

# Pop Ludovic Hunter-Tilney



## Eiko Ishibashi

**Antigone**

Drag City

★★★★☆

When musicians say their sound is uncategorisable, they usually mean that they don't want to be categorised. In their mind's eye, their songs are singular creations fluttering around the richly varied world of music. Capturing these effusions and attaching a genre name to them is a deathly act of taxonomy, like pinning a rare butterfly to a board. But contrary to musician pride, most songs are all too easily sorted into types.

Some, however, are not. Japanese auteur Eiko Ishibashi's songs are among those to evade the swishes of the net. We can hear different elements in them, a jumble of orchestral pop, prog, folk, jazz-rock, modern classical and the upbeat 1980s Japanese sound known as city pop. But pinning it down to a single label is challenging. No sooner might the classifier settle on prog-pop, citing Ishibashi's teenage love of Genesis's *Foxtrot*, than another song flutters free from the net and the chase begins anew.



### Hazy: Japanese auteur Eiko Ishibashi is hard to pigeonhole

Taro Mizutani

*Antigone* is named after the ancient Greek heroine of Sophocles' play, an independent-minded daughter who does what she wants, with tragic results. It is the 50-year-old's first collection of songs since 2018's *The Dream My Bones Dream*, in which she explored her father's upbringing in occupied Manchuria in the 1940s, a tragic episode in Chinese and Japanese history.

Among the musicians joining her on *Antigone* is her main collaborator and

romantic partner, Jim O'Rourke, another freethinking figure with a distinguished discography of his own. Initially conceived in the style of Julee Cruise, the dreamy torch singer whose voice adorned David Lynch's films, the music is captivating and unpredictable. Ishibashi sings in a languid, breathy voice. The lyrics are mostly in Japanese with a sprinkling of English.

"October" lifts off with a grand orchestral swell before heading into an idiosyncratic

version of psychedelia. Ishibashi's hazy vocals are accompanied by samples of staticky American babble between astronauts and mission control. "The Model" has a shimmering, 1970s cosmic music feel. "Nothing As" is a whispery ballad sung in English, while "Mona Lisa" is sophisticated and sensual. Like the titular painting's enigmatic smile, whose meaning belongs to the sitter, the painter or the viewer, the song draws us in even as it eludes our grasp.