

The dream-rock band Belly blazed a bright trail in the '90s, releasing two albums full of taut, yet wondrous music that was memorable for its rumbling bass lines and insistent drumming as it was for its glittering riffs and airy vocals. Their 2018 release *Dove*, which was recorded with friend of the band Paul Q. Kolderie, places Belly back on that trail, bridging the gaps between reverbed-out bliss and spaghetti-western drone and muscular, hook-forward pop.

Belly came together in 1991, when vocalist-guitarist Tanya Donelly (Throwing Muses, The Breeders) began playing with brothers (and fellow Rhode Islanders) Tom (guitar) and Chris (drums) Gorman, as well as bassist Fred Abong. He left before the band's 1993 debut *Star* came out, and Gail Greenwood, then playing around Providence, joined. *Star* was a hit with critics and listeners alike, spawning the alt-radio and MTV staple "Feed the Tree." The band toured extensively behind the gold-certified album, touring with the likes of Radiohead, the Cranberries, and Pavement and playing a show at the Hippodrome in Paris where they opened for U2 and the Velvet Underground.

Belly opened 1994 with two Grammy nominations, scoring nods for Best Alternative Music Album and Best New Artist at that year's edition of the awards. That summer, the band began work on *King*, their harder-edged second album. Belly toured behind that 1995 release extensively, opening for R.E.M. in Europe and bringing along Catherine Wheel and Superchunk for the American tour; their last gig was in November 1995, and the band officially dissolved in 1996.

Since then, Belly's members kept busy, with Donelly releasing a string of hailed solo albums and touring with Throwing Muses, Greenwood performing with brash rockers L7 and revved-up punker Bif Naked, and Tom Gorman performing with fellow New England alt-rockers Buffalo Tom and Donelly's Throwing Muses partner Kristin Hersh before launching a photography business in New York with his brother. They had occasionally broached the topic of getting back together in individual settings; Greenwood and Tom Gorman separately collaborated with Donelly on her *Swan Song Series* omnibus.

The idea of a Belly reunion, though, gained serious traction a few years ago. "We had just gotten to the point where we were just missing each other, and missing the music," says Donelly. "The music I've been doing in the past several years has been very collaborative, which made me kind of homesick for Belly; I missed that sense of having a band."

Early rehearsals showed that Belly was still very much a unit, the years falling away as the quartet went to work on older material. "We immediately fell back into our original relationship and musical dynamics," says Donelly. "Just a lot of laughing—it felt like a real reunion in the best and truest sense from the first practice on. We had a bit of trepidation: 'Is this going to work?' But the first practice really set all our anxiety to rest."

Eventually, though, the band's members, who had collaborated sporadically in the interim, got the itch to bring new songs into their set as a curveball for listeners—and for themselves, too. "You almost want to put yourself in the deep end," says Chris Gorman. "That just seems to be the inclination for creative people—you never just want to feel comfortable. You're always going, 'Well, what's the part of the night that's really going to make me really, *really* nervous and freaked out?' And that usually is, 'Let's try a new song.' When it works, that's the most the rewarding moment in the night."

Belly previewed some of their new songs, including the prowling "Army of Clay" and the folk-tinged "Human Child," at their early reunion dates to effusive audiences. "The crowds have been amazing," says Donelly. "We've never really operated on a level before where live shows feel genuinely communal. We got such great feedback on the new stuff—people were just as enthusiastic about it," Donelly recalls. That handful of tracks blossomed into *Dove*, a dozen songs that nod to past glories while also showcasing the four members' growth as songwriters and musicians, adding dramatic flourishes like strings and vibed-out guitars to the group's already widescreen sound.

Belly recorded most of the rhythm tracks for Dove at Stable Sound Studios in Portsmouth, RI, vocals at Greenwood's home studio, and guitars and overdubs in Tom's and Tanya's home studios. The songs spun out of a new songwriting system that was necessitated by the four members' far-flung hometowns. "It required a lot of trust," says Donelly, "because we were sending raw snippets to each other—anything from 30-second pieces to full songs. Tom and Gail and I would send demos back and forth, and then Chris would add drums to whatever snippets he'd heard, and Tom would sew everything together. It would sometimes be a very circuitous route to a song, but it was really fun."

"All three of the songwriters were locked in and working in a way that complemented the others' strengths," says Chris Gorman. "Gail's writing was in top form. Tanya is able to make anybody's song her own—she's got that gift. And Tom has really honed his arrangement and production style."

The shimmering, expansive "Shiny One," which pairs dreamy vocal harmonies with urgent riffing and dramatic string flourishes, is one of the best examples of Belly's new process. "I have a lot of affection for that one," says Donelly. "It was the first completely collaborative song we've ever done—Gail wrote the riff and the chorus, Tom and I wrote the verse and bridge, Chris’s parts shaped the direction and vibe. When I hear it, I hear all four of us equally."

While *Dove*'s flight was aided by previews of some new tracks during the band's reunion tour, the band is excited to release the album in full, and to show it off to audiences around the world. "We're all looking forward to presenting these songs in a live setting, and having the opportunity to play together again," says Chris Gorman. "We should be in for a really exciting year."