

SPOTLIGHT



Toby Butler, Liela Moss, Marc Sallis,
Olly Betts, Luke Ford

THE DUKE SPIRIT

A powerhouse band, a flamethrowing singer, a bruising album—and home décor too

LIELA MOSS IS COVERED IN PAINT. The Duke Spirit's lead singer is taking advantage of a lull in the group's tour schedule to take care of some decorating around her house in London. "You've got to keep things looking nice," she chirps in her clipped, melodious British accent. Few would guess that this cheerful, petite gal-about-the-house is currently one of rock's most compelling frontpersons, armed with a hurricane voice, smoldering onstage charisma and a well-known reputation for her ruthless approach to the tambourine. "I think I've used it to hide behind," she says with a chuckle. "Somehow having percussion meant that I was definitely involved in the band, even though I wasn't playing a plugged-in instrument. I've actually tried to reduce that because my right arm has a bulge and looks quite unladylike. I'm Popeye on one side, Olive Oyl on the other."

Too bad—Moss' ritual tambourine abuse is a perfect accompaniment to the roar of the Duke Spirit, which also includes guitarists Luke Ford and Toby Butler, bass player Marc Sallis and drummer Olly Betts. The group's third and latest album, *Bruiser*, further hones an already tightly focused sound. "We wanted to articulate ourselves more

clearly this time around," Moss says. "I like going through everything with a fine-toothed comb, creating space so that things can soar and sizzle. We shied away from that before because we were just having fun thrashing about, being a bundle of energy wrestling with our instruments."

The Duke Spirit has been "thrashing about" since 2003, when Moss, Ford and Butler met at college in Cheltenham. The trio moved 100 miles east to London, where they soon picked up Betts; Sallis joined in 2008. Moss' lyrics at first were a direct line to her reeling id, but now she prefers a "more storytelling" approach. "Things have changed on this record," she says. "I felt like I needed to step out of adolescence. I tried to write observations on this big journey I've been on, and to stop being so introspective."

With *Bruiser* due out in June and concerts scheduled through September, the Duke Spirit is already working on new material. "We tend to tour for a long time, and then you come home and you've got no new material," Moss explains. "So right now we're all about having an album finished and a stack of new stuff behind it as well, just waiting to come out."

—Chris Neal

