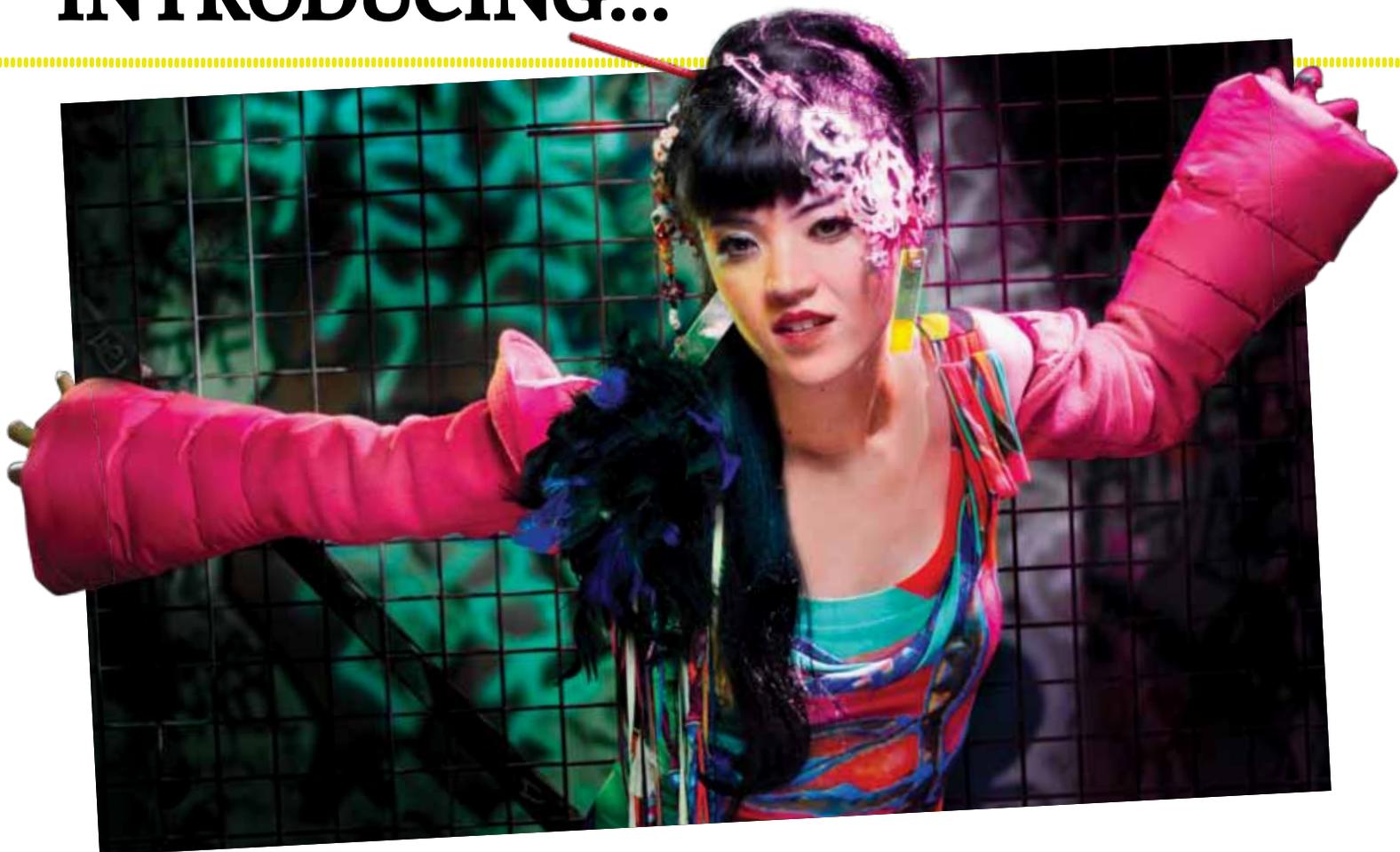


INTRODUCING...



MAÏA BAROUH

Alexandra Petropoulos talks to the singer and flautist who is re-rooting herself in the folk music of Japan

When Maïa Barouh first heard about the 2011 earthquake and nuclear accident in Japan, the singer and flautist found herself at a critical point in her musical career. “I lost a part of my innocence when I found out,” she says. “It was a big shock and I couldn’t really play music for six months because I felt naked. I had to stop and think about what my mission was.”

Born in Tokyo to a Japanese artist and a French *chanson* singer, Barouh spent her childhood travelling between the two countries and picking up various musical influences along the way, including a unique style of singing from Japan. “When I was touring with my dad when I was 18, we went to

this really small island in the south of Japan, called Amami Oshima. There they have a special singing technique.” It is a throaty singing that suddenly jumps into falsetto and is not dissimilar to yodelling or Iranian *tahrir*. “I didn’t really know any traditional singing at the time and when I went to this island and met a young singer, I was really impressed.” She started performing with musicians from the island as a flautist, but before long she started to teach herself the technique. “Rather than trying to sing it as they’re doing it, I wanted to find my own way to do it.”

Exploring her own unique mix of jazz, electronic music and various world influences she picked up from her travels, Barouh’s music thrives on blurring the distinctions between these seemingly different genres. Upon hearing the news about the earthquake and resulting nuclear disaster in Fukushima, she suddenly felt the urge to explore the music of Japan. “I thought about singing traditional songs from Fukushima and the north. It’s a music that is so powerful and rich, but we don’t know about it, even in Japan.”

Rooting herself more firmly in the traditional music of Japan, she started collecting folk songs from the north. “The traditional songs are peasant songs. There are no rules to the music, which has been transmitted orally over hundreds of years. It just has to be honest. I don’t want to make music with the brain because it’s something you feel.” Thus she has transformed songs like ‘Jongala’ (born out of a bloody territory war in the north of Japan) or ‘Kane Ren Ren’ (an Ainu folk song) into timeless odes to the region on her latest album, *Kodama*.

While rooted in the traditional, the album still features her creative mix of electronic sounds, which blend with the folk themes in such a way that reminds the listener of both the historical richness and future potential of a region that has been reduced to rubble. The title means ‘Echoes’ in Japanese, and suitably her music picks up on the regional echoes of the past and sends them out again to fall upon new ears. ♦

➤ **ALBUM** *Kodama* is reviewed in this issue, see p78