

The image shows the album cover for Alyssa Pyper's 'Salt Crust'. It is a split-image design. The left half features a close-up of Alyssa Pyper's face, looking slightly to the right with a soft expression. The right half shows her from the waist up, standing outdoors at night, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt, with her hands in her pockets. The background is dark and blurry, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Alyssa Pyper Salt Crust

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Utah's Great Salt Lake holds the last concentrated dregs of ancient Lake Bonneville, once a massive sea extending across west Nevada and north toward Idaho. Lake Bonneville dried up centuries ago, leaving a sweep of pale salt flats just west of Salt Lake City. These otherworldly miles of white mineral deposit give Alyssa Pyper's debut album its name: Salt Crust.

Pyper grew up just outside of Salt Lake City, a town with a history entwined with Mormonism. The religious sect is responsible for settling the Utah and Salt Lake valleys in the 1840s and the influence of the church is widespread and palpable today. It's this immersive faith culture that Alyssa Pyper swam through as a young girl in Utah.

Pyper was a devoted Mormon and as a young adult, she enrolled in a violin performance program at the church-owned Brigham Young University. But as Pyper reconciled her lesbianism with the heteronormative requirements of the Mormon faith, her participation in the religion waned and ultimately, ended. She quit the church, transferred schools, and started writing the songs that comprise Salt Crust.

Leaving Mormonism is not simple, though, and it's evident in Pyper's album that she scratches at something irreclaimable, a cultural monolith that touched every part of her life. The record both questions, subverts, and reveres authority structures— parent and child, mentor and student, clergy and congregant. It mourns a fractured selfhood while also asserting the wholeness of authentic identity.

Pyper's writing process began with her beloved violin and a Boss RC 30 loop pedal— an instrument in its own right. "I was trying to push the limits of what looping meant and looked like - including chance ('aleatory') elements," she says of the process. And on every track, Pyper's carefully crafted lyrics and flutish voice hover over these meditative violin parts scattered with textural elements. Audially and lyrically, Pyper seems to pace around the complex tensions between identity and community.

Almost two years after she'd completed the music for the album, Pyper came to producer-engineer Lindenfield with her completed compositions. The songs were refined, her ideas were direct and powerful, and the performance of the tracks was "under her fingers," as Lindenfield puts it. They began recording in December 2017 in Provo, Utah. "John W. Taylor, an apostle of the church in its early days, built and lived in the home where we recorded. It was strange, and right, for this album," Pyper remembers.

Perhaps the only thing that outweighs the security of community acceptance is the deeper security of knowing and loving oneself. Alyssa Pyper's Salt Crust ultimately uncovers and validates that true self, unmuted, insistent, and joyful. In an image that evokes rebirth, she sings, "In the water /death dances with daylight /moving through me //I run /I run to the water /blue love /it changes me." And she is changed— with this debut, she reveals an artistic power that is thoughtful and ineffably certain, meditative and yet never doubtful, a speaker who is sure of herself.