little something to The Beatles.

Most of all, Bridgers is a storyteller. Over gently finger-picked acoustic guitar on album stand-out “Funeral,” Bridgers sings with raw veracity: “Jesus Christ, I’m so blue all the time.”

“Funeral” is about an experience we all have sooner or later: attending the funeral of someone our own age, bringing down that youthful sense we’re all going to live forever. “I’m singing at a funeral tomorrow,” Bridgers sings on the track, “for a kid a year older than me.”

She explains the song’s backstory: “A series of strange events led to me singing at a stranger’s funeral, and the experience made me confront my depression.”

Despite her dark subject matter, Bridgers recalls the innocent teen-pop idol Hilary Duff helping her discover a love for music. “I wanted to be her when I was a kid,” Bridgers says. “I wanted a headset microphone and a dress that turned into a pantsuit.”

Performing with Bridgers in Eugene is **Noah Gundersen**. He’s touring behind his latest release *White Noise*, an album of earnest, extroverted anthems. Gundersen’s clenched-jaw American rock vocals sound a little like Ryan Adams when Adams does the ’80s, but also a little like Bryan Adams’ own 1980s heyday.

Like Bridgers, Gundersen expresses big emotions, but over electric guitars and big sweeping, almost U2-like moods, he aims for the horizon. Bridgers feels content to sing the four walls of her bedroom as metaphor for her mind and her own claustrophobia. ■

Noah Gundersen and Phoebe Bridgers perform 9 pm Friday, Nov. 10, at Hi-Fi Music Hall; \$15, all-ages.

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