

## **Virus** **All Is Full of Love**

### **Björk**

**B**jörk is an Icelandic singer and songwriter who has shown remarkable staying power since gaining widespread attention in the late 1980s as lead singer of the alternative rock band The Sugarcubes. The Icelandic group was short-lived — it was formed in 1986, released its first acclaimed album in 1988, and disbanded in 1992 — but it inspired international enthusiasm in those few years, thanks in no small part to Björk’s extraordinary vocal variety and expressiveness. She continued as a solo artist, and in 1993 she released her first solo recording, appropriately titled *Debut*. It would be the first of nine albums to date, the most recent being *Utopia*, from 2017.

Her discography has met with extraordinary success. Several of her albums have figured within the Top 20 in the *Billboard* charts, more than 30 of her singles have qualified for international best-seller lists, and in 2015 it was reported that her total record sales to date fell somewhere in the range of 20 to 40 million units worldwide. In the course of her career, her music-making has traveled through many styles, including punk rock, jazz fusion, alternative rock, electro-pop, EDM (electronic dance music), and IDM (intelligent dance music). Her songs have drawn from an eclectic array of other repertoires, from the jazz of Ella Fitzgerald to the traditional musics of Iceland, Greenland, Bulgaria, China, and Central Africa. Asked about musical influences, she told her biographer Mark Pytlik:

If I were to say who influenced me most, I would say people like Stockhausen, Kraftwerk, Brian Eno, and Mark Bell.

Family surnames do not traditionally feature in the Icelandic language. Instead, “last

names” are patronymics that typically change with each generation to reflect the name of a person’s father. Björk’s full name with patronymic is Björk Guðmundsdóttir, denoting “Björk daughter of Guðmund.” Growing up, she completed the full 10-year course of the Barnamúsíkskóli Reykjavíkur, the oldest and most distinguished music school in her country (which boasts an unusual density of music schools). As a student she studied piano and flute, and by the time she graduated, in 1980, she had developed strong interests in jazz, minimalism, and avant-garde experimentalism, in addition to classical music. But asked to pinpoint influences in her musical style, Björk insists that her inspiration is not limited to the work of earlier musicians. She told a Brazilian reporter in 1996:

I’m influenced by everything, by books, by the weather, by the water, by my shoes, if they’re comfortable or not. Everything. [Some] of it is music, but I think it is very important with people who are dealing with making music that they are not only influenced by music. ... It should be beyond style, beyond influence, it should be about pure emotion, and real life.

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### **In Short**

**Born:** November 21, 1965, in Reykjavík, Iceland

**Resides:** in Reykjavík

**Works composed and premiered:** *Virus*, in 2011; *All Is Full of Love*, 1997; both songs orchestrated by Hans Ek in 2016

**New York Philharmonic premieres:** these performances

**Estimated durations:** *Virus*, ca. 4 minutes; *All Is Full of Love*, ca. 3 minutes

In addition to singing, Björk has had an acting career, appearing in *The Juniper Tree* (1990) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000). For the latter, which was written and directed by Lars von Trier, she composed and produced the musical score, and was awarded the Best Actress award at the Cannes Film Festival for her performance.

*Virus* appeared on Björk's 2011 album *Biophilia*, in which the songs relate to nature. This is a love song, but the nature metaphor she employs is not a traditionally sunny one. Instead, it views a love relationship in terms of biological synergy, as a sort of parasitic attack of one organism on another — a liaison that encompasses both inevitable attraction and mutual destruction. In part, the song relates to Björk's own experience of being afflicted with candidiasis, a fungal infection of the mouth and throat. "It's like I have this new neighbor that I have to sort of learn to live with," she said. "And obviously you know this fungus is inside all of us and it's never about eliminating it. You have to kind of just live with it."

*All Is Full of Love* is the closing track from her 1997 album *Homogenic*. The album was in general an homage to Iceland and Norse mythology, although Björk created much of it while living in Málaga, Spain, where she reported that she was specifically inspired for this song by hearing birdsongs during a morning walk in April. It therefore concluded the rather dark album on a hopeful note.

**Instrumentation:** *Virus* calls flute and piccolo, oboe and English horn, clarinet and bass clarinet, bassoon and contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, crotales, marimba, orchestra bells, vibraphone, finger cymbals, sizzle cymbal, large and small bass drums, harp, celesta, and strings, in addition to the solo soprano. *All Is Full of Love* employs flute and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, bassoon (doubling contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, crotales, marimba, large cymbal, finger cymbals, sizzle cymbal, bass drum, harp, celesta, and strings, in addition to the solo soprano.

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## Polar Parallels



The arrangements of Björk songs performed here were made by Hans Ek (b. 1964 in Uppsala, Sweden), who has orchestrated and conducted music for numerous films and has arranged popular music for concert use. He has repeatedly worked as music director for the Polar Music Prize, a Swedish award founded in 1989 by Stig Anderson (manager of the band ABBA) and given each year to one classical and one "contemporary" musician. As it happens, both Björk and Renée Fleming have been recipients, the former in 2010, the latter in 2008. Fleming said of Björk:

Her originality is breathtaking. She just blazes her own path forward. ... Björk's openness of expression, and the creative coloring of her voice, the text and instrumentation, create a style that is uniquely hers.

*Björk, in a photoshoot for the album Biophilia, which included the song Virus*

# Text

## **Bjork's *Virus* and *All Is Full of Love***

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### **Bjork's *Virus***

Like a virus needs a body  
As soft tissue feeds on blood  
Some day I'll find you, the urge is here

Like a mushroom on a tree trunk  
As the protein transmutes  
I knock on your skin, and I am in

The perfect match, you and me  
I adapt, contagious  
You open up, say welcome

Like a flame that seeks explosives  
As gunpowder needs a war  
I feast inside you, my host is you

The perfect match, you and I  
You fail to resist  
My crystalline charm

Like a virus, patient hunter  
I'm waiting for you, I'm starving for you

My sweet adversary  
My sweet adversary  
My sweet adversary

### **Bjork's *All Is Full of Love***

You'll be given love  
You'll be taken care of  
You'll be given love  
You have to trust it

Maybe not from the sources  
You have poured yours  
Maybe not from the directions  
You are staring at

Twist your head around  
It's all around you  
All is full of love  
All around you

All is full of love  
You just ain't receiving  
All is full of love  
Your phone is off the hook  
All is full of love  
Your doors are all shut  
All is full of love!

All is full of love, all is full of love  
All is full of love, all is full of love